"Chitrakarkhana: picture factory - artist food", *Interview with Shaina Anand[i],
Media Activist, with Alessandra Renzi and Megan Boler*.

Shaina Anand is a filmmaker and media artist who works collaboratively with video and
televised media. She is the founder of http://ChitraKarKhana.net (picture factory/artist
food) a fully independent unit for practical media, based in Mumbai. ChitraKarKhana's
media interventions, employ cheap and accessible DIY video and editing hardware skills
to produce on-site televised media.
We use examples from Anand's work to explore media and information politics, as well
as moments of critique of and experimentation with video as a documentary form.

Rustle TV (2004) was a temporary TV channel set up inside Russell Market, Bangalore.
The market presented a microcosm of the real world, over which was forced an idealistic
"utopia": the people in the market became the clients, the "stars" and the primary
audience, while a group of students performed in the service of the community and
delivered the programming.
The project, ***WI city TV*** (2005) transmitted programming to 3000 homes in and around
Shivaji Nagar, Bangalore, through an existing "informal" local cable channel. Local
programming generated daily was spun off from the world-information.org conference,
its themes and participants. This was an "intervention" in the conference itself, but more
importantly, it pushed outwards into the immediate neighbourhood of spaces, languages
and infopolitics.
KhirkeeYaan (2006) is an open-circuit TV system, a local area network communication
and feedback device. It employs cheap security apparatuses, otherwise used for
surveillance for the "use" of the community-at-large. Here, on-site, public access to video
feedback in real-time encourages experiments in community "networking", performance,
and automated storytelling and filmmaking.
"Recurrencies- across electricity and the urban" (2007), with Ashok Sukumaran,
documents a number of electrical "public works" primarily based in Mumbai. It looks at
alternative media currencies, altered circuits of information infrastructure from the
bottom up, foregrounding issues of contemporary power, information flows, and property
and control relationships.

In Anand's work, these sites of intervention become players in the creation of
autonomous media, generated for their own "use". This negotiation is at each step
tenuous, made possible by person-to-person interaction. The intervention is self-
organized, messy, grey and at all times collaborative.

This interview took place through a phone conversation between Mumbai and Toronto in
March 2007.

Alessandra Renzi: First I was wondering, how did you come to media activism?

Shaina Anand: I came to media activism from filmmaking. My early training as a film student was probably instrumental in shaping a political worldview, mainly through an exposure to world cinema from Latin America, Europe, North America and East Asia, and what we called parallel cinema, a movement we had in India in the 60s and 70s outside of the industry of mainstream Bollywood. We had a realist cinema, we had socialist cinema, and so on. Filmmaking did, in a sense shape an early worldview, what we call Nazariya, a way of seeing.

An early mentor of sorts was Saeed Mirza, a filmmaker I worked with while I was still in my teens –a lot of my early political thinking came from him. I used to write fiction then. But I began thinking very closely about issues of power, power dynamics and power structures within the politics and processes of filmmaking exactly 10 years ago, in '97. I was assistant director on a documentary with the same director I mentioned. We travelled the country, all of India, by road for six months non-stop making a serialized documentary: *A tryst with the people of India.*

Our intentions were noble –a very sensitized director, politically aware, politically correct. The agenda for this documentary was to speak to the ordinary Indian –to give representation to that subaltern voice, analyze what went wrong in 50 years since a democratic India, and so on and so forth. This journey shifted my (pre)occupation with the medium, a turning point where I questioned my career choice and our filmmaking practice: issues about the technology, the methodology of filmmaking, or film craft, an acute awareness of the machinery of a film crew –Beta cameras, big mic, boom operator, asst camera man, sound recordist, camera and recorder attendants. A crew of six handling the gear and a director asking the questions, and three assistant directors who would butt in, there would be a camera man who would be angry when lighting was not beautiful, a sound recordist who would be bugged when a baby in the village would cry mid interview.

I began questioning where the agency came from and what happens to all this footage and experience in the face and veneer of a 30-minute episode. And mind you, this is India: four large jeeps going down roads where cars have not been, again and again through the vast and brutally diverse country. At 21, this journey stayed with me. I began re-watching the footage and writing critically about it, asking others and myself about documentary aesthetics and ethics, grappling with the idea of India in the 90's.

GATT has happened. We had entered the new trade order. Rather belligerently and happily because we have the largest democracy in the world. We went nuclear on 12th May 1998. A bunch of colleagues –we called ourselves the Indian People's Media Collective– started organizing talks and screening films on nuclearization and militarism in colleges.

Those were very deterministic times, there was almost no nuclear debate in the mainstream media in the subcontinent, just like there had not been any globalization debate. This same decade had witnessed a sweeping rise of majority communalism. Urban campuses were politically insipid. Authorities would not allow screenings. We had to manoeuver around, build our networks from the inside, via "sensitized" professors and sustain the campaign. We even organized students and musicians and activists and pulled off a huge 12- hour concert on Hiroshima day. Back then, we were just grappling with the violent 90's. There was naivety and not much for the youth to hold on to as precedence. The left had gotten left behind in a dark hole. Then technology got cheap and got DIY.

