

## Even Before I Have Stepped into the Station...

Spotting us from the corner of their eyes, the boys leap up and flee. Joseph calls out, "Hey, it's us! Where are you off to?" They pause, two or three with a leg over the railings. Their faces split in grins, they wait for us to catch up with them. "Did you think we were the police?" asks Joseph, his cheerful voice booming.

"We were playing *bomma*," they explain. A simple game played by younger boys at Vijaywada railway station: tossing a coin, calling out heads or tails, keeping the coin if you call correctly. The keepers of law mistake this for gambling, and usually object.

Curious passersby slow down, stop to watch us talk to the children. There are seven boys aged 8-12 in this group, hanging out at the end of the handicapped-accessible ramp beside the broad steps of the station's side entrance. Vijaywada is the largest junction on the South Central Railway. It services 135 trains and about 30,000 passengers daily. On an average, 23 children arrive here each day, having left their homes and families. Joseph and Basha, who trawl the railway platforms daily on behalf of a local NGO working with children in need of care and protection, are familiar figures to these particular boys. The fact that I am accompanying Joseph and Basha makes me 'safe', in the group's perception.

"Does anyone speak Hindi? She can speak Hindi," Joseph says. In my minimal Telugu, and with hand gestures, I explain, "Telugu raadu. I can't *maataadu*, but if you speak to me, *artham cheysukontaanu*."

All seven are amused at my incompetence, but generous about my effort. Three start talking to me in Hindi, and a fourth, we discover, speaks Tamil, so he and I have that language in common. Most important is their question "Tumhara gaon kahaan (Where is your village)?"

One of them has travelled to Bangalore, and asks me where the street children's shelters are. "I looked for them, but I couldn't find them." I give him a quick tip on how to locate the shelters there.

A man comes by with a flask and tiny plastic "glasses" that can hold about two tablespoons of liquid. Within a moment, we are all sipping tea. The vendor is in a chatty mood. "I tell them they should also sell tea...I can help one or two. They can sell tea and make Rs. 50-100 a day. But they don't listen."

The boys ignore him. "Do you hang out here often?" I ask. They say yes, nod casually. "No one disturbs you?"

"No...Or if they come, we go there. Or there." They point to the roof abutting the ramp, to the roof of the wide porch, to the space under the metal stairs leading from a footbridge to the road outside the railway station. "When we want to sleep, we go under those stairs. Or up there, when it is hot. We climb up that." They point at a cast iron drainpipe along the side of the building.

"Is that difficult?" They laugh. One boy leaps onto the railings. In a couple of seconds, he has shimmed up to the roof and back. "We can climb up that *neem* tree to the porch. Or use that pipe over there...or those pipes."

I've not even entered yet, and already I've seen three non-standard living spaces that the Vijaywada railway station provides to its young residents. Spaces that I have never noticed there before. This was my second lesson in recent times. Earlier, three young men at the station had drawn freehand maps to indicate spaces they thought were 'safe' and 'dangerous' for children who live there. In their sketch, a well-lit, modern food court and the railway reservation counter were marked as dangerous, and the roofs of footbridges and stairways connecting different platforms were marked as the safest - for rest, for play, for living. How the youngsters inhabiting the station perceived its spaces in terms of 'security' and 'threat' was in complete contradiction to how those same spaces were perceived by me, a middle-aged, middle-class woman.

