

THE POLITICS *of* INFORMATION

My mailbox at Sarai has recently been receiving a number of unsolicited mails with subject headers like 'Access Control', 'Biometrics', 'Workplace Watchdog' etc., from companies vending innovative software solutions in Pune and Bangalore. Looking for distributors for various Physical Access Control, IT Security and Fingerprint based Access Control System technologies, they hope that I might be interested.

On the other hand, my father, who has chosen to remain a tenant all through his long years in the city, was recently given a 'tenant verification form' by the housing society in which he stays, to be submitted to the local police station. He is disturbed about having himself verified after thirty-five years of abiding by the law. Both these events – the e-mails selling surveillance systems and the arrival of my father's verification form – are pointers towards an increasing drive to collect information that will enable greater control over access and mobility within urban spaces.

What we are witnessing now is a sophisticated compact between state institutions, public policy, businesses, voluntary groups and technologists to control 'populations' and to erect fortresses (and *gulags?*) of data.

Information is also part of a complex flow of a global traffic of investment, goods, labour and instructions. Information, in its commodified form, travels towards new frontiers, pushes boundaries, making certain barriers obsolete, some porous, some re-configured, and also creating novel and more refined access regulators.

Being within this 'network' of access controls and accelerating flows also implies innovating, resisting, building horizontal solidarities and imaginatively constructing possible practices and futures with and of information. The knowledge that runs the network is available to many millions. And the network is always inhabited by a million mutinies.

The exhilaration of our times lies in our creative ability to translate and extend the language of freedom, collaboration and commons that animates so much of the practices within the digital domain to other social domains and practices.

The collection of articles in this section is an attempt to engage with and think through these issues.



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