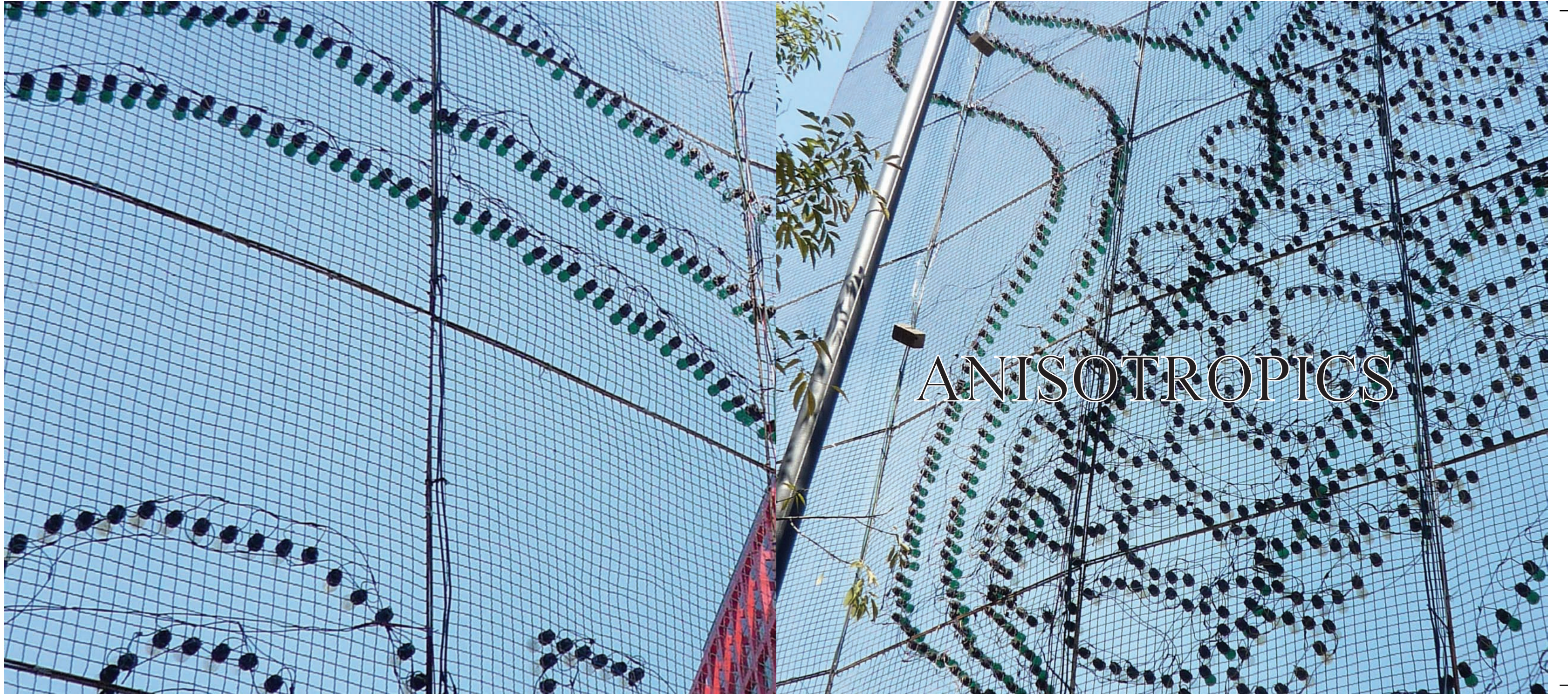




ANISOTROPICS

Ashok Sukumaran
Shaina Anand

MUU Galleria, Helsinki, March 12-28, 2010.



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PI::ELACHE2010

ANISOTROPICS: SHAINA ANAND AND ASHOK SUKUMARAN.

Our work digs for what lies under, within and next to, "networks": radio, television, broadcast, electricity, water, transport, trade, and other forms of human and un-human contact. The interesting part of these investigations for us is not that they occur primarily in the "South" where there exists a "lack" of technology, which we then fill. It is that they perhaps point to a different evolutionary path, a different ecology, and a set of technical and conceptual freedoms that the North did not have the historical possibility to explore. This means not only that our view of technology changes, but that the technology itself, under pressure from such diverse sources, can find new depths, and slip towards a different future.