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Compiled from two postings, which can be accessed at:

<https://mail.sarai.net/pipermail/reader-list/2005-January/004879.html>

<https://mail.sarai.net/pipermail/reader-list/2005-May/005689.html>

## Play

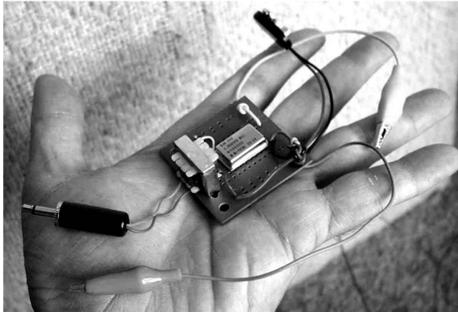


### And Things Flow...

A blank audio cassette is a medium as well as testimony to multiple everyday acts of creativity; a tool and an impetus to the flow of needs, desires and friendships; a gift, and also a commodity. That which does not contain anything can take any form. That which does not have a fixed location finds itself constituting the rhythms of different relationships. It flows, leaving trails in the landscape.

These trails are lines of transmission. They could be the pre-configured circuits on which transmission rides. Or rewired circuits, as that which is transmitted seeks and finds new shapes, carriers, loops, in its path. And they are also eddies, of acts performed and journeys undertaken when that which is being transmitted spills over its destined routes.

Depending on how lines of power are drawn, and where we position ourselves, we experience and register blockages, barriers, risks, threats, fears and small moments of epiphany.



### Materials Required

- > A 1-megahertz crystal oscillator
- > An audio transformer
- > A generic printed circuit board
- > A phone plug
- > A 9-volt battery clip
- > A 9-volt battery
- > A set of alligator jumpers
- > Some insulated wire for an antenna

## How to Build a Transmitter

- 1) Flatten out the two metal tabs on the bottom of the transformer and glue them to the circuit board.
- 2) Insert and firmly secure the leads of the oscillator into the circuit board, placing it far to the right. Solder.
- 3) Insert the stripped end of the red wire of the transformer into a hole in the printed circuit board. Insert the red wire from the battery clip into another hole that is connected by copper foil to the first hole. Solder.
- 4) Insert the white transformer wire into a hole whose copper foil is connected to the upper left pin of the oscillator. Solder.
- 5) Cut one of the clip leads in half and strip the insulation from the last half-inch of each piece.
- 6) Insert the black wire of the battery clip into a hole whose copper foil connects to the lower right pin of the oscillator. Do the same with the stripped end of one of the alligator clip leads. Solder the two wires to the copper foil. The alligator clip will be the "ground" connection.
- 7) Insert the stripped end of the other alligator clip into a hole that is connected to the upper right pin of the oscillator. Solder to the copper foil. This is the antenna connector.
- 8) Open the phone plug, insert the blue and green wires of the transformer into the plastic handle. Put each of the transformer wires into holes in the plug. Solder.

Depending on the antenna, the transmitter can send voice and music across the room, or across the street. To get a good range, clip the ground wire to a good ground, such as a cold water pipe, and clip the antenna to a long wire. Choose your range. Transmit.

[http://www.scitoys.com/scitoys/scitoys/radio/am\\_transmitter.html](http://www.scitoys.com/scitoys/scitoys/radio/am_transmitter.html)

## Rewind

### The Censor and the Interpreter

For an oral historian, the first major source is the encounter between two subjectivities, between the interviewee and the interviewer. But when I say two subjectivities, I mean not only the agency, the capacity to act. I mean also the world of ideas, imagination, thought, emotion, which inhabits the subject. And the source here is to be understood in the literal sense like the water which vivifies. The source is the meeting between human beings, and therefore the recognition between them, how they relate to each other and present each other, the understanding between them, and finally the actual emotion of meeting.

So this is the first source of oral history: the emotion of the meeting. Of course, there are other similar sources. I mean, there is a similar source in history also that does not use the oral at all, and it is called empathy. It is the empathy of the biographer; it is the empathy with the document. So this encounter is there, the encounter of feelings.

Why do I insist on the emotion? Not only because I think that it is an under-recognised topic and attitude in history, but also because I am thinking of Freud's reference to the question of emotion when he says that the erotic drive is actually extremely flexible. It is much more flexible than the drive to eat, because you cannot eat just anything but you can become attached to anything. You can love anything.

This flexibility of sentiment is the first source of oral history.

