

Media/Art Works



Hypertext Artwork

Ectropy Index (2005)

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The word “ectropy” means a general increase in organisation. It appears to have been developed in 1969 by Willard V. Quine, a philosopher and mathematician, in the course of a series of discussions about information. It is now understood as an antonym of “entropy”. If entropy is the net increase in the tendency towards chaos within a system, then ectropy, being its opposite, suggests a congealing and thickening of information from a mass of things known, half known and unknown.

While imagining ectropy it helps to think of a circle, that denotes a neutral state. Any inward collapse of the circle in a cardioid fashion denotes the loss of order, or entropy. The outward radiation of the circle, leading to an increase in its circumferential arc, is ectropy. An ectropic index, then, would be the measure of the increase of information, or of order, in a given system.

Ectropy Index takes these meanings to create its own tension between entropic and ectropic impulses, between the forces that tend to increase and those that decrease the levels of order and systematisation (as opposed to randomness) within a system.

Interestingly, ectropy is also a disease of the eyelid, which especially afflicts hyper-thoroughbred (or inbred) hunting dogs and people who have artificial eyes. In this disease, the eyelids do not close satisfactorily, so that the orbit of the eye comes loose and protrudes, ectropically, from its socket. Eyes that do not blink, or sleep, or never shut to occasionally ‘not see’ something, tend towards ectropy. The eye that wants everything in order, all the time, should perhaps beware of ectropy.

It is said that we live today in a social realm increasingly marked by activities that have to do with information. Identity cards and identity theft, fingerprints and forgeries, surveillance cameras and shadows, data bodies and data crashes, biometrics and body sculpting, etc., seem to define significant features of the topography of contemporaneity. Here, in this zone, falls the glare of the searchlight, surrounded by the thickening fog of the unknowable. A host of everyday practices, ways of make-do and make-believe, provoke the anxieties of agencies deeply invested in knowing all that can be known.

And all that can be known takes recourse to and refuge in the unknowable.

This is the ground that this work walks through. Here you can find logs of ongoing research at Sarai on information and society, and a random harvest of images and fragments of information, from the World Wide Web, from the street nearby, from distant shores, and from right under our noses.

Welcome. Enter, and take your own measure of the ectropy index.

Venue: Sarai Café

Video Documentary

Temporary Loss of Consciousness (2005)

Monica Bhasin, *Independent Filmmaker, Delhi*

Kashmiri/Punjabi/Bengali/Urdu, with English subtitles

Colour, 35 min.

Temporary Loss of Consciousness alludes to the recurring displacement of populations in the Indian subcontinent from Partition in 1947 to the present. Shot in New Delhi and the borders of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, the film explores the idea of borders, boundaries, limits and forbidden spaces that generate vast expanses and wastelands of human emotion and action.

Treated as a poetic essay, the film traces these ideas through the voices of those that live in exile.

The film falls into the genre of 'experimental documentary', and constructs meaning through the juxtaposition of several elements, including found footage of Independence/Partition. It depicts characters from *Toba Tek Singh*, Saadat Hasan Manto's classic parable of Partition, as well as abstractions of abandoned spaces or spaces of refuge, woven into the structure along with narratives of loss, home, honour, longing, belonging, betrayal, frontiers and crossings, expressed in different languages.

Venue: CSDS Seminar Room

Rapporteur's Note

Excerpted from *Toba Tek Singh* (1947):

"A couple of years after the Partition of the country, it occurred to the respective governments of India and Pakistan that inmates of lunatic asylums, like prisoners, should also be exchanged. Muslim lunatics in India should be transferred to Pakistan, and Hindu and Sikh lunatics in Pakistani asylums should be sent to India.

"Whether this was a reasonable or an unreasonable idea is difficult to say. One thing, however, is clear. It took many conferences of important officials from the two sides to come to this decision. Final details, like the date of actual exchange, were worked out. Muslim lunatics whose families were still residing in India were to be left undisturbed, the rest moving to the border for the exchange. The situation in India was slightly different, since almost the entire population of Hindus and Sikhs had already migrated to India. The question of keeping non-Muslim lunatics in Pakistan did not, therefore, arise.

"While it is not known what the reaction in India was, when the news reached the Lahore lunatic asylum, it immediately became the subject of heated discussion. One Muslim lunatic, a regular reader of the fire-eating daily newspaper *Zamindar*, when asked what Pakistan was, replied after deep reflection, 'The name of a place in India where cut-throat razors are manufactured.'

"... As to where Pakistan was located, the inmates knew nothing. That is why both the mad and the partially mad were unable to decide whether they were in India or Pakistan. If they were in India, where on earth was Pakistan? And if they were in Pakistan, then how come that until only the other day it was India?