Anisotropy is the property in materials or mediums of being direction-dependent. This is the opposite of isotropy, which means equal properties in all directions. Wood and tendons are examples of anisotropic materials, which show different strengths when measured along different axes. As Wikipedia tells us, this word is primarily used in the material sciences and the use of it here would then appear metaphorical. But, it is not only so. Because there are material qualities of many technologies (radio and electricity being already examples) that lie suppressed within their legal, socio-cultural and geopolitical contexts.

In this spirit, the projects in this exhibition explore directions other than the binary of capitalist capture or techno-social obsolescence. When radio or electricity or CCTV is "pulled" in this way, it reveals a set of peculiar and unfamiliar properties, a presence and a spirit that is not just perceived or potential, but real.

The projects span a period of five years, and took place in Bangalore, Bombay, Dakar, Delhi, Jerusalem/ Al Quds, and Mexico City.

> The Recurrencies series (2007-)

explore urban electrical infrastructures, nights in the city, and the desire and possibility of people to act within these. The pieces shown include:
> House
> One agreement
> Two Poles
> El Nuevo Signo

> Changes of State (2005)

is an electrically "leaky" cinema in Bangalore. It also proposes that if every electric system has two basic states: on and off, both of them are significant.

> Glow Positioning System (2005)

animates a 400 metre panoramic ring of lights that enters homes, restaurants, offices, empty apartments, and the old Post Office building in downtown Mumbai, turning the nightscape into a "filmic" experience.

> Sept soirées (2008)

is a set of temporary micro-radio and local cinema events in the Marche N' Gellaw, a suburban market in Dakar, Senegal. These events created a new daily routine, a space and time of collectively watching/ listening / broadcasting.

>RustleTV (2004)

a cable TV channel produced and broadcast within the confines of Russel Market, a large indoor market in Bangalore.

> Khirkeeyaan (2006)

combined CCTV and TV equipment to create a series of neighbourhood cross connections in an “urban village” in Delhi, using small security cameras mounted on household televisions.

> The Neighbour before the House (2009)

is a video project in East Jerusalem, shot entirely with a security camera. Palestinian residents reach out to what can be seen from their homes, and speak about the nature of their distance from others. (A project by CAMP).



The Recurrencies series (2007-)

At the same time as city services, the built environment, "public works" and other infrastructures are acting upon people, people are acting upon them, in return. This may take on forms such as consumption, acquiescence, blockage, leakage, reuse or redistribution. These exchanges, and their location, increasingly shape what human conduct is possible in our technological environments; who may conduct what, and what common grounds may be formed, among people.

The recurrencies project thus engages with the idea of infrastructure as "culture". It deals with spaces not normally within the ambit of cultural activity, such as technical assemblies, and distributions of voices, symbols and energy.

House (2007)

We are in the house most of the time, and the lights go off every hour or so. Its quite regular, but still a bit of a shock inside the house. There could be a lot more traffic, but the switch is somewhat hidden behind parked cars through the day. Thats fine with us. Usually when the lights turn on (we can also hear the relay clacking) we walk out and wave.

The count this month is 2618: so many stranger touches.

This possibility is not new, and is not a result of any particular democratisation brought about by "new media", for instance. What is current is perhaps its resonance with the question of infrastructure as found in development rhetoric in India, and how that in turn is related to the way in which technologies are instrumented.

Electricity is both power and control. It is both a force in itself, as well as something that controls other forces. It is here both symbolic (standing in for other technologies, languages, information) and real (where it is dealt with as a material medium, as energy, as a commodity). The use of "mains" electricity is deliberate also, to make such work distinct from the concerns of "electronic culture". A crucial question for us, is in what ways we are already shaped, by a hundred years of electrical life.

Interior balcony, Surya Kiran,
14th Road, Khar, Bombay





One Agreement (2007)

Here we test an ability to control flows of electricity beyond the routing limits of its traditional supply lines. Two unconnected agents create a "subcontract" that leaps over some lines of property and propriety.

A 9th floor resident of the sea-facing Landmark building agrees to "share" two electrical connections in her house with a temporary occupant, a sandwich vendor, on the road below. Two fans and two lamps are then improbably linked, in this zero-sum game. The total electrical consumption is locked to what the house alone would use normally. In other words, when the hawker uses more electricity, the house gets less. As his light sometimes dimmed to avoid attention, her living room glows back to normal. As his fan speeds up, hers crawls.