Secondly, this encounter between two subjectivities is expressed in words, and therefore it gives rise to an inter-subjectivity of dialogue. It is this inter-subjectivity that is taped on the tape recorder.

This 'tape' is a very strong censorship. It is the censorship of everything that is not a word. The tape recorder does not include the image, does not include the body. (It does, however, include laughter, chuckles, cries...)

But the very censorship it operates through also forms the tools through which we work. The taped interview is the source I always send my students back to. They cannot go back to the original situation but they can go back to the taped interview. The transcript, which is the third source, is only a shortcut: a shortcut for analysis. But the transcript is already the translation of the oral into the written. So it has undergone a huge transformation.

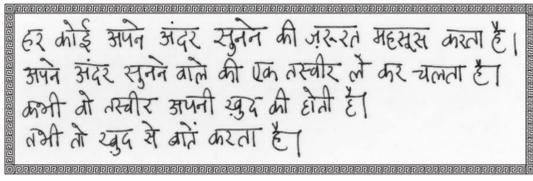
And then there is a fourth transformation, which is interpretation. Here one uses all sorts of disciplinary tools, from folklore, from anthropology, from media studies, from economics, and so on.

Then there is the question of temporalities. I would say that in the oral interview there are three temporalities at least. One is the time in which one does the interview - the present. Another is the time period of the narration. A narration, for instance, can refer to Fascism in the 1930s, between the two world wars. And the third is the temporality of the narration itself. The narration can very well have centuries-long roots. It can have roots in other traditions of narration - a tradition of narration that exists since a very long time or that comes from different spheres, for instance TV shows, and so on.

Operating through these three temporalities, the inter-subjectivity of the encounter produces something that can constitute very different collections. It can constitute an oral archive, it can become the basis of a community project or it can undergo literary treatment, or it can become a radio programme, or it can become a source for history.

These are ways in which oral material becomes a source...in order to be transformed into a source, oral material has to undergo specific procedures.

Excerpted and adapted from a talk by Luisa Passerini at the 'History, Memory, Identity' workshop organised by Sarai-CSDS (14-16 January 2005).



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## What It Is, and What It's Called

*How many times can a joke be told if a joke be told more than once?  
How many ways can a joke be told if a joke be told more than once?  
What would a jester do if told that a joke dies with its first telling?  
Would a joke remain the same joke if we only changed the spelling?*

In 1895, the Lumière brothers in France made a film called *L'Arroseur Arrosé*, or *The Waterer Watered*. The plot was apparently simple, comic, almost slapstick. A gardener is holding a hose. A boy steps on the hose, choking off the flow of water. The gardener peers down the hose. The boy lifts his foot from the hose. The gardener is squirted.

Early films were in high demand; the period between 1895 and 1899 was a sort of Wild West of opportunity to reproduce at random and at large. Often the original negatives ran out, and the prints could only be shown about 60 times; by then they were reduced to stunts. In such instances, as with *The Waterer Watered*, the only option was to re-shoot, i.e., to 're-tell' the joke. So, like all jokes which grow and transform in the telling, this rudimentary plot changed with each version. Stylistic components such as depth of field were introduced; so were dramatic elements. The boy is spanked; the 'watered' gardener 'waters': the boy in turn; the boy is played by a girl...

From 1896 to 1903 occurs what I call the moment of the too-too-many copies of *The Waterer Watered*. Through my research on this film's multiple variants, we know that a film called *The Gardener* (Le Jardinier, 1895, Lumière Company) was shown at the Salon Indien in Paris. The film later becomes *The Waterer Watered*. This is further complicated, in that the Lumières made the same film, *The Waterer Watered*, more than once.