I come from privilege: Educated, middle class, the Internet access generation in Bombay, center of the TV industry, of Bollywood, financial capital and all of that. I thought the digital revolution would herald radical cinema. Cheap technology for alternative media would change things. Soon I thought otherwise. But, these were my early inroads into media activism, though I am never comfortable calling it that.

AR: So basically what you are saying is that it was part of a generational shift. This is certainly your personal experience but is it also a kind of broader phenomenon in India, where there is a generation now that has more access to these forms of technology, and is more politicized through the 90s?

SA: Good question, though I am not sure I could validate that. A decade ago we were all getting stoned and thirsting for radical cinema, young and cynical believing no one will fund it. And three years later, certainly, no one needed to fund it. We could do it together, by ourselves. But strangely, I felt alone in that space. It seemed so easy to say "Let's get up and do it, let's not complain, but try". I did not see it happening as much as I thought it would. We still waited for our budgets, we still waited till an NGO wanted to fund it, we still waited till there was a better camera, we still needed an XLR mic for sound, so there was always something lacking. I do not think that media, DIY media really caught on as fast as I thought it should have.

Megan Boler: And do you think that that is a question of the kind of access to resources that you were describing? Or, Alessandra was asking was there a new generation of interest in this media activism?

SA: Soon enough, many people could access the technology. A telling point was how quickly all our TV channels started exploiting the resources. While we were still paying commercial fees to go to editing studios, which of course by then were using souped-up PCs or consumer Macs. Everyone was shooting mini-DV and you needed to watch news on TV here to know how they were on top of things, just like now they are using phone videos, hidden cameras and broadband if they need to – any kind of technology. But us independent practitioners– we were a little behind.

I still joke, being so aware of tactical media - about the Sangh Parivar- the Hindu Rights think-tank's strategies in the 90's when we had this rise of majority communalism- how effectively and locally their networks masterminded hate: flyers, pamphlets, boycotts, all-India rallies spreading hatespeech on a Mythical Air-conditioned Chariot, the Rath Yatra's. They were appropriating mailing lists and electoral databases to send you propaganda videotapes in your mailbox, they would telejam via local cable networks, cut out ads and insert their propaganda, CD's slipped inside news magazines. So, DIY and tactical media strategies were being claimed much faster by either mainstream media or by political parties and their "cultural" wings. Also, in the wake of liberalization, we had quickly moved into that post-Marxist phase where activists –all with integrity– began working for the sudden proliferation of NGOs flush with funds, because "they had to". They could not sustain their "struggle" – the left was decimated. So a decade goes by caught amidst liberalization, the technological moment and the possibilities are missed by one generation on the field.

Having said that, we do have a strong documentary film movement. A lot of politically motivated filmmakers continue to make relevant films and a shared footage collective formed after the Gujarat riots marked an interesting turn. But its use and strategy was caught up in self-righteous and proprietary zeal. Also, they do not question the form. They provide some political context and alternative, rarely a political critique of the form or process.

AR: I would say that that is probably not just a problem in India. That is very common with filmmakers everywhere. I found interesting what you were saying about the NGOs – I am not aware of many projects here in Canada for instance, or the European countries I am familiar with, which are affiliated with NGOs. It is usually independent activist groups that may recur to media activism to further their cause. But I find it interesting, because a lot of NGOs are also connected to bigger structures and institutions, so in a way it is a funny link between independent media making and some kind of institutions.

SA: Yeah, it is a funny link. But it is something that is here to stay. And we cannot sit high on exclusive autonomy. Yet, an acute awareness of being co-opted, of using funding –this social capital that in one sense is systemic to maintaining status-quos or "adjusting" social conditions –needs to inform our practice. Tactics and strategies have to evolve around these dilemmas. In most of my interventions, I begin by conceptually interrogating the funding source and then carefully positioning the project, be it for an alternative information conference, a workshop or an artist residency.

Despite an NGO or more for everything, our public culture is in abject poverty. This is also perhaps why I shift from "break the bank and end the war" to what I see as micro-politics, or more correctly interventions into political ramification of everyday life. And yes, I am cynical of a lot of NGO-driven community-based stuff in India that begins and ends with power politics: the "we are giving things to you and we are telling you what's good for you" kind of approach.

MB: Are there examples of NGO funding, in your mind, radically reshaping the work of an independent media/tactical media artist? Or more generally, is your concern that when there is NGO funding, it really changes what the artist or activist wants to produce?