Two Poles (2007)

(following Jodi Dean)

Messages may or may not be sent.

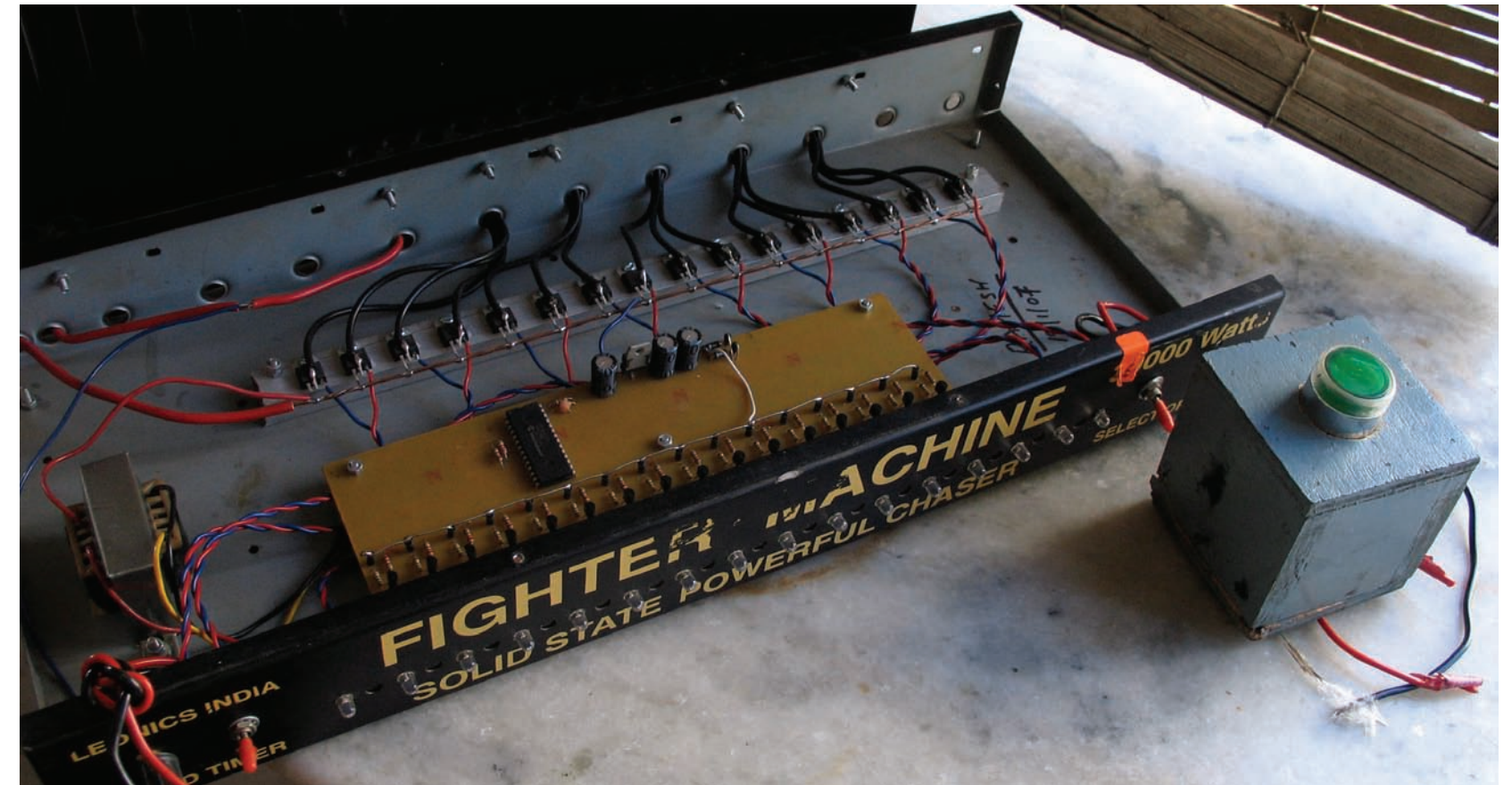
If they are sent, they may or may not be received.

If they are received, they may or may not get a response.

If they get a response, the response may or may not mean what you think it means.