"... It was anybody's guess what was going to happen to Lahore, which was currently in Pakistan, but could slide into India any moment. It was also possible that the entire subcontinent of India might become Pakistan. And who could say if both India and Pakistan might not entirely vanish from the map of the world one day...?"

In a 1951 preface, Manto wrote:

"For a long time I refused to accept the consequences of the revolution which followed the Partition of the country. I still feel the same way; but I suppose, in the end, I came to accept this nightmarish reality without self-pity or despair. In the process, I tried to retrieve from this man-made sea of blood, pearls of a rare hue, by writing about the single-minded dedication with which men killed men, about the remorse felt by some of them, about the tears shed by murderers who could not understand why they still had some feelings left... I cannot bear human suffering, I swear to God."

Resting Time
Saadat Hasan Manto

"He is not dead, there is still some life left in him."

"I can't. I am really exhausted."

Multi-Screen Video Installation

KhirkeeYaan [Hindi: *khirkee*/window; *yaan*/vehicle] (2006)

Shaina Anand, *Independent Filmmaker, Mumbai*

KhirkeeYaan is an exploration of an open-circuit TV system as a local area network communication, micro-media generation and feedback device (see www.chitrakarkhana.net/khirkeeyaan.htm).

It employed security apparatus, otherwise used for surveillance and 'secret' use: cheap surveillance cameras and a quad processor, coupled with microphones and an audio mixer and cable TV equipment. An Rf modulator, splitters and metres of coax cable were laid out to form temporary communication systems for the 'use' of the community at large. Televisions, electricity, consent and participation were sourced on-site(s), often drawing from a multitude of sources.

Four sets of cameras, televisions and microphones were planted visibly with a 200-metre radius of each other. The cameras sat on top of the televisions. The quadrant comprising of sound and image from all four locations was fed back to the TVs, allowing the subject/viewer/performer/audience to interact with others in the quadrant. Video became the 'site' for these interactions and conversations.

Chitrakarkhana's prior media projects have employed cheap and accessible DIY video and editing software, hardware and skills to produce on-site 'televised' media. The project pushes that envelope of site, community media and technology further. Importantly, here the filmmaking is 'automatic', made possible through eye-level communication, real-time feedback and the absence of cameraperson and editor. The technology is even cheaper: no computers and DV technology, but commercially applied CCTV and CATV equipment.

The seven episodes were generated through seven sets of installations in different neighbourhoods in and around Khirkee Extension, New Delhi, over three weeks, during an associate residency at Delhi's Khoj Studios in April 2006.

Components

- 4 cheap surveillance cameras
- 4 microphones
- 4 televisions at source (or provided)
- 4 x 100 metres coax cable (video)
- 4 x 100 metres XLR cable (audio)
- 4 x 100 metres coax cable (RF)
- Quad processor
- Audio mixer
- RF modulator
- RF splitter
- Mini- DV camera with AV in
- Video travels from 4 cameras to quad processor
- RCA out-BNC in (x 4)
- Audio travels from microphones to mixer
- XLR (x 4)
- A/V in mini-DV camera

Excerpt from *KhirkeeYaan #1*

We decided to host the patch bay at City Electricals. Straight down the T-junction from the city was KIM Electricals, a largish shop overlooking a construction site. This required crossing the road. Abid, an electrician from City Electricals, lost no time going to houses and accessing first-floor balconies of neighbours and buttressing our cables on their grills. Earlier, when I had looked at our monster tangle of cables knotting into themselves at Khoj, I had wondered if we were doing the right thing. But one look skywards, at the canopy of assorted wires, cables and pipes shading these bylanes, and I felt right at home. It was nothing out of the ordinary to add a few more cables to already existing electronic jungle... In one hour we had the lanes wired, and the cameras came on...

Back in the studio we digitised the video feed and were amazed at how much repeat viewing it warranted. We wanted to watch the footage again and again, and each time we identified a new dynamism, another exchange; a joke here, an aside there, many layers of two- or three-way communication. This relatively simple interface made up of four cameras, four frontal eye-level frames, feedback through a quadrant on 4"-14" TVs, gave way to a space that was collaborative, part web cam, part video conferencing. *KhirkeeYaan*'s salience lay in the feedback happening in local time – right here, right now... a geographical bound of approximately 150 square metres; and the television, while looking just like some global news channel, was transformed from the idiot box of passive viewing to an immediate and interactive self-reflective device which could be looked into and looked out of...

Excerpt from *KhirkeeYaan #7*

At all times, the four televisions saw exactly the same image, one that represented the site, or rather, one that became the site – four locations connected within a 200-metre radius of a neighbourhood. This geographical boundary limited the network to a negotiable and visible distance that could be traced by the coloured cables. Thus, in the larger context of site and performance, the real-time feedback, collaboration and conversation between the 'street' or 'community' was received and read as truth. Everyone participating was present; their claim to this space was legitimised by virtue of them being there. The *verité* of camera and reality TV – significantly in this case, four surveillance cameras – was a 'given'.

Venue: Sarai Café, Basement

5-Channel Video Installation

Conversing the Cut (2005)

Babak Afrassiabi, *Artist/Media Practitioner, Teheran/Rotterdam*

"Censorship has always been an undeniable part of cinema, and this is likely to always be the case. Paradoxically, as a mode of erasure it always leaves a trace of its presence to be detected, even when it allows for the complete substitution or covering up of material. For many years, censorship has played an important role in shaping the conventions of Western drama, replacing what could not be said with an excessive *mise-en-scène* and a highly stylised decor, to stand in for the repressed meaning or the desire for the unobtainable object or 'other'...

"We could assert with confidence that censorship is an inherent constituent of cinematic representation and montage...

"As long as there is an 'inappropriate' image to be excised from our scopical field, or, better said, as long as there is a 'cut', there remains a desire for the inappropriate, therefore a desire to see... and therefore the necessity to cut.

"But what if our entire field of vision was *without* a cut, without a trace of the unseen? A terrain filled with an excess of images, where nothing is filtered, and where finally the idea of the 'appropriate' and the 'inappropriate' no longer holds?

"These concerns, among others, preoccupied me when I began my interviews in Cairo with filmmakers, film critics and censors. To try and get as close as possible to the 'true' nature of censorship, I kept my questions very technical and always about the actual 'cuts' in the films, and how each of the respondents experienced the cut from his or her respective position. The video consists of detailed accounts of censored scenes and incidents that occurred around them. The politics of censorship and their specificity to Egypt are explained through these technical, sometimes absurd, stories.

"The 'cut' has varied readings, being an essentially flexible device, of a fluid nature. I decided to edit the interviews in such a way that the story of the cut in a particular film is narrated by different persons, positioned on different monitors. Thus, for the full account of each cut the viewer has to move from one screen to the next."

Venue: Outside Corridor, CSDS Old Building

Mural

The Dilemma of the Techno-Hero (2006)

Amitabh Kumar, *Artist, Delhi*

Assisted by Vijay, Bhagwati Prasad

Acrylic, varnish, paper; 58 ft. x 3 ft.

"This mural rendered in the Sarai backspace drew upon my ongoing Sarai research on the genre and genealogies of Indian comic books. The main tropes were of surveillance and its technologies, coalescing in a panoptic view of the 'knight in shining armour' who, in the light of my engagement with comic books, was the superhero/saviour who had taken it upon himself to deliver the world from evil and oppression.

"As I prepared the layouts for the mural, I began to make other symbolic connections: the idea of an emerging threat that in some manner simultaneously creates the potential intervention of the Hero; the victims that need his help; the city as the canvas upon which the action unfolds; and the presence of technology that stitched all of these into a single unit...

"The initial idea was to create a simple narrative that would be a kind of collage of various frames from the comic books I was researching. But as I began working, I realised that there was space for a certain degree of abstraction between the frames, which could perhaps lend a deeper meaning to the entire work. The link between two frames was explored, and other tropes were introduced: for instance, the dilemma/frustration of the 'common man' at not being a superhero.

"The central panel began with a studio-like image of a man posing as the superhero, and another asking why he could not be one. The hero used his superpowers; this was followed by a visual of a scanning device that allowed entry into a space. The hero then tries to educate himself technologically, while one of his aides observes Delhi through a CCTV camera. A woman yells the order to fire, and other images show how technology is being used as a weapon; bullets and cell phones frame the scene, and bullets collide with autorickshaws in the centre.

"The narrative ends on a hyperbolic note with a girl turning around, and then an explosion. A mute and impassive witness to the climax was in the form of the Mona Lisa, an iconic figure that perhaps speaks to the history of images and image making.

"The other two panels were relatively simpler. One told a small story of a Superheroine contacted on her cell phone by her mother while the heroine was on a vigil. The other created the illusion of a host of superheroes flying up to the viewer from the mural's surface.

"The sketches were done almost entirely by blowing up the layout (made on the computer) to the scale of the wall and tracing it onto the surface using carbon paper. This methodology simplified the painting process, and gave me room to keep developing my concepts as the work took shape."

Venue: Sarai Backspace