SA: I would have to think about it, I am not sure I have a particular example. But I can be categorical of the fact that most independent media practitioners or activists pacify their politics when funded. Large "progressive" cultural organizations posture more, preach a little and do much less, when funding increases. With video and documentary, I think my grouse is basically in the kind of media that is generated. It is often either very top down or repressed in its aesthetics and rendering of a politically correct picture, or it sits on a higher fence that often I am critical of.

AR: That is what I was wondering. What is the link and how do the two elements interact and what kind of product comes out?

SA: It is also subjective. There of course are positive effects if you are thinking broadly about alternative media. For example, certain films made after the Gujarat riots were crucial in talking about the pogrom and the fury of hate that had ruptured. Thanks to NGOs, there were sustained screening campaigns that managed to convey to an unpoliticised audience a lot of facts on the riots and state-terrorism that the mainstream media would not tell you about.

In my own works, I see this collaboration (and calibration) very transparently. Other than community driven or peer/self organized initiatives, appropriating small amounts of culture funds is one "survive and flourish" strategy. Small funding but yet the kind of product that comes out is by no means modest. And to me, video does not lie. That is the good and bad part about video. To critical eyes, it reveals a lot. As a filmmaker, I am always looking at the products and asking where is the agency? Where is the power reversal for these people who have become your subjects?

A little aside, to bridge the gap between my cynicism with video and its use in my current work processes: on 9/11, I started working on what began to look like an epic, it was a film called Tellavision Mumbai. I was at home with my video camera in hand, watching those Twin Towers being hit and coming down, filming it over and over again for over two hours. In the weeks that followed this moment of reckoning –this supposed end of America's "holiday from history"– factions and remnants of our completely fractured left started popping out of virtual oblivion. Emails, demonstrations, street plays, public meetings –interventions were sorely needed. We have the second largest Muslim population in the world, there was fear of persecution, but there was also hope that groups would come together to counter balance the war spin. I began this very systematic documentation of what I ironically saw as the invisible public culture of the city: trade union solidarity meetings, ultra left demonstrations, citizens action groups, journalist networks, Muslim cultural organizations, Gandhians, Human Rights activist groups –a sole reporter with a camera.

Back home, I would watch and film TV off the screen. From infinite justice to enduring freedom, the building up of the global coalition and the war in Afghanistan, I followed the timeline in a contrapuntal manner: ambient TV and direct DV. Each chronological event was preceded by a physical journey through the post-industrial and post-liberalised landscape of Bombay, into the heart of a street play or public meeting, and then journeying home on that timeline, back into fishbowl of global TV, war and entertainment. Through all these episodes, I was trying to cull and stitch together a holistic discourse, a chronicle, a global media critique, a city searching for an articulation of a vision –and the reality: an ultimate critique of our public culture.

Watching a rough cut, a fellow activist filmmaker warned me that I should not be co-opting one faction of the ultra left with another other more moderate one. But that was the whole point. They were all to be co-opted, and represented as presenting their information, which is what they are trying to do anyway. The film with its mega narrative was never completed even though each chronological event was made into a short film, countered and interpreted with the help of restless TV surfing bytes. I thought I should mention it, as this zero budget project did corroborate my disillusionment with straight up video, with empirical narratives, and shifted my focus to micro-politics, and very local effects in recent works.

MB: Shaina, I wondered if you could just say in a brief form, in a soundbite form, what was that you wanted to convey in this project that you did not get a chance to finish?

SA: The title said it, quite ambitiously: Tell-a-vision Mumbai. A public consciousness had mutated, been manufactured and realigned with global spin –9/11 was a media invent with far reaching effects like no other, and Tellavision Mumbai was an attempt to cast our vote, to inform and be informed and be counted in, but also to look into ourselves, the city, and subcontinent for symptoms and scars of this clash, of "us and them" politics. It was countering an almost private and invisible space of public dissent with the public, ubiquitous face of Private TV –tying to immerse and inform the viewer through this altered mediascape.

MB: What was the nature of the conversation at those protest events in India after September 11th? Specifically, what were people talking about and how was that related to reactions to mainstream media or corporate media representation of the events in the United States?

SA: Well, corporate media and mainstream media and the Bharatiya Janta Party (right wing Hindu fundamentalist party) that was in power then just picked up where George Bush, the Republicans and mainstream media in America left off. The government wilfully and jingoistically replicated Bush's "good against evil", "us vs them", dividing the world –the clash of civilization speak.

