

Free Media Lounge

The Free Media Lounge, organised/produced by Sarai-CSDS, was a large digital space adjacent to the conference hall. It presented live audio streaming of the conference proceedings for all three days, provided Internet connections and showcased creative work in new media formats, on the theme of emerging conflicts around intellectual property in the domain of cultural production. It hosted a series of three workshops by programmers and media practitioners. The focus was on describing open source platforms which enable users to experiment with a range of media to create their own works. The Free Media Lounge also had tables displaying various Sarai digital works and print publications.

ApnaOpus

Silvan Zurbruegg and **Victoria Donkersloot**

Victoria Donkersloot and Silvan Zurbruegg presented their work on ApnaOpus, a digital platform created for Sarai's Cybermohalla project (<http://www.sarai.net/cybermohalla/cybermohalla.htm>). ApnaOpus is a development of the OPUS project (<http://www.opuscommons.net/templates/doc/record/html>) created in the Sarai Media Lab, which sought to push free software principles (download-modify-redistribute) in the realm of cultural production.

OPUS is an online space for people, machines and codes to share, create and transform images, sounds, videos and texts. It is an attempt to create a digital commons in culture, enabling one to view, create and exhibit media objects (video, audio, still images, html and text) and make modifications on work done by others, in the spirit of collaboration and the sharing of creativity. It is an environment in which each viewer/user is also invited to be a producer, and it is also a means for producers to work together

to shape new content. Each media object archived, exhibited and made available for transformation within OPUS carries with it data that can identify all those who have worked on it. Thus, it also preserves the identity of authors/creators (no matter how big or small their contribution may be) at each stage of a work's evolution. The basic idea behind OPUS, inspired by the free software movement, is to create an online community of practitioners and artists willing to work outside the increasing global domination of intellectual property regimes in cultural production.

The ApnaOpus ("Our Own Opus") project is an attempt to translate alternative protocols for networked art practice to the context and needs of Cybermohalla practitioners. The Cybermohalla project is an initiative dedicated towards creative interventions using free and open source software tools, digital culture and the Internet in non-elite neighbourhoods of Delhi. One can see the Cybermohalla project as an experiment to engage 'tactically' with media technologies, digital art practice and software, to create multiple local media contexts emerging within the larger media network fostered by the Internet. It can be seen as a critique of the technological imagination and the dominant mediascape, and a counter-strategy committed to access, sharing and democratic collaboration. It is also an example of art practice grounded in local history, experiences, modes of expression and communal creativity. This project generates a long-term creative/interpretative context for digital reflection on the urban condition, through a sustained engagement with working-class young people associated with three locality media labs, and an R&D lab seeded by Sarai in collaboration with Ankur, an NGO working in the field of alternatives in education. The labs, equipped with free software-enabled computers, are situated in underserved areas of Delhi.

ApnaOpus seeks to develop and customise OPUS in a direction where it becomes easy to use, create and share digital art works within the context of the activities of the Cybermohalla project. OPUS

was always meant to act as a community-building resource, and equally, to function as an online space for making and viewing digital objects in various media. The ApnaOpus project takes the principles of OPUS forward into the actual life of a real offline community. It requires customisation and development of the software, which also involves transference of the 'ownership' system, from designers, developers and programmers to users, hence the 'Apna' ("Our Own") in ApnaOpus.

Like OPUS itself, ApnaOpus is a peer-to-peer filesharing tool with the additional capacity to enable the annotation of shared contents. It includes a wiki (<http://apnaopus.var.cc>). The project entails a thorough overhaul of the interface of the OPUS system, making it compatible and responsive to the needs of the Cybermohalla practitioners, enabling online creative sharing and the construction of their "own" digital commons. The project will mandate detailed documentation through what the Cybermohalla practitioners call 'Scratch' Books: a combination of field notes, annals, journals, manuals, annotations, commentaries, reflections, indexes, scrapbooks. These are layered and accretive, densely inscribed with the texture of daily life and local imperatives.