Two Poles is a modification of a standard street decoration grid, and lighting control box. Instead of being parallel to each other, the light elements are lined up end-to-end, with the result that the "decoration" is now half-kilometre long and stretches between a newly-restored promenade, and the edge of a fishing village.

People at each end can push light patterns from one place to another, beyond their visual horizons.



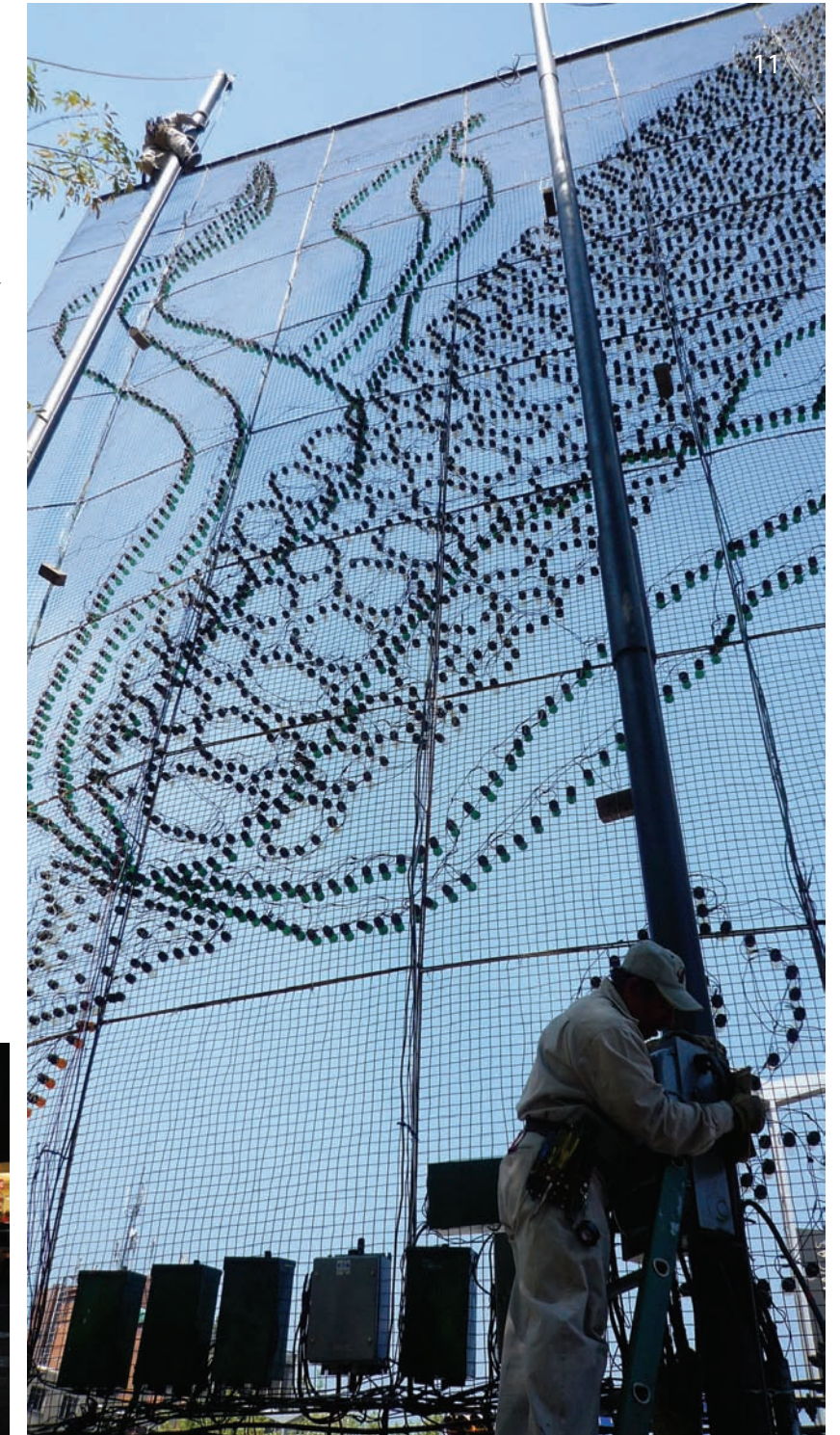


El Nuevo Signo

This work replaces, and extends the life of, a giant lit sign of the Angel of Independence that is set up annually for Mexican Independence Day (September 16) on the intersection of Reforma and Insurgencia streets. Soon after the state event, a number of material properties of the decoration are reconfigured. The result is an animated sign that could possibly be a national symbol, Mayan hieroglyph, marker of the food vs. fuel debate around corn, or advertisement for the corn vendor around the corner, among other flickering possibilities.