Afghanistan is contiguous to India; America's overt war was close by. The demon face of Osama and the Taliban, the projected crisis and partisan generalization of Islam and terrorism was eerily global, yet its effects were mirrored nationally and locally. CNN and BBC were the mainstay global news channels, we also had three or four Indian satellite news channels and state and regional channels. The educated Indian Middle Class surfed through all these channels, and the rhetoric was essentially the same. In the meetings I documented, the conversations sought to throw light on history, the cold war years, America's covert war in Afghanistan, its support of corrupt dictators of Islamic nations, its interventions, coups and CIA operations across the globe. Voices would caution and speak of re-instilling our secular democratic fabric that had been ruptured often through the violent 90's, and was being fueled to blow up again. Activist journalists critiqued media monopolies, abridged Chomsky and localized "manufacturing consent". The Muslim intelligentsia and organizations came out strongly against fundamentalism and terrorism of all kinds. Peaceniks spoke about the cost of war –or what Arundhati Roy called the "algebra of infinite justice". They called on the UN and Kofi Annan to "deserve" their 2001 Nobel peace price, to stand up to America. Neighbourhood Mohalla committees talked and worked to prevent riots. Human rights groups protested against the introduction of a new Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance that came into force soon after 9/11. The Marxists talked of empire and neo-liberalism, people like Medha Patkar retracted from rhetoric and brought our attention to the real war of power against people, their land and livelihood by the state or transnational empire. People gleaned texts from political theorists and alternative sites on the net, localized and translated them. Yet, the voices were miniscule, local alternative media was ineffective, reaching and preaching only to the converted and lacking in action, living in the nostalgic days of 70s when the left had the streets in the heart of the industrial city. I did feel my documentation and chronicle were valid, but the truth was in the video: there was an aching gap between people's movements and the people.

The build-up to Iraq was different, a semblance of awareness, debate, moderation and total helplessness prevailed in the world, and in India, dissent had almost run out of that brief bit of decentralized, non-political party urgent renewal it had in 2001. The 9/11 and Afghanistan blitzkrieg was extreme in how it divided people. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu "cultural" Organization) whipped up the communal hate with global justification and in March 2002, a pressure valve was upped and opened: the torching of a train carrying Hindu pilgrims by "terrorists" and a wide-spread massacre of Muslim families in Gujarat carried out by party workers, police and educated middle class neighbours. The rightwing Hindu hate sites outnumbered independent or politically leftist sites.

Even Indymedia was causality in India. It was around during September 11th but its energy was short lived, so that during the World Social Forum in Bombay people from all over the world were checking it out and its last entry was from 2 years earlier. There were enough urban youth and activists with internet access then, yet besides some individuals, there was no community network.

We do not have a precedence of net art or net activism, we did not have access to the net on a broader level. Now of course, educated youth have access to computers, a recent survey said net users in Bombay totaled 2 million. That is a sizable 12% of the city's population, and some of our newer collaborative projects include building an online video footage archive, and an alternative community wireless mesh intranet and information repository. Still, most of my works now intervene into physical space in India, where the ubiquitous information mass media devices everybody has are passive TVs and radios.

And yes, I still use video, like I was telling you, it does not lie to critical eyes. A while ago I read a very early essay by Critical Art Ensemble, maybe it was from The Electronic Disturbance[ii], it was the chapter on video resistance. It is a nasty chapter against documentary, saying it was born in a crisis and the technological invention of video, its instantaneity changed nothing in the retrograde tradition of documentary film. Come to think of it, all critique of documentary and its technology, all seminal shifts happened in the film medium, before video. Video technology is about feedback, instant broadcast – the TV is versatile unregulated hardware capable of receiving things in the air– and the moment comes with cheap accessible DIY. These cameras have screens on them, just flip the screen around and for me that is projection, that is broadcast. Carry 800 meters of cable, if you have to, and there are things one can do with wireless, illegally temporarily occupy the air. Alternative media has to look actively beyond the anti-war website or documentary. There is more than enough of that and it is not breaking a bank or ending the war. Like Jodi Dean says in her essay, there is all this circulation of content, it is all mainstream. Arundhati Roy says it in a recent essay: "the information is out there, it is just going nowhere". I think my tactical media practice has therefore shifted, it has moved into the generation of micro-media. It has developed by harvesting or claiming resources, and it is not necessarily events but everyday life and embedded politics that you dirty your hands with and respond to.

AR: This is one of the things I find most interesting: the way you trouble the idea of resources and the distribution of resources –not only media, but also electricity distribution in your new project. Can you tell us something more about that project and what kind of ideas are behind it?

SA: The project is called "Recurrencies- across electricity and the urban" where we are looking at "electronic commodities" that have become smoothly marketable closed systems. It is collaboration with my partner Ashok Sukumaran, whose installations and works have stretched across the fields of contemporary computer based art, cinema and architecture, imagining various kinds of "publicness". With Recurrencies, we begin with electricity –that prefigured new media, cold media as Mcluhan called it (as apposed to hot media with content). We are exploring alternative media currencies, altered circuits of information infrastructure from bottom up, making technology newly curious about contemporary power, information flows and property and control relationships, with today's ability to look back at the digital.