### Making and Re-making:

Most textbooks record one version of *The Waterer Watered*, and possibly two. Only two textbooks from the 1930s refer to ten versions. I have actually counted up to sixteen versions. As we shall see, these versions were not just by the Lumières, the 'original' makers. In 1896, Méliès made his own version. Edison made an 1896 American version, *Bad Woman, Bad Boy*, in which both roles are played by women; this film is not extant. The British made *The Bad Boy and the Garden Hose* (Blackton and Smith), and *The Gardener with Hose* or *The Mischivous Boy* (W.H. Smith). Then we have two more French examples, one of them made by the pioneer woman producer/director Alice Guy-Blaché.

Most interesting to me is the mystery print, *The Gardener and the Bad Boy*, which was shown in New York in 1896, but had no mention of any exhibitor or distributor. The date of this 'extra-legal' screening does not correspond with the date that the Lumière company actually showed the first work in New York.



*Teasing the Gardener*. With all of these variations, where is the correspondence, if any, between the titles and the prints?

Some argue that *The Waterer Watered* is the first comedy, some argue that it's the first fiction film. I have to tell you that I am not a believer in 'firsts'. I am also on the warpath against 'origins'. And what I love about this particular project is that it is impossible to really determine where the 'first' occurs, when the 'first' occurs, or if there is a 'first'...

Excerpted and adapted from the presentation "Early Cinema, Heyday of Copying" by Jane Gaines, at the 'Contested Commons, Trespassing Publics' conference organised by Sarai-CSDS and the Alternative Law Forum (6-8 January 2005, New Delhi). An audio file of the presentation can be accessed at: [http://www.sarai.net/events/pl\\_conf/day02\\_audio/stream-070105-afterlunch.mp3](http://www.sarai.net/events/pl_conf/day02_audio/stream-070105-afterlunch.mp3)  
Image link: <http://theocsarite.com/chronicle/1895c.htm>

## Replay

## Record

### The Map Is Never Complete

This project is an attempt to extend critical understandings of the use of spatial technologies (remote sensing and GIS) that typically focus on institutional and instrumental aspects. My research includes documenting my observations of the actual processes of technological practice.

I argue that we should pay attention to the spaces and actors involved in the technical stages of knowledge production, and maintain the linkages from the phenomenon to be represented (e.g., the agrarian landscape) to the objects of representation (e.g., a land use map) and the manner in which these are utilised.

During my ongoing interactions with the technical staff of the NGO that I have been associated with for this work, I have noticed a specific culture of learning/practice.

I accompanied a soil scientist on a soil mapping field trip. To familiarise me with his approach to soil classification and mapping, he handed me a soils manual and asked me to read it on the day before our field visit. It contained information about soil characteristics such as texture, depth, and colour - specifically, definitions of different classes of texture, depth, etc. Later he gave me a quick overview of his field methods.

These methods were based on the interaction between soil characteristics, and this information was not contained in the manual. I asked him about this as we drove to the site the next morning. He replied that while writing the manual, he had made a deliberate choice to not include the information about the interactions. He also refused to tell me about it in the jeep. He described this as a question of style that he had developed over the years. In his opinion, if he 'told' me about it, broke it down into steps, it would not help me in the least. I would not develop my own style or understanding, and would instead practice a simplistic method of soil mapping.

We spent nearly two days traversing the fields, classifying soils and mapping their distributions. During this, he shared many insights. However none were prescriptive; instead, they were (some rather slippery) building blocks.

This seemed to me a specific epistemology and approach to learning. There is no absolute soil class or soil map for a region. Much is based on interpretation and making tough, but informed, choices on the ground. In order to impart this kind of knowledge, my 'teacher' chose to provide me with the basics textually, and then chose to show the way differently through 'practice'.

I had to learn to make these choices myself as I stood on a plot of land and looked around - how to situate myself with respect to the local topography, interpret the local geography, triangulate it with standing crops (if any) in the area, the slope of the land, the colour of the soil. The map is never complete, stage by stage, inch by inch - a choice you make down the line might still influence a choice you had just made.