Victoria Donkersloot described her field research at the R&D Lab, undertaken to get a perspective on the internal processes regarding the production of digital content. Her focus was the observation of archiving and file-sharing practices in order to create a model that could be mapped to a software tool. She stated that her goals as an interface designer were to create a navigation system that was clear, easy to understand and consistent; and to analyse how users currently shared and archived digital objects. She clarified that the emphasis was not on the accumulation of files, but on the sharing of the ideas embedded within the objects. For instance, a Cybermohalla practitioner had uploaded a picture of a bike on a parking spot for cars, accompanied by a text "I am not less". On seeing the image, someone else

might decide to write a text on the idea of "I am not less". A third person might like the specific lighting technique used in the photo and would try to emulate this in his/her own photos. So the relationship between the users was based on reflecting upon what was offered.

Donkersloot asserted that interviewing and observing the practitioners had made her aware of the strong sense of sharing, and the constant flow of works created in reaction to other works. People constantly encouraged each other to reflect upon made objects, older members of the labs encouraging the newer ones. This was done at meetings but also in registers, notebooks of photos, text and sound. All entries are logged/archived in factual detail, numbered in columns with date, place, time, etc., but the reflective/metaphorical mode is also encouraged.

The speaker clarified that initially she wanted to copy the factual way of archiving. She tried to embed this into the interface design. In the upload menu, after fetching an object from the PC, the user was asked to place it, in a similar way as when one saves a file into a folder on the PC. This mandatory file structure mimicked the analog way of archiving. However, she later redesigned the entire structure to accommodate the practitioners' texts, because "factual data is less important than reflective data". She realised that the initial structure "pushed people too much to think of how to archive correctly. People are allowed to think about archiving, but this should have second priority." The new structure's upload menu supported the mode of reflection upon content. It did not ask for factual details but asked the user to think how his/her work related to that of others. Instead of asking the user for a description of his/her work, the question is "What ideas would you like to share about your digital object?"

Describing the technical parameters of ApnaOpus, Silvan Zurbruegg remarked that the strength of OPUS was its concept of "rescension", where any contributed file could be seen as a base for

another person to build upon. “This centralised platform provided for the record of genealogies, and a meta-level that allowed for the creation of themes and projects in order to organise the files in a context-specific manner.” However, uploading large files from anywhere to the central OPUS server was complicated. In addition, “the transparency and usability of the platform got clouded due to a fancy but cryptic interface, and an ambiguity between the coexistent genealogical and contextual interrelations”.

The technical experiment in the area of P2P filesharing was through BitTorrent, “since it seemed to be a good compromise between the decentralisation of file exchange, but with a central meeting point (the tracker site) to get information about what was available in the network”. Zurbruegg explained that a peculiar feature of the BitTorrent protocol was “its use of a meta-file that coexists with the distinct data source. This meta-file is used to inform a client about where to ask for peers in order to request a file from the network”. This place is called the tracker. “But unfortunately, a classical BitTorrent tracker knows nothing more than statistical information about a file. It knows just enough to ensure the file’s exchangeability. The use of a meta-file makes it possible to bridge the gaps, to the Web or e-mail, to broaden the access to files from within the network.”

Zurbruegg clarified that the importance of meta-data for OPUS as well as ApnaOpus led to the decision to “build a meta-info layer for the existing BitTorrent meta-file structure. By means of this layer, a BitTorrent tracker then not only knows about what files it is dealing with, but moreover, what context is related to those files. The meta-data set consists of basic parameters such as title, description, information about the author and contributor, links, a folder (category) field and a field to store relations to other files. When a client is adding a new resource (file), it submits all the information to the tracker, which in turn relays information about the new addition through its Web interface.

A visitor to the tracker site immediately sees the contextual frame of the newly added file, and not just information about file name, file size and file type. The tracker also becomes searchable according to the meta-info parameters, and one can subscribe to search queries in order to stay informed about new additions according to the requested parameters.”

The central feature of ApnaOpus is file-sharing according to contextual information that is submitted. This does not detract from the concept of genealogy, which is boosted through the relation parameter “that allows for interrelating to any resource available on a tracker, without explicitly tracking a parent-child state. Therefore, the interrelation became flatter and more wiki-like, rather than nested and genealogical.”

Another emphasis is on the concept of folders or categories.”This parameter is derived directly from the practice at the R&D Lab, that uses a folder structure on the file system to organise all the different types of files circulating around the projects and activities. The folder is used metaphorically, to categorise files according to projects or topics.”

Zurbruegg concluded that the “intersection of extending BitTorrent and using its premises, along with the concept of an interface that emerged from cognitions about the workflow of specific practitioner groups, combined with features from OPUS, has evolved into Version 0.3, the current form of ApnaOpus”.

He completed the session with a demonstration of file exchange from one computer to the other, within the room’s network.

Monica Narula facilitated the discussion that followed, explaining the essential details of contexts and practices of Cybermohalla, and the experiences with OPUS. Interjectors asked if ApnaOpus had backup features, about its advantages and limitations, whether it would run on Windows, etc.

dyne:bolic

Denis Rojo, a.k.a. Jaromil

Jaromil explained that dyne:bolic is a live bootable CD, a practical tool for multimedia production, created to meet the needs of media activists, artists and practitioners interested in realising a full multimedia studio. "It is part of a grassroots effort to spread free software in the spirit of sharing information and creative collaboration. It is handcrafted by experienced software artisans who have been making their own applications for the past many years; dyne:bolic is not based on any other distribution."

This operating system works directly from the CD without the need to install or change anything on the hard disk. It is user-friendly, recognises hardware devices (sound, video, firewire and USB) and offers a vast range of software for multimedia production, streaming, 3D modeling, photo, peer-to-peer file sharing, web browsing and publishing, word processing, email, encryption and networking. It also includes games and a world navigator. It does automatic clustering, joining the CPU power between any other dyne:bolic on the local network, and works on modded XBOX consoles as well as the old Pentium 1. It has an "intuitive and funky" desktop interface, and is equipped for "nesting" (saves data and settings in one encrypted file on the hard disk or USB storage device). "Hence, it is possible to surf, stream, edit, encode and broadcast both sound and video, all in one CD that just has to be booted."

dyne:bolic avoids the use of both Gnome and KDE. Its applications include the graphical environment XFree86 with WindowMaker, and numerous softwares created by the GNU/Linux free software community for the past 15 years. These include:

- > MP4Live for streaming MPEG4 audio and video on Darwin server
 - > FreeJ for performing on video livesets as a freejay
 - > MuSE, for mixing and streaming voice and sound files live on the Net
 - > HasciiCam, to have a webcam on low bandwidth
 - > TerminatorX, GDam, SoundTracker and PD, to perform with live audio
 - > Kino, Cinelerra and LIVES, to edit video and publish clips
 - > Audacity and ReZound, to edit audio and add effects
 - > Gimp, the GNU image manipulation software to edit photos
 - > Blender, a powerful 3D modelling and rendering tool
 - > AbiWord and Ted, to read, edit and save any kind of word file
 - > Bluefish, to generate and edit html webpages
 - > Sylpheed and Gpa, to send and receive mail, with full encryption
 - > Lopster, which permits file sharing over WINmx and Gnutella
 - > Samba, to exchange data over shared directories in LANs
 - > XChat, linphone and other messaging software for rapid communication
 - > VNC and RDesktop to remotely access any Win or Unix desktop
 - > Network tools for analysis and poweruser access to the Net
 - > Xfe, an intuitive local file browser recognising all file types
 - > GCombust, to burn data on CDs on machines with a CD burner
 - > XRmap, to browse world geography and the CIA factbook
 - > Games, which can be played in multiplayer mode online with others running dyne:bolic
- dyne:bolic does not follow the desktop paradigm

established by software corporations using proprietary operating systems, but tries to explore new degrees of human interaction with computers. The developers' philosophy is summed up on the dyne:bolic website: "Death to imitation, power to imagination!"

Open Content in Practice

Bjorn Wijers

Simuze is a music portal that is committed to the idea of Open Content, hence in some senses an extension of the GPL family of licences. While the latter acknowledges that the text (or software, or image) can be modified, open content, according to Wijers, is "GPL-plus". It subscribes to the imperative that open content be changed and that the subsequent product be shared. Open content ties in well with Simuze because of recent advances in digital technology that make remixing easier than ever before. Wijers introduced the concept of netlabels — virtual record labels that give artists the opportunity to distribute and promote their music, often using Creative Commons licences. The speaker described Simuze as less of a record label, similar to a netlabel, with elements of a community-based portal. Simuze tries to create a hospitable place for artists to work on their music, and for listeners to tune in to their artists.

The developers' first, proof-of-concept website ran off an old spare PC in someone's home. It let people upload music, choose their licence. It allowed other people to listen to the music through a streaming MP3 system. They realised that user interaction is the key: good technology alone does not make software work, "it has to have a good feel, it has to be easy". They were on the verge of working out an online distribution model when their server gave up under the steadily increasing load. They are now trying to create a new, more stable system, to be put online. In the new system, artists can log in, put up a profile, photo, genre, who they are related to and

inspired by, contact information, description, concerts, and have their music uploaded on Creative Commons licences: type 1/4/5, etc. This makes it possible for visitors to create playlists of the music, share them, view recommended playlists or listen to random songs from their database.

In the discussion that followed, interjectors asked Wijers why the developers had chosen a Macromedia Flash player as their streaming MP3 player, and why they weren't using the patent-free Ogg Vorbis format to stream their audio. Somewhat defensively, the speaker replied that they were looking for "the best user experience", and in the free/open source software world, "there wasn't any real alternative to Flash". He added that everything Simuze creates will be licenced under an OSI licence (as opposed to an FSF one). An interjector suggested that it was not only a question of licencing the software: what they should do is document their server interface so that people can write players for Simuze Java, C or Python, etc. Wijers asserted that Simuze was trying to create an experience whereby the listening and commenting/editing playlist experience was not separated, as was the case in sites like mp3.com.

The Free Media Lounge showcased the following digital resources and film/video projects for viewing:

The Code (59 min); screened daily at 2.30 pm
A film by Hannu Puttonen, produced by MAKING MOVIES and ADR PRODUCTIONS. Featuring Linus Torvalds and Richard Stallman

The Code, a classic account of the beginnings of free software, presents the first decade of Linux from 1991 to 2001. It includes many of Torvalds' closest allies in the development process of an operating system that is now seen as the greatest success story of Internet culture.

Queering Bollywood

A video project by Alternative Law Forum, Bangalore

This is an exhibition and demonstration of a collection of queer readings of popular Indian cinema. Open and collaborative in nature, it subverts notions of ownership by freely copying and mixing from various sources. As a serious exercise in creativity and innovation, it ironically deconstructs the standard tropes of heterosexuality that remain the entrenched romantic staple of Hindi films.

Beautiful World

A short text film by Geert Lovink and Mieke Gerritzen

Geert Lovink is a media activist and theorist. Mieke Gerritsen is an Amsterdam-based designer.

Some Stories of Places, People, You and Us

Video/animation projects by practitioners Linda and Kristoffer from Sweden and Denmark with practitioners from the Cybermohalla Labs

This is a set of short films/videos which explore crossroads in the city, places where people meet, spaces of conversation: shops, community centres, lanes, courtyards, rooftops. Images and sounds in these films have been re-used from a shared database of photographs and recordings, with the idea of exploring modes of interpretation.

The Zoo

This text film by practitioners from the Cybermohalla Labs speaks of a visit to the zoo, which develops into a Socratic conversation on the nature of the sexual harassment of women.

/TM

This short text film produced at the Sarai Media Lab takes a playful look at particular sentences that surround us in everyday life, but which, for various reasons, we are usually barred from uttering aloud.

New Media Work

The Network of No_Des

Produced by the Sarai Media Lab

This digital work, which includes research on media and the city from the PPHP (Publics and Practices in the History of the Present) project at Sarai, opens up an absorbing hypertextual world of found material from the new media street culture of Delhi. It includes texts/images and film clips as an array of associational possibilities. The path that one takes as one travels between the nodes in this work brings surprises, confirmations and detours, and forces one to confront the fact of oneself as a forager in the undergrowth of the information economy.

Global Village Health Manual

Raqs Media Collective with Mrityunjay Chatterjee

Produced at the Sarai Media Lab

This work asks the viewer to bridge the distance between the data stream of the present and the fading imprint of the recent past, and urges the navigator to look through yesterday's web of images at the bitmap of where one is today. Reprints of 19th-century Calcutta woodcuts are used to build the interactive interface, along with contemporary elements taken from an array of sites from the Internet. These components are edited, reframed, rendered and transformed to embody a new sensibility.

Kingdom of Piracy

Curated by Shu Lea Cheang, Armin Medosch and Yukiko Shikata

This is an online open workspace that explores piracy as the ultimate form of Net art. The project includes links, objects, software, commissioned artists' projects, critical writing and online streaming media events. The purpose of "<KOP>" is to consider the legal provisions surrounding intellectual property in the context of geographical and cultural borders, and to examine the changes and challenges these present to artists and cultural producers worldwide.

Tenali Rama and the Tactical City

Rupali Gupte

A digital media presentation by Rupali Gupte, Sarai Independent Research Fellow, 2003-04. This work is a fictitious history of Mumbai's urbanism, told here through the figure of Tenali Rama – a character from a popular Indian folklore. The stories help establish the nuances of the cultural context of the situation; they also make way for a tactical intervention, rendered either through design or analysis. Throughout the narrative, cultural and urban theorists emerge as characters in the city, to emphasise that the “tactical city” claims to be a theoretical position, a stance for operating in the contemporary, and a way of thinking about built forms.

Other Digital Resources

Intellectual Property Resources CD

This compilation, put together by the Alternative Law Forum, Bangalore, is a database on critical aspects of copyright, patents and traditional knowledge. It is an experiment towards the creation of a collaborative research community around legal issues of contemporary significance.

Fearless Speech

This CD is a collaborative database which includes a range of material, from important Supreme Court cases on freedom of speech/censorship to interesting texts, music, web resources, banned books, etc.

PPHP Project CD

This CD presents the work of researchers in the areas of media and the city, working in the Publics and Practices in the History of the Present (PPHP) project at Sarai. It includes narrative accounts, ethnography, interviews, photographs, music, trade secrets, etc. It incorporates research postings and field notes, arranged thematically/chronologically to give a sense of the systematic growth of core ideas/research questions. The CD was distributed to all participants at the conference.
<http://pphp.sarai.net>

“Inspired” Music from the Sarai Collection

This CD, a compilation of inspired popular songs from Bollywood and the “original” scores, is an audacious take on the practice of music piracy as creative cultural appropriation.

Interviews by David Barsamian

For almost a decade now, Alternative Radio run by David Barsamian has actively campaigned for freeing the airwaves as an alternative to the corporatised empires of mainstream media empire. Presented here are some of David Barsamian's interviews with significant intellectual figures, including Noam Chomsky, Arundhati Roy, Howard Zinn and John Pilger, among others.

Web Resources Booklet

This is a small selection of links to sites that use the idea of collaborative creation and open source knowledge in creative ways. They include resources for artists who might wish to release their works under a creative commons licence so that others are able not only to download their work for free, but also make derivative work. Other links relate to the application of these principles in the field of software. The booklet includes a set of miscellaneous links that highlight the debates surrounding intellectual property and the “commons” in various spheres; provide information about copyright and open content licenses, reading material on the public domain, and other sites which use new and old media.

a browser is also an editor a desktop is also a server
a user is also a producer

a queer rendition of a bollywood blockbuster, a hacked
game better than the original, a celebration of
piracy as the ultimate form of net art, a socratic conversation
at the zoo

free media lounge

invites you to browse play listen view

workshops

6th dyne:bolic
Jaromil

7th APNAOPUS
Silvan Zurbruegg
Victoria Donkersloot

8th gforge
Bjorn Wijers

all workshops start at 4.30 pm

Film

7th 2.00 pm
The Code

new media work
global village health manual
network of no-des
kingdom of piracy

video projects
queering bollywood
the zoo
just do it!
stories of places and people
beautiful world

more...
civilisation 4
fearless speech
pirate remixes
intellectual property resources

6th 7th 8th January 2005
Jacaranda, India Habitat Centre
2.00-6.00 pm everyday
register now - registration@sarai.net
contact - iram@sarai.net

Part of the Contested Commons Trespassing Publics conference on Intellectual property
http://www.sarai.net/events/ip_conf/ip_conf.htm