For example, electricity is fundamentally "open source", it is not hidden, or encrypted, it does not take a serious hacker to break some code to modify it or steal it or tap into any stream at any given point. So, imagine a simple system: a switch could potentially trigger anything, breach boundaries, share networks, offer more participation, posit other informal utopian states…We intend to do several "acts", installations around public infrastructures, and slowly shift media as well –video, airwaves, wireless, the future of so-called embedded or pervasive computing– then open up the project as it goes, begin to grow wild with some of these "currencies", with local communities –across the open.

AR: I especially like the play with "re-currencies" because the guiding thread of electricity can transversally connect to so many other different issues. You had as tags on your website: "sharing" but you also had "different spaces". One of the things that struck me the most when I was watching the videos and your descriptions of the games was the way electricity can create a space where people come together and interact more. For instance, the project in the student quarters where all these families were connecting is a very beautiful and simple way to trouble different notions of community and to create something new.

SA: You said it just like I was thinking about it. But we are also looking hard at "interactive" art and trying to unpeel notions and theories of relational arts and dialogical arts, community art –participatory art is the new buzzword again. We want to look at these things as critically and as meaningfully as one can. Look at the public history of technology and leak out from the holes that remain open. There are tags like "sharing", "gift", "distance", "switch" –kinds of economy or currency that one can imagine. While these might be conceptual ideas, once they play out in a physical context or place, there are also all sorts of embedded politics there that we want to shift or temporarily hijack. In many ways, these works state possible technologically reorganised futures. The essential free soul or tactical heart behind it is integral to how we see things and what we do.

MB: You just used the term "participatory art" and you said it has a new popularity. Could you say something about how you envision concretely these projects? Do you feel that the conception of the project itself is a participatory engagement? Who is the audience that you imagine directing those participatory actions to or with, and what kinds of communities are you participating with?

SA: Participatory… that hype around web 2.0! I would not bandy that word around too much. It sometimes has too happy a veneer of sharing and democracy around it that often does not exist. In my own work, the "conception" has not been participatory in that sense at all. Of course the projects themselves are about the involvement, co-operation of a number of people.

In Rustle TV, one of my earlier works, the idea was to flip or turn the usual way of video production or filmmaking on its head. The participation and collaboration involved the entire market but the intent was laid open to the students and in the manifesto to the market: "This is your channel, it is the channel of the people of the market for the people of the market – but it is by the crew that is going to work their asses off and produce the content for you as per your desires". So participation was very much key, conceptually the site of the market was the public realm, its people were the audience and performers who determined the content and in turn received what the students gave them by way of their performance.

With KhirkeeYaan I wanted to push that envelope and explore how autonomous this "production" could get for the people that were participating in the creating and receiving. Could the usual bunch of people who produce that content – me or the camera person or the editor, the DIY– be thrown out of the equation, and could that interaction belong to the eight, ten, twenty, forty people who are on that screen at that point? The screen comprised of a grid of four frames in different places that were networked and fed-back to each other in real time. These conversations were generated in distinct spaces all within a radius of 200 metres. Participants were performers, audiences, subjects, witnesses etc. at the same time. So, yes participation is something that I think of from concept. Filmmaking is a collaborative process, but the nature of the normal structure of how media is produced, which is interpreted by the few people doing it on behalf of many and so on is questioned.

And on-site, what works for me is a very careful but organic calibration of the power structures and dynamics of other forces at play. With Rustle TV I was to conduct a workshop for students and this was part of their New Media semester called "Force" at Srishti School of Art Design and Technology. I knew it was a private arts school and that there would be ten, fifteen students who would be extremely privileged, not just in terms of their demographics or background, but also by being in this wonderful school with much access. The idea was to make a pedagogical intervention right there. They would have to learn and experience all sorts of things "in the field". At the time of conception, I did not know the students or the people of market. I had no relationship with them. I was just imagining a space where little or no media existed, especially electronic media. KhirkeeYaan was done during an artist residency at Khoj in New Delhi where I was invited to work within in Khirkee Extension, a fragmented urban village, the neighbourhood where their studios were located, a place I had not been to ever before. Khirkee means window in Hindi, Khirkeeyaan is the plural, Yaan means vehicle. All those live episodes were generated after relationships and micro-contracts were forged in the course of a couple of days with people offering TVs, electricity, their property and participation. The stories evolved with the people who were engaging in conversation and performance via this transparent act of media production. The audience was determined by the site(s), and what they were seeing and hearing was performed by this 'televisation'. It was a complex mix of people residing in this neighbourhood, about the length of a kilometer, and each episode represented distinct linguistic, regional and socio-political states.

World Information City TV was a little different. I was thinking, "Alright, here's the alternative conference on Information Politics that's going to happen in Bangalore, the Silicon Valley of the East, the IT capital of India. Naturally, it's the 'in' venue for an international conference such as World Information." There was Net-base/t-01 from Vienna, Sarai from Delhi, Waag from Amsterdam and Alternative Law Forum from Bangalore. These were some of the players organizing the conference. At the outset, the project was publicly defined as an "intervention" into the conference itself. It pushed outwards from this conference, its themes and participants, and channelled information to a completely different, vernacular and wider audience, who in various ways were the empirical "subjects" of many a conference themes: intellectual property, closure, regulation, access, piracy, grey markets, cinema, media. WI C TV aired to about 3500 homes in Shivaji Nagar on their "illegal" channel that was hugely popular as it showed the latest Tamil and Bollywood flicks soon after release. They were our audience, and the programming revolved around their neighbourhood: its histories, trade and services, people, places and practices –and the Info-politics discussed at the conference, without representing the talks.

Unlike Rustle and KhirkeeYaan, here our total viewers were invisible, imagined watching a range of local content about their city, communities, neighbourhood and world in their homes. Yet, this local terrestrial, literally roof-to-roof, window-to-window network of cables through which they receive all other satellite channels for once reported from the "ground". Our connection with Lokesh, the cable operator, had been formed during Rustle TV when he and his colleagues had helped us cable the market. We set up an open studio on the terrace room of 'Lawyers Collective' an NGO that happened to be located in the centre of our ambit. A number of films were generated in the 'chaorganization' of the ten days that followed, made by a voluntary crew of rookies, film students, tactical media jammers and practitioners. Ironically, WI C TV was part of World Information City, an 'art exhibition', curated by a group of lawyers and artists.

MB: You are talking about the importance of process or medium, I hear that coming across more strongly than concerns about content or message. I wonder if you might want to say something about that.

SA: The process or the medium are the concerns about content or message. The medium alone is not the message, and the form-content tension needs to confront itself. Process, tactics, strategies, even rules are explored, emphasized. So, while the films that aired in the market on Rustle TV were made by students, most of whom had never held a video camera before, there were rules of engagement: the few who had video skills were encouraged to flip the screen outwards, "mirror" the view –so that the "viewfinder" was no longer their privilege but the subject's as well. The students had to "perform" in the service of the market, their "market research" involved speaking to vendors in every stall. Their political naivety was bombarded by much sensory information. Indeed, in the early days of the project, emotions and zeal led some students to believe they could solve a lot of "problems" of the market. Quickly, –it was not called Rustle TV just for fun– running

along the timeline of production, their attention was shifted to their experience and the footage they had generated, which they had to confront for creating a whole range of programming. People had sung songs, recited prose and poetry, bought tapes with their favourite songs and danced in the aisles, in the aquarium, in the open courtyards. Movie scenes were re-enacted, talents and skills displayed. A range of "serialised" programming was generated and it included, apart from remixed music videos, film spoofs, talent and comedy shows, short features and portraitures about the old folk, the young, the women, the kids who worked in the market, time-lapsed shorts about the 24-hour cycle of the market and its environs, photo essays, promos, signature tunes and animations in more than four languages. Interestingly, no adverting was generated even though this service was available and stated in the "manifesto" stuck on all the notice boards and gates of the market. When the channel went on air inside the market, exactly 15 days into the project, we included live events, quiz shows, checkers tournaments, open forums, open stage and even 'tele-jammed' between cricket and pirate cinema. There was festivity, serendipity, irreverence and joy in the market –at least this content did something for all us involved. Video became the site, place became the media for a feedback mechanism of shared memories and experiences. I would also like to believe that it was a fruitful case of radical pedagogy for the students, as was WI C TV.

Khirkeeyaan's process was more subjective. While the "system" allowed for real time collaborative conversation that was happening in "local" time –the episodes themselves simulated and represented a range of contexts: labour, urban migration, caste politics, gender bias, communal anger, the violent re-development of "New'" Delhi. In episode one, we just wanted to take the device to the street and see what would happen. It was instantly claimed by the children of the 4 streets it connected together. Within a minute they transformed this four-way network it into their own Indian Idol talent show. We connected the homes of four women from Nepal, some of whom were very recent immigrants, living close by but not in a "community". For over 2 hours they chatted with each other in their native language, exchanged personal narratives and journeys, wisdom and warmth. In one episode we networked labour under four distinct basement sweatshop owners for an entire 8-hour shift –quite ironical, since we used surveillance gear. A leather works unit, two hand embroidery units and one tailoring unit worked the drudgery away with some passive play. A polyglot network, common hometowns, districts and languages were discovered, friendships were forged with promises to meet outside-in person, barters and exchanges were struck, music and cricket scores were piped from different locations.

Here is a sampling of the films made and aired by our motley crew during WI C TV: a thirty minute film that personalizes Elgin Cinema, its loyal workers and clients. This is Bangalore's oldest cinema house, (and possibly India's oldest –more than a 100 years old), now run-down, with the cheapest ticket prices in the world, a Shivaji Nagar icon - with its re-runs and B-grade Hindi and Tamil cinema, a dark cool escape for menfolk who throng here after a hard shifts work. There was a film about the old car junk market, another looking at the demolition of old markets to make way for malls. Then a true story about of how one of our crewmembers broke his camera and got it repaired for euro 3.33

in thirty minutes despite the Canon authorized service centre telling them it will take a week just for the estimate. A side-ways look at the digital ecology of the area, IP and piracy featuring many interviews including a strong case in support of piracy primer in Hindi by legal theorist Lawrence Liang. We learned of a local Urdu channel called Suroor TV, (pleasure TV) that a young entrepreneur had tried to run from his family home. To air to Shivaji Nagar residents, his linguistic target audience, he had negotiated a set of complicated hurdles that revealed the messy control wars and misplaced laws from top to bottom. His channel could not survive and had to shut down despite being extremely popular. We shot an uncensored talk show in their studio room, featuring local cable operators and the Suroor TV crew in conversation with a panel of conference speakers whom we invited as "guests". Of course the content is important, but this is practice and not theory.

MB: I wonder if you would want to speak a little bit about the different kinds of access to technology in the areas you have been working with. Who has access, what are the important questions around access, to you?

SA: Even the poorest slum has TV. And that is the first device that everybody has. It is not even radio, I think I can fully say it is TV. This is an access point for me. It is a largely uncontested piece of hardware, with relatively open standards built into the system. Inside Russell Market only one TV with cable existed, though most vendors had TVs at home. For Rustle TV, we rented out a dozen TV sets at three dollars each and cabled them to receive the feed from our studio desk upstairs. In Khirkee, most shops and homes including the small tenements and squats for migrant labour had TVs. In case we needed some, we rented them from the half a dozen shops in the lane, which assemble and sell their 'own' TV sets –a tube, a tuner kit and a chassis with some obscure brand. The interface device for KhirkeeYaan was connected using the cheapest consumer level CCTV and CATV equipment: Taiwanese surveillance cameras, a generic Chinese quad splitter, locally manufactured RF modulator, audio mixer and meters of hardy coaxial cables that I bought from Mumbai's electronics market. None of these places had a density of computers or distributed internet penetration.

WI C TV's entire cable infrastructure already existed, we collaborated with the cable operator. He had offered to air our programming on his network: "local programming, everyone will watch." These interventions claimed and tweaked the social understanding and acceptance of TV as a way of life. Most of my works are situated in places where almost no local or autonomous media exists.

There are many questions around access, and importantly around access to systems of technology. Where there is an even field access to ICTs, like for example internet and wireless routers in Bandra where I live, we are working to harvest these resources through participation and sharing. We want to create a mesh network and community wireless intranet that through wider collaboration and support would spread citywide, become an "offline", maybe even legal local "internet".

If we manage to tactically posit it and skirt around the laws. Software, knowledge and media repositories, open and closed, black, white and grey could be claimed and shared, media could also be very localized.

With Recurrencies, the intent is to look hard at technological commodities, use and imagine differently organized states, while looking to the past and future. Bombay City has been the essential modernist example of India in the west and nationally. This modernity in the real-time global world is getting closed in seemingly one-way loops, and this refers to the mass culture of consumption and worldview down here that systemically mimics its western democratic counterparts. I am more interested in the heterogeneous urban spaces, where there are diverse and hydra-headed ways in which small economies function. There is an inherent "squatting" or hacker intent for survival and function, whether they are on the edge of grey or downright illegal.

I find the flow of information in these places can be extremely interesting, and not just because I like to romanticize them, but because that is where I see freedom –the future and potential for "alterations" and practices that we could even be aware of but cynical or distanced from in our cloning, liberalized times. In fact, unlike the west we are not such a regulated information society –as yet. There are a lot of grey practices that can happen, do happen and function even as new internal laws are being formed. With our socialist-democratic modernity past and the privatized and transnational present, it is fair to worry about how closed and repressive the State will become, is becoming already.

AR: I was wondering about two things. What is the reception of your work in India, because, in a way, it seems to be very original. Do you ever hear the criticism that your work is too short-lived, that it does not have an effect, or that your interventions do not necessarily leave any structures for people? Or, some people may overlook that you are concentrating on the process more than creating content, and what kind of effects these processes have? So, I was wondering what people think about your work and how useful they think it is, and how useful you think it is.

SA: The second question first. A lot of projects by way of process have exposed the "under-use" of existing infrastructure or displayed quite transparently the potential for newer network and communication zones. And they have done this by small examples, locally on the ground in a short and economical period of time, ironically as workshops or art events, with negligible budgets. Of course, there will always be that criticism of these being temporary and short lived, or not permanently resulting in shifts, especially when seen as tactical media. Our tactics are informed by a host of practices, and beyond critical self-awareness and clarity of practice, I am looking hard for some contextual peer review here. Yet, I have to say, media alone is never going to bring about shifts in power. It can never fundamentally, unless it is a piece of video that is clinching evidence in court or something. Seizing and producing temporary shifts in power motivates my individual practice. I guess I am hardwired that way.

With Recurrencies however, we are looking purely at the "structures" that make up our electric realm. So far, the projects have sought to articulate practical, tactical, and equitable and even spectacular "usable" things. Since this is a long-term project, where we are also building relationships with the people in the neighbourhood, we are also looking at alternative community infrastructures that could result. It is natural to think of how to make these circuits more meaningful, sustainable and instrumental to "changes". And that said, I do have a cynicism in the permanent thing, because the permanent thing needs to follow the currency of commerce or social capital, and that for me brings back into focus what we talked about earlier: a power dynamic. If I had to run things permanently, it would not be autonomous, it would be autocratic. It would change the nature of things and it would happen to the best of people, unless there are tactical and colluded collaborative ways something can happen.

I live very close to the art world and the film world, just by virtue of living in Bombay, and ironically my work has gained some recognition as art practice, and not as filmmaking. But what I feel I would really like is peer recognition and peer interaction in more fearless and collaborative ways, so that there is give and take and urgent critique. Ashok and I are looking at the new art boom here, artists using new media technologies in galleries, and we just get bored with it because one has seen enough of this in the last decade anyway. To suddenly encounter derivations of it in India in the midst of a huge art market hype and boom –it is a serious boom– is such a lost cause that its not even worth contesting. Our peers will not be found there. So, I am not sure how people see us, because we have not been able to belong somewhere entirely. Definitely we are art practitioners and that is what we will always do. For the time being, art is what legitimizes what we do, and I like that. I like the fact that I can just walk down the street and say well, it is an art project so we are taking electricity from the park, and for a while nobody knows what to say. So, art and even pedagogy allows you to justify doing things. We find ourselves working more and more, with people who are advocating alternative technologies like wireless, micro-FM, FLOSS. People who are doing very interesting research on Knowledge and Culture Commons, on intellectual property law, and issues of piracy. Ashok and I are committed to set up a kind of base for what we call CAMP: Critical Art and Media Practices. As of now, there is no money to back this, there is no immediate, organized framework, but I believe it will change.

India is no longer a developing country, we are "second world" now. The big boosterist monster is trampling over the real estate in the city, crushing, uprooting people and livelihoods, countering this vision of a global city. It is also democracy boom-time, the middle class and intelligentsia think they have rights they can claim and exercise. Everybody is talking that rights-based discourse, it was nauseating to see the mass of NGO's eloquence in every tent at the World Social Forum. There is millions for whom there is no fundamental concept of a right, be it labour, livelihood, housing, land. We are all riding this wave that India is soon going to become the richest country in the world, never mind the fact that 600 million people will not be rich, but dare you say anything negative at this moment. It is such a gung-ho time. With Web 2.0 and YouTube and social networking, young people are back in start up mode, in venture mode.

MB: Do you have any thoughts about the buzz around the "democratization" of media that is surrounding formats like YouTube? You just mentioned something about that buzz. Do you have thoughts about it?

SA: On the face of it, it is great, why should I complain? In much the same way I would not complain about my two GB storage on my Gmail account. I am just hoping and looking for slightly better bandwidth so that I can download more videos. But I am not buying the "you're the broadcast yourself generation" and all of that. And on very basic levels: YouTube is Google, Murdoch is MySpace, eyeballs mean money. You know, Creative Commons India launched a couple of weeks ago, and it was almost eerie. You had this guy Joichi Ito who is a venture capitalist, who runs the World of Warcraft Guild, and is the head of Creative Commons worldwide –Lessig is the other head. Ito is more the operating head and he gave his spiel about buzz marketing, how free downloads and Pepsi and Ipods can work together. There is this idea that free culture will happen if we build it. So, "creativity builds on the past", but the past starts on the day that free culture thinks it starts, or a Creative Commons license legitimizes its presence.

I am sure if I lived in America or in Europe I would be endorsing CC and licensing my own work and my own films, but living here in India I could never take a very critical and vocal stand against piracy, quite the contrary. I mean that is access here. It might come from software or movie piracy but for me it is the best, cheapest, most localized, fastest super-efficient distribution of information. If anything, I have a little cynicism about many things "democratic" at the moment.

MB: To conclude, do you want to say something about what your ideal form of dissemination and distribution would look like, imagining you had no issues with resources? What would your more ideal form of dissemination and distribution be?

SA: Fiction film. Really, it does not get more ideal than that, and in all forms of distribution, from being aired on TV and cinemas, to it being streamed and pirated on YouTube in ten-minute segments, torrented, sold in black, whatever. You know, there is just beauty and joy in telling happy stories about people. But it is not all like that, so one must continue doing what we do. Did I answer that, or did you want me to give more a serious answer?

i www.chitrakarkhana.net, www.recurrencies.net, http://world-

information.org/wio/program/bangalore

ii http://www.critical-art.net/books/ted/