The shoe-shiner under the sign says:

About the Bicentennial (200 years of Mexican independence): its ok. It is a reminder of the independence movement. Its the peoples money that pays for it, so we should take it back somehow. About the farmer's protests at this site: It was a good show. They were here for 3 years, 3 shows a day. They were wearing photos of the politician who made threats to them, and not much else.



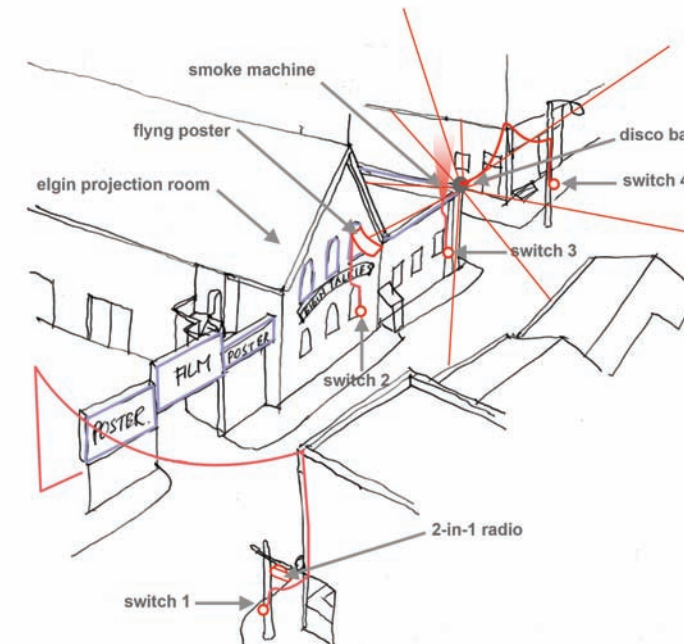


Changes of State (2005)

The default state of this installation was a decorated building. This was also what we had official permission to do. At the same time, multiple switches were placed on the building facade and across the street on lamp-posts. These switches were momentary, on-if-pressed type, and triggered 'changes' or transformations in the decorated building facade, from remote or nearby locations, as follows (in one typical scenario):

1. Marquee lights go off, tape player across the street comes on.
2. Lights in the projection room go off, 'now playing' film poster flies out.
3. Smoke comes out from a "chimney".
4. Edge lights go off, disco ball comes on.

An audience on the street could thus switch from a light-decorated facade to other, displaced conditions, evoking a cinematic life jumping out onto the street, becoming a leaky architecture of electrical doubt and fantasy.





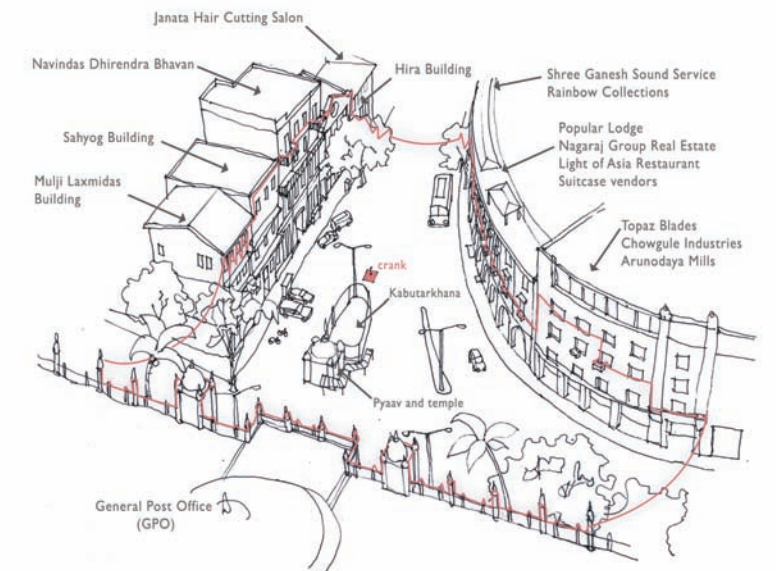
Glow Positioning System (2005)

There are many ways to “map” the city, and our selves within it. One way is to distance oneself from it- to look it up in an atlas, a picture, or to go out to sea or up a hill to watch the twinkling lights, and point out the streets we know. Another way is to move within the streets themselves; to awaken the more proximate senses, to touch the city itself. The historical space between and across these two extremes is richly populated: by maps, movies, mondo nuovo, grids and drifts, 'oramas and 'oscopes, travelling shots and shooting travelers.

Unlike GPS and its contemporary "locative media" forms, Glow Positioning System points to another kind of travel. This is an interior voyage; a circular tourism, of a place we know. A 1000-foot ring of lights encircles the General Post Office intersection in Fort, Mumbai. The lights travel between buildings, across roads and onto trees and lampposts, forming an image-scape that is starkly visible at night. A hand-crank mounted on the pavement provides a way for the audience to "scroll" this landscape. It allows the physical length of the view to become a chronological one- to be viewed at a speed determined by the user.

These are complex paths not only from the co-ordinates of the building envelope, but by its elevation, skyline, accessibility, surface, habitations, permissions, the desires of home and shop-owners, the skills and expressions of the decorators.

This is not a new arrangement in itself, and refers directly to the moving panorama, and its evocation of horizons of travel. But here, the conditions of the crank-driven panoramic painting, or the Cyclorama or 360-degree panorama, and that of the city itself, are being tied together. The path of movement is traced upon the concrete city, and our heads turn to meet it. The crank mechanism then refers to not only its specific history in the moving panorama, but also to a general history of the moving image: as a driver for cinema.



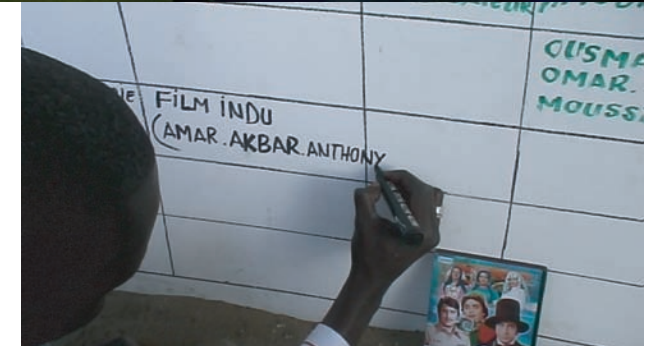


Sept Soirées (2008)

Sept Soirees was a series of battery-powered "evenings" in the Marche N' Gellaw, a suburban market in Dakar, Senegal. These evenings were conceived in a situation

where there is scarce time, space or other resources for communal activity at a certain scale. Also because of the peculiar condition of cinemas in Dakar: there are only two still functioning.

These "micro-cinema" and "micro-radio" events are performed by showing up at a street corner with some equipment, and negotiating the rest. Acknowledgements are given to those who help, charge the batteries or lend content, creating a growing ecosystem of minor cultural patronages.





RustleTV (2004)

What would it be like, if Russell market had its own TV channel?

A market in Bangalore posed as a microcosm of the real world; over which was laid the conditions of such a “utopia”.

A crew consisting of art and design students rapidly acquired video skills as programming was generated on-site. Open locations and processes of production came full-circle as Rustle TV went ‘on air’ inside the market, with a wide range of programming including live discussion events. TV sets were cabled to receive feed from two desks that functioned as an open studio. A 2-way screen was added in the central aisle of the market.

Can we see the video medium both as a site and carrier, for a feedback mechanism of shared memories and experiences?





Khirkeeyaan (2006)

The seven “episodes” of this work were born out of seven sets of installations of security cameras and wiring in Khirkee Extension. The surprising thing was not that we were able to use such technology to “communicate”, but that this combination of surveillance equipment, household televisions and neighbours produced such an easy fit, such a ludic inversion of its technical and social context.

CCTV cameras of the type used here cost about 25 USD, and are growing cheaper by the day. Large numbers are now installed in shops, restaurants and small businesses even in places like Khirkee Extension which is an urban village like many others, situated right inside the city of Delhi. Such CCTV produces images that are cheap and plentiful... images of one’s “own” space, of territory, of watching as a protective act and as the default mode of looking.

In 2006, when *Khirkeeyaan* took place, the predominant landscape of images was still (as has been for the past couple of decades) television. The security-camera quad produces a set of four “holes” in the surface of television. The fact that people who face the camera also face each other, while also facing their familiar TV sets, produces a tension in the TV image: a question about whether this is an open or closed circuit, a redistribution or “grid” of speaking and listening, and a sense of liveness that is also physically nearby.

Khirkee Extension is fractured by all sorts of lines: caste, religion, money, new and old settlers from different regions. It was once a feudal village, whose 'Extension' has been claimed and been settled in cycles since partition. It is now full of migrant labour, sitting next to upper-caste land owners, all of whom are threatened by large urban developments close by.

Khirkeeyaan’s traversals of this terrain, its conversations, its double logic of “safety” (in one’s own home) and self-exposure, enters directly into a space produced by the non-overlap of land-based politics, and global communication networks.





Shyama Beauty Parlour.



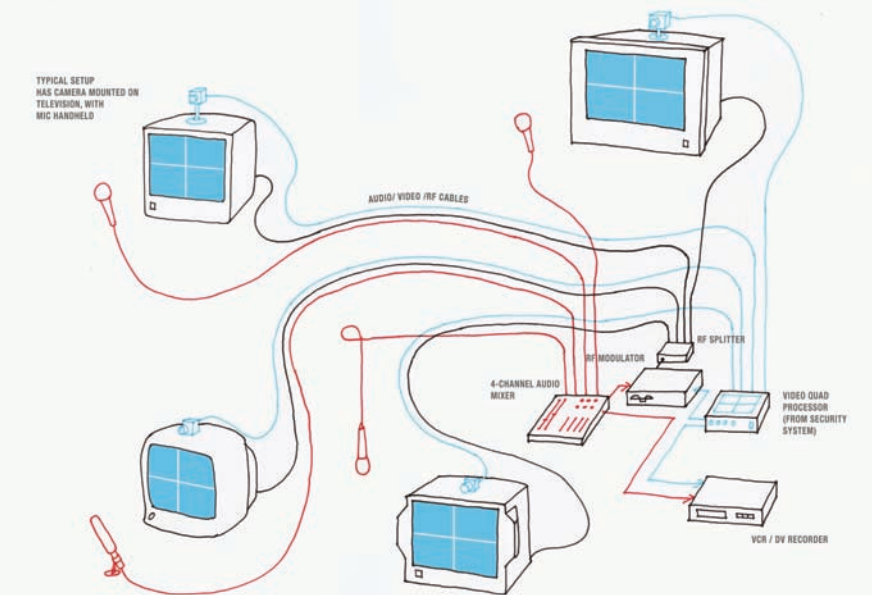
Sudha in her employer's house.



At the STD booth run by Kamla.



KhirkeeYaan: cabling diagram



In other episodes: three electrical shops, two barber shops, two homes of Nepali women, one home of a new immigrant from Nepal, the home of five daughters-in-law of the Chauhans, a general store, a doctor's clinic, a dhaba (small restaurant), two basement embroidery units, a leather-goods manufacturing unit, a basement tailoring shop, another beauty parlour, an STD (long distance calling) booth run by a woman, another run by a man, several outdoor locations... All within about 200 metres of each other, in Khirkee village and Extension, Delhi.



The Neighbour before the House (2009)

“Al Jaar Qabl al Daar” or, the neighbour before the house, is the title for a series of video probes into the landscape of East Jerusalem. Working with families in several neighbourhoods, shooting with a mounted security camera, these videos try to move beyond the instrumental nature of surveillance imaging, or even its “inversion” against power. Inquisitiveness, jest, memory, fear, desire and doubt are seen to pervade this project of watching. Stories float up, as Palestinian residents comment about what can be seen from their own windows—messianic archeological digs; settlement activities near and far; the Old City, the Wall and other mundane-seeming details of a slow and deliberate occupation of the city. Pans, tilts and zooms become ways in which they frame and speak about the nature of their distance from others.

This is an ongoing project by CAMP.



كان هناك منزل تملكه عائلة أبو السعود



My mom had a chicken coop.

Recurrencies, across electricity and the urban. 2007-
Is supported by the India Foundation for the Arts (Grant for Extending Arts Practice) and the Daniel Langlois Foundation for Arts, Science, and Technology.
Thanks to Sanjay Bhangar.
Photos: courtesy of the artists

El Neuvo Signo, Ashok Sukumaran, Mexico City 2009.
Comissioned by TransitióMX, curated by Gunalan Nadarajan and Eduardo de Jesus.
Photos: TransitióMX

Glow Positioning System, Ashok Sukumaran, Bombay 2005.
Produced by Chitrakarkhana Mumbai, with the assistance of: Expert Radio and Electricals (light installation), Unicorn Infosolutions (computer loan), David D'sa (crank fabrication). Commissioned for the Mumbai Festival 2005 with support from the Jindal South-West Foundation.
Photos: courtesy of the artist.

Changes of State, Ashok Sukumaran, Bangalore 2005.
At Elgin Talkies, Bangalore during World Information City. Thanks to Elgin Talkies management, Ayisha Abraham, Namita Malhotra, Alternative Law Forum, and other organisers / supporters of the World Information City event, 2005.
Photos: courtesy of the artist.

Sept Soirees, Ashok Sukumaran and Shaina Anand, Dakar 2008.
Took place during a residency at Ker-Thiosanne during AfroPixel 08, part of the Dakar Bienalle-off.
Thanks to Patrick Watkins, Daoda Arfang Kote, Nyaga, Ndiaga, Batje, Ableye and DJ Amala Doucoure. Modibo Diaware, Baba Diop, Kan-si Salaam, Jean-luc, Manu

Louisgrand, Djibril, Genova, Amadou Kane, Mamadou Pam, Rana Singh, Ramata Abdour Rahman-ly, Macky Ndiaye, Usman Cisse, Diop et Freres and our hosts at Ker Thiosanne: Marion Louisgrand, Francois Sylla, Marie-Anna Tsagouris, Moussa, Adama, Seree.
Photos: Jean-Luc, Manu Louisgrand.

Rustle TV, Shaina Anand, Bangalore 2004.
Was realized as an interim semester workshop for students of Srishti School of Art Design and Technology.
Special thanks to Arathi Parthasarthy, Ishan Ghosh, Navin Kumar, Ramyah Gowrishankar, Nupur Mathur, Pratima Kalmadi, Michael Joseph, Ramesh Kalkur, Raghavendra Rao, Shekhar Krishnan, Qusai Kathawala, Jasmeen Patheja, Ashok Sukumaran, Geetha Narayanan, Parvez Bhai, Rajan, Abdul Razack, Siraj Bhai, Afzar Bhai, DH Lokesh and Mubarak.

Khirkeeyaan, Shaina Anand, New Delhi 2006.
Produced during an Associate Residency at Khoj Studios, New Delhi.
Thanks to Aastha Chauhan, Gaurav Chandelya, Manoj VP, Sanjay Bhangar, Pooja Sood, Anita Dube, Tanmoy Sarkar, Anand Vivek Taneja, Ashok Lal and Ashok Sukumaran.
Photos: Aastha Chauhan, Shaina Anand.

Al Jaar Qabla Al Dar (the neighbour before the house) Jerusalem, 2009.
An ongoing project by CAMP (with Shaina Anand, Nida Ghouse, Ashok Sukumaran) and Mahmoud Jiddah, Shereen Barakat and Mahasen Nasser-Eldin.
Many thanks to: Abu Hassan, Ashraf Bakri, Darwish Kurd, Hovsep Nalbandian, Maali Adris, and Mohamed Saleh, Khadijeh Kanambo and Jumana Aboud.
This series was produced for the Jerusalem Show, curated by Jack Persekian and Nina Montmann
Photos: Nida Ghouse

Shaina Anand is a filmmaker and media artist.
Ashok Sukumaran is an architect and artist. Both are based in India and their work has been exhibited widely internationally. They are co-founders of CAMP (<http://computer.org>), a space for artistic research and practice located in Bombay, and are co-initators of the Pad.ma (<http://pad.ma>) online footage archive. Their work has received several honours, including the first prize for the UNESCO Digital Arts Award, 2006 (Sukumaran), a Golden Nica and three honorary mentions at the Prix Ars Electronica (2007, 2005 Sukumaran, 2007 Anand, 2009 pad.ma), and the first Jury Prize at the 2009 Sharjah Biennial (as CAMP), among others.

www.chitrakarkhana.net
www.0ut.in
www.camputer.org
www.pad.ma

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