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<http://mail.sarai.net/pipermail/reader-list/2005-April/005376.html>

## Long Distance Conversations

I am a prisoner of phone booths. STD/ISD/PCO/FAX/Xerox By Japanese Machine booths. I am enthralled by their darkened glass panes, stencilled signage and plastic flowers, the late hours they keep, and the stories that gather on their wallpapers. Like an idiot hungry for tales of travellers who idled in the *sarais* of the Delhi sultanate, I waste my time in the phone booths of '90s New Delhi. Even when I have nothing to say and no one to call. I go there to eavesdrop on the world, to whisper in my head the magic of distant place names: Adas, Addagadde, Galsi, Gambhoi, Kanjirapuzha, Kaina, Zira, Zineboto. Or, I search further in the book of codes for cities with enchantments: Rosario, Uppsala, Valparaiso, Zauqa, Aqaba...and Sandnes...and Los Angeles.

...Phone booths in the city centre, close to railway stations and cheap hotels, are home to a floating population of tourists and travellers in various stages of fatigue and enthusiasm. They unbuckle their voluminous rucksacks, unzip their hip pouches to take out scraps of paper with phone numbers in Belgium or Germany, while imagining the prospects of return and mapping their future itineraries. Will it be Ladakh before Goa, or Dharamsala before Varanasi? These are the roving envoys of the lonely planet, invariably overcharged by smooth phone booth owners who hide their racism behind the complicated arithmetic of time and money.

...A refugee Afghan doctor and his wife come to ring up Kabul. I asked them once if they still have friends or relatives there. "No," they said, "everyone is dead, or in exile. We call only to see if the house we left behind is still standing. When the phone rings, it means that the house has not been shelled."

...Three Malayali nurses, exceptionally graceful, regularly call up family in their home town. After the change has been tendered, the boss of our phone booth, who lets the nurses move to the head of the queue (no one seems to mind), asks them searching questions about the Christian faith. Is the Holy Ghost a ghost? Was Jesus reborn after his death? Did the Virgin Mary have a normal delivery? Do Christians have caste? The nurses painstakingly answer these questions in halting Hindi, promise to try and find out for their priest.

...The night's calls are nearly over, at 12.40 am. Along with me, there's a backpacker still trying to get through to Barcelona, and the boss, staring at cable TV. The phone rings, but the boss and the backpacker have fallen asleep, and for the next twenty-five minutes or so, the shiny-shoed salesman who rushes in making long-distance love to a married woman in Bangalore. Sometimes he breaks off from Kannada and begins talking about her long hair in English. He jokes about the sleeping husband, asks for news of the children, promises to see her soon.

...The boss counts the day's takings and begins to roll down the shutter. I offer to drive the backpacker down to the all-night STD booth outside the Eastern Court buildings on Janpath. We drive in silence; we have things to say to the people we need to call, not to each other. Then my companion decides to tell me that his friend is dead and cold in a hospital morgue, that he is catching the next flight back in the morning with her body. When we get to the booth, he lets me wake the operator and get the cards with which to work the phones. He shuts the door tight behind him when he calls, and I cannot hear his voice. When he is done, he thanks me and leaves before I can ask him if I can take him to his hotel, or to the hospital.

...How did he say what he had to tell his friend's family? "Flavia and I are coming home tomorrow, but she is not alive," or "Flavia died this morning at 6.45 in her sleep", or just, "Flavia is dead."

Sometimes I think of all the telephone conversations that criss-cross the earth...Numbers don't match, there is static interference, satellite links fail, people don't know what to say, or are unable to say what they mean. Perhaps all that is unsaid collects each night and hovers above us like an unknown layer in the atmosphere, until it is blown away on the rare days when people find it possible to really speak to each other.

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Excerpted from an essay first published in *The India Magazine*, August-September 1996; republished in *Eisenhower*, ed. Kai Friese, Penguin India, New Delhi, 2000. For full text see: