



How Sarai Happened

Sarai began to take shape in the summer of 1998 in Delhi.

The summer of '98 was a time for many new beginnings in the city of Delhi. The nineties had been a decade marked by doubt and rethinking on many fronts, all of which seemed to have come to a head for some of us during that summer.

There was a sense of disquiet with increasing urban violence and strife, dissatisfaction with restrictive modes of thinking and practice within mainstream academia, the universities & the media and a general unease at the stagnation that underlay the absence of a critical public culture.

At the same time, Delhi witnessed a quiet rebirth of an independent arts and media scene. This became evident in exhibitions and screenings that began taking place modestly in alternative venues, outside galleries and institutional spaces, and in archival initiatives that began to be active. Spaces for dissent and debate were being kept alive by clusters of teachers and students in the universities. New ideas, modes of communication and forms of protest were being tried out and tested on the streets. There was a vibrant energy evident in street level improvisations with new technologies. Public phone booths were transforming themselves into street corner cyber cafés, independent filmmakers were beginning to organise themselves in forums and a new open source and free software community made its mark in the city's BBSs (Electronic Bulletin Boards). The city itself, as a space and as an idea, was becoming a focus for enquiry and reflection, and a provocation for a series of creative experiments.

It was from within this ferment of ideas, rough & ready plans, and fragments of proposals, that a series of conversations on film history, new media theory, media practice and urban culture was able to mature into the conceptual foundation of Sarai. Underlying these conversations was a desire to create a space which, like the *sarais* for which Delhi was once well known, would be a convivial place where people from many backgrounds could gather, converse and work together.

The challenge before the founding group was to cohere a philosophy that would marry this range of concerns to the vision of creating a lively public space where research, media practice and activism could flow into each other.

It took two years to translate this conception into a plan for a real space and a design of a workable interdisciplinary programme of activities. The Sarai Initiative embraces interests that include cinema history, urban cultures and politics, new media theory, computers, the Internet and software cultures, documentary filmmaking, digital arts and critical cultural practice.

Sarai has been founded on the basis of a collaborative vision and it will grow by continuing to include and engage with new people and ideas.

Initiators :

Ravi Vasudevan & Ravi Sundaram (Centre for the Study of Developing Societies)

Raqs Media Collective (Jeebesh Bagchi, Monica Narula & Shuddhabrata Sengupta)

Sarai, the New Media Initiative, a programme of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies is an alternative, non-profit space for an imaginative reconstitution of urban public culture, new/old media practice and research and critical cultural intervention.

The framework of Sarai includes scholarly reflection and creative work on film & video, computers, telephony, print culture, radio, multimedia and the Internet.

AIMS & OBJECTIVES

To become an engaged and integral part of contemporary urban culture within the city of Delhi.

+

To foster interdisciplinary research on urban culture & politics and media history & practice.

+

To create contexts for collaboration between practitioners & scholars

+

To collaborate with non-elite and neighbourhood media practitioners with new skills through workshops and outreach programmes.

+

To demonstrate the validity of low-cost & low-tech methods and strategies in media and communication practices, with a commitment to public participation and access.

+

To promote non-proprietary (copyleft) and collaborative models of cultural practice/knowledge.

ACTIVITIES & INTERESTS

Media Research & Theory + Media Practice +
Media History + Free Software Development + Web Based
Practices + Multimedia & Digital Art + Workshops &
Seminars + Training + Lectures/Talks/Presentation +
Advocacy & Education + Film/Video/Multimedia Screenings
+ Online Journal & Website + Publications

The Society for Old and New Media (SONM), De Waag, Amsterdam.
www.waag.org

The Society for Old and New Media is a cultural research and development centre for communications technology. Central to the Society's aims is the development of technological applications for the cultural and social expression of groups and individuals. Designers, software engineers, artists and scientists work together closely within the Society for Old and New Media, and for projects, collaboration is sought with partners in the social sector, the educational field and trade and industry.

The Society's projects are categorized into three different groups:

DESIGN & SOFTWARE

Designers in the Society for Old and New Media develop internet environments, interfaces and hybrid media applications like interactive television. The Society's designs always place central emphasis on the users.

ADVENTURES

The Society for Old and New Media organises so-called 'Adventures': training and workshops for policy makers, teachers, developers and advisors from diverse backgrounds.

PROGRAMME AND EVENTS

The Society arranges conferences, manifestations, debates, presentations and exhibitions. These are sometimes organised in co-operation with several other institutes and theatres.



Centre For The Study Of Developing Societies (CSDS), Delhi

The Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, founded in 1964, is one of India's best-known independent research institutes. Bringing together some of South Asia's best known thinkers and writers, the CSDS has played an important part in shaping the intellectual and creative map of this part of the world.

The Centre's current research programme has four main focuses:

- > democratic politics and its future;
- > politics of culture, including the new technologies of culture & communication;
- > politics of alternatives and human futures;
- > violence, ethnicity & diversity.

CONTRIBUTORS (in alphabetical order)

- Aditya Nigam** is a writer, political theorist and activist working on the politics of city space in Delhi. He is working on a Hindi e-zine at Sarai. aditya@sarai.net
- Arun Mehta** is a telecommunications engineer and Internet activist based in Delhi. He is president of the Society for Telecommunications Empowerment (STEM).
www.radiophony.com; indata@satyam.net.in
- Ashish Mahajan** is a media production manager and is presently taking care of operations at Sarai.
ashish@sarai.net
- Awadhendra Sharan** is a historian. He coordinates the 'CityLives: Urban Culture and Politics' Project at Sarai. sharan@sarai.net
- Bruce Sterling** is the author of science fiction novels such as *Holy Fire* and (with William Gibson) *The Difference Engine*. He has written extensively on hacking and cyberspace, including *The Hacker Crackdown*. www.rice.edu/projects/RDA/programs/VirtualCity/Sterling/; bruce@well.com
- C.K. Lal** is an engineer and freelance columnist with Himal Khabarpatrika and Nepali Times. He is associated with Martin Chautari - an independent discussion forum in Kathmandu, Nepal.
- David Garcia** is an artist and media activist. His work has focused on using different forms of media to give voice to marginalized concerns. He is an organizer of the Next Five Minutes Tactical Media Conferences in Amsterdam. davidg@xs4all.nl
- Erik Kluitenberg** is a writer, organizer and theorist who deals with the collision of new media technology, culture and society. He currently works with the political/cultural centre De Balie in Amsterdam.
epk@xs4all.nl
- Florian Cramer** is a writer, theorist, critic and programmer. He is coder of the combinatorial poetry site Permutations. <http://permutations.home.ml.org/>; <http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~cantsin/>; cantsin@zedat.fu-berlin.de
- Frederick Noronha** is an independent journalist and Internet activist based in Goa. He writes for the India Abroad News Service (IANS) and for several other publications. Frederick, together with Partha Sarkar (Dhaka) initiated Bytes For All, an online newsletter about IT initiatives from South Asia and cybersolution. www.bytesforall.org; fred@bytesforall.org
- Free Science Campaign** is a public campaign for the freedom of distribution of scientific work.
<http://ethology.zool.su.se/freescience/>; freescience@zool.su.se
- Free Software Foundation (FSF)** is an online platform for the GNU (Gnu's not Unix) Project. FSF supports the freedoms of speech, press, and association on the Internet, the right to use encryption software for private communication, and the right to write software unimpeded by private monopolies.
www.fsf.org; gnu@gnu.org
- Geert Lovink** is a media theorist and activist, member of Adilkno, co-founder of Digital-City, desk.nl and contrast.org, and co-moderator of Nettime. Geert Lovink is co-ordinator of the Sarai-Waag Exchange Programme. www.nettime.org; <http://thing.desk.nl/bilwet/>; geert@xs4all.nl
- Hakim Bey** is a religious historian, independent scholar and author of *Pirate Utopias: Moorish Corsairs, European Renegades*, and *The Temporary Autonomous Zone*, amongst other books. He is an editor with Autonomedia Books. www.t0.or.at/hakimbey/hakimbey.htm
- Ian Clarke** is the 23-year-old Irishman who, as a student at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland, developed Freenet, a piece of technology which, if it becomes as virally popular as the Napster and

Gnutella software applications, will revolutionize not only the Net but also the very concept of intellectual property. www.sanity.uklinux.net; I.Clarke@strs.co.uk.

Jaron Lanier is a computer scientist, composer, visual artist, and author. He coined the term 'Virtual Reality'. Currently, he is the Lead Scientist of the National Tele-immersion Initiative, a coalition of universities studying advanced applications for Internet 2. www.well.com/~jaron/; jaron@advanced.org

Jeebesh Bagchi is a filmmaker and media researcher with the Raqs Media Collective, and a co-initiator of Sarai. jeebesh@sarai.net

Julianne Pierce is member of the computer artists group VNS Matrix and the Cyberfeminist International, and a performer. Presently she is director of the Australian Network for Art & Technology (ANAT). <http://sysx.org.vns> ; www.anat.org.au; julianne@anat.org.au

Lev Manovich is an artist, a theorist and a critic of new media. He is the author of *The Language of New Media*, and *Tekstura: Russian Essays on Visual Culture*. Manovich is also a regional editor for *rhizome.org*. www.manovich.net; manovich@ucsd.edu

Matthew Fuller is a writer, artist, theorist and critic on new media art based in London. He has worked with the group I/O/D and with Mongrel. <http://trace.ntu.ac.uk/frame/text/fullerbio.html>; matt@axia.demon.co.uk

Mongrel is mixed bunch of people, machines and intelligences, working to celebrate the methods of London street culture. Some mongrels pride themselves on their ability to program, engineer and build their own software, while others have dedicated themselves to working with people. The core members are Matsuko Yokokoji, Mervin Jarman, Richard Pierre-Davis and Harwood. www.mongrelx.org; core@mongrelx.org

Monica Narula is a filmmaker, cinematographer & photographer with the Raqs Media Collective, and a co-initiator of Sarai. monica@sarai.net

Mrityunjoy Chatterjee is a graphic artist and web designer. Presently he is with the Media Lab at Sarai. www.naksiink.com; joy@sarai.net

Pankaj Kaushal is a free software activist, co-initiator of GNU-India.org and webmaster at Sarai. pankaj@sarai.net

Pradip Saha is a photographer and designer. He is creative consultant to the Centre for Science & Environment, Delhi. prosaha@hotmail.com

Pratyoush Onta is an independent researcher, radio activist and founder member of Martin Chautari, Kathmandu, Nepal. Pratyoush is also a fellow of the Asia Fellowships Programme, researching academic resources on South Asian Societies. sinhas@mos.com.np

Raj Jayadev is a journalist and activist. He has been a Fellow of the Lafetra Fellows Program. He has worked with the Santa Clara Centre for Occupational Safety and Health, educating immigrant labourers about workplace safety. www.lafetra.org/fellows/1998/profiles.html; jayadev3@hotmail.com

Ram Samudrala has been post-doctoral fellow at Stanford University doing research in the area of computational genomics and proteomics. He is currently principal investigator (assistant professor) at the University of Washington in Seattle. Ram publishes music online under the name of TWISTED HELICES. www.ram.org; me@ram.org

Raqs Media Collective is a group of filmmakers, photographers, writers and researchers based in Delhi. Raqs has made several documentary films, including *In the Eye of the Fish*, *Present Imperfect*, *Future Tense*, and the *Growing Up* series. Raqs has also edited *Double Take: Looking at the Documentary*. www.raqscollective.net; raqs@vsnl.com

- Ravi Sundaram** is a new media theorist and fellow at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi and a co-initiator of Sarai. He has written extensively on new media and modernity in India. <http://www.nettime.org/nettime.w3archive/199611/msg00018.htm>
<http://www.expand.at/s/words/bazaar.html>; ravis@sarai.net
- Ravi Vasudevan** is a film historian and fellow at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi and a co-initiator of Sarai. He has written extensively on cinema history and has recently edited *Making Meaning In Indian Cinema*. raviv@sarai.net
- Ravikant** is a historian, writer and translator. He co-ordinates the 'Language and New Media' Project at Sarai. He is co-editor of *Translating Partition: An Anthology of Partition Literature*, (forthcoming). ravikant@sarai.net
- Rehan Ansari** is a playwright and journalist based in Lahore. He writes a regular column on Chowk.com. www.chowk.com; rehanhasanansari@yahoo.com
- Richard Stallman** is the founder of the GNU Project, launched in 1984 to develop the free operating system GNU (an acronym for "GNU's Not Unix"), and thereby give computer users the freedom that most of them have lost. www.stallman.org; rms@stallman.org
- Rishabh Aiyer Ghosh** is Managing Editor of First Monday, the peer-reviewed journal of the Internet published online from Copenhagen. He is with the e-Basics Research Unit at the International Institute of Infonomics, Maastricht University. www.firstmonday.dk; www.dxm.org; rishabh@dxm.org
- Ruchika Agarwal** has trained as a multimedia designer. She is presently with the Media Lab at Sarai. ruchika@sarai.net
- Saskia Sassen** is Professor of Sociology, University of Chicago, and Centennial Visiting Professor, London School of Economics. Her most recent books are *Guests and Aliens* and *Globalization and its Discontents*.
<http://social-sciences.uchicago.edu/sociology/sassen.html>; ssassen@uchicago.edu
- Saumya Gupta** is a historian, and the programmes and research co-ordinator at Sarai. sgupta@sarai.net
- Seema Kazi** is coordinator of Sisterhood Is Global Initiative's (SIG) human rights education program in India. A member of the Women's Research Action Group, she has worked extensively with issues concerning Muslim women and inter-religious personal laws. skazi@nde.vsnl.net.in
- Shahid Amin** is currently head of the Department of History, Delhi University and a member of the Subaltern Studies Collective. He has written *Event, Metaphor, Memory - Chauri Chaura 1921*. www.lib.Virginia.edu/area-studies/subaltern/ssh.htm; samin@del6.vsnl.net.in
- Shuddhabrata Sengupta** is a filmmaker and writer with the Raqs Media Collective and a co-initiator of Sarai. shuddha@sarai.net
- L. Fitzgerald Sjoberg** is a well-known Internet humorist and satirist. He is editor of *The Brunching Shuttlecocks*, an online humour magazine. www.brunching.com; lfitzgerald@brunching.com
- Supreet Sethi** is a free software activist, co-initiator of GNU-India.org and systems administrator at Sarai. supreet@sarai.net
- Tomislav Longinovic** is Associate Professor, Slavic Languages, University of Wisconsin-Madison; novelist, psychologist, and cultural scholar interested in the connection between media, war, and nationalism in the former Yugoslavia. <http://polyglot.lss.wisc.edu/mpi/members/longinovic.htm>;
tlongino@facstaff.wisc.edu

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Almost all of the non-commissioned texts in the reader have been located and downloaded from the Public Domain of the Internet. Many amongst these were posted on Nettime. Almost all the 'Nettime' texts in this reader, with few exceptions, were published in *Readme! The Nettime Reader*, Autonomedia, New York, 1998. Every effort has been made to trace the authors and copyright holders of all texts, and obtain their consent for their re-publication. We do hope, in the instance of those authors whom we have not been able to communicate with, that they will not have any objection to the usage of their pieces, keeping in view the educational and non-commercial nature of this publication.

Following is a list of all the articles and other texts that have appeared elsewhere prior to their publication in this reader.

1. "FAQs on the Public Domain" is a version re-edited by Erik Kluitenberg for the Sarai Reader. The original version of this FAQ was drafted at the Society for Old and New Media (De Waag) in Amsterdam, April 1998, by Robert van Boeschoten, Eric Kluitenberg, Geert Lovink, Reinder Rustema and Marleen Stikker.
Source: http://www.waag.org/faq_publiekdomein2.0/
Re-edited by Eric Kluitenberg for the *Sarai Reader*, January 2001.
2. "The Topoi of E Space" by Saskia Sassen was presented first as a lecture at the DEAF 96 Symposium (Digital Territories), Rotterdam and posted on 'Nettime' on 28/10/1996.
3. "Post Colonial Towns Called Deoria" by Shahid Amin is a revised version of an essay originally published in *Seminar*, No. 432, August, 1995, Delhi.
4. "An Imperfect Public: Cinema and Citizenship in the 'third world'" by Ravi.S. Vasudevan is a revised version of the Van Zelst Lecture on Communication delivered at Northwestern University, Evanston, USA in 1998.
5. "On Mushtaq Gazdar's History of Pakistani Cinema" by Rehan Ansari is an expanded version of an article that was published originally in *Himal* magazine and then featured on Chowk.com. It is downloaded from the Chowk Website at: http://www.chowk.com/bin/showa.cgi?ransari_oct0798
6. "Who's Afraid of Radio in India?" is an edited version of an essay by the same name by Frederick Noronha, which was posted on 'Nettime' on 27/10/2000 (www.nettime.org).
7. "The 'Daily' Reality of Partition by" Saumya Gupta is an edited version of an essay to be published in *Translating Partition* edited by Ravikant and Tarun. K. Saint, Katha, New Delhi (forthcoming).
8. "ABC of Tactical Media" by Geert Lovink and David Garcia was written for the Next Five Minutes 3 Conference in Amsterdam (1999) and is downloaded from the Waag website at <http://www.waag.org/tmn/abc.html>
9. "Recycling Modernity" by Ravi Sundaram was first published in *Third Text*, Summer 1999 and posted on Nettime 16/09/1998 (www.nettime.org).
10. "New Media - A Users Guide" by Lev Manovich is downloaded from: www.manovich.net
11. "The Rise and Fall of Dotcommania - Cyberculture in the New Economy" by Geert Lovink is a revised version of "Cyberculture in the Age of Dotcom.mania: A Vista Over Internet Strategies" that was posted on 'Nettime', 15/04/2000 (www.nettime.org).
12. "Internet Nation - The Case of Cyber Yugoslavia" by Tomislav Longinovic was presented at "Portable Cultures: Old and New

- Media in the Contemporary' a workshop held at Sarai in January 2001 in collaboration with the University of Wisconsin-Madison.
13. "Interview with Mongrel" by Matthew Fuller was posted on 'Nettime' on 14/02/1999 (www.nettime.org).
 14. "Policing the Net: The Dangers of India's New IT Act" by Siddharth Varadarajan was published in *The Times of India* 18/05/2000. It is downloaded from: <http://www.timesofindia.com/180500/18edit4.htm>
 15. Seema Kazi's letter against VSNL Censorsip is downloaded from the *Hindu* Newspaper (11/11/2000) website www.the-hindu.com
 16. "Why Activists should take the Internet Seriously" by Arun Mehta was presented at a workshop on the Internet and Community Radio at Sarai, January 2001.
 17. "Touch: Wetware, Ubicom and Nanotech" by Julianne Pierce was published in *Touch Forum: an anthology of essays*. (Published by Nicholas Tsoutas for Artspace, Sydney 1996).
 18. "New Maps & Old Territories" by Monica Narula and Shuddhabrata Sengupta was first presented at the Cyberfeminist Strategies Panel at the Crossroads Conference on Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham, June 2000.
 19. "Next in Line - Indian Workers in Silicon Valley" by Raj Jayadev is downloaded from www.zmag.org/Bulletins/psawsv.htm
 20. "Bodyshopping Story - Account of an émigré Indian programmer in America" is downloaded from www.indnet.org//at/0004.html
 21. "Why Software should have no owners" by Richard Stallman is downloaded from the Gnu Website at www.gnu.org/philosophy/why-free.html
 22. "What is Copyleft?" is downloaded from the Gnu Website at: www.gnu.org/copyleft/copyleft.html
 23. "Some Confusing/Loaded Words & Phrases" is downloaded from the Gnu Website at www.gnu.org.
 24. "Piracy is Your Friend" by Jaron Lanier was first published in the New York Times of May 9, 1999, and was downloaded from the 'Zen Guitar Webzine' at: www.maui.net/~zen_gtr/zgzineback.html
 25. "Interview with Stallman" (excerpts) by David Bennahum is downloaded from the *MEME 2.04* site at <http://www.memex.org/meme2.04.html>
 26. "Hacker's Ethic" (originally written by Stephen Levy, in *Hackers: Heroes of the Computer Revolution*, 1984), downloaded from: <http://hoshi.cic.sfu.ca/~guay/Paradigm/Hacker.html>
 27. "Hackers Anti Defamation League" downloaded from: <http://members.nbci.com/jcenters/HADL.html>
 28. "Free Science Campaign" is downloaded from: <http://members.nbci.com/jcenters/HADL.html>
 29. "Free Music Philosophy" (v1.4) by Ram Samudrala, downloaded from: <http://www.ram.org/ramblings/philosophy/fmp.html>
 30. "Free Software as Collaborative Text" by Florian Cramer, downloaded from: http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~cantsin/aufsaetze/netzliteratu/free_software_as_text.html also posted on 'Nettime', 15/09/2000, and 21/09/2000 (www.nettime.org).
 31. "Cooking Pot Markets: An Economic Model for the Free Trade in Goods and Services on The Internet", *First Monday*, Issue 3., 1998: http://www.firstmonday.dk/issues/issue3_3/ghosh/ and subsequently posted on Nettime, 03/08/1998 & 04/08/1998. Downloaded from 'Nettime'.
 32. "Fire, Work With Me by L. Fitzgerald Sjoberg" from the 'Brunching Shuttlecocks Web Zine', <http://www.brunching.com/features/feature.copypire.html>
 33. "Copyrighting Fire" by Ian Clarke, downloaded from the GNU Website: <http://www.gnu.org/philosophy/fire.html>
 34. "The Manifesto of January 3, 2000" (Ideological Freeware - distribute at will) was posted on 03/01/2000 on Nettime (www.nettime.org).
 35. "The Net and the Web" is taken from T.A.Z. - *the Temporary Autonomous Zone*, by Hakim Bey, Published by Autonomedia Books, New York (1985, 199), downloaded from: <http://www.t0.or.at/hakimbey/taz/taz.htm> (the Hakim Bey/Zero News Datapool Site).

Quotes :

1. pg viii, from Richard Sennet - *The Fall of Public Man* (W.W. Norton, New York 1974)
2. pg 10, from Dipesh Chakrabarty - "Open Space/Public Space: Garbage, Modernity and India", *South Asia*, Vol XI, no.1 (1991)
3. pg 11, from Sudipta Kaviraj - "Filth & the Public Sphere", *Public Culture*, 10(1): (Fall, 1997)
4. pg 34, from Partha Chatterjee - "Community in The East", *Economic and Political Weekly*, February 7, 1998
5. pg 36, from Ashis Nandy - *An Ambiguous Journey to the City* (OUP, Delhi 2001)
6. pg 56, from Ravi Vasudevan (ed.) - *Making Meaning in Indian Cinema* (OUP, Delhi 2001)
7. pg 147, from Critical Art Ensemble, downloaded from www.critical-art.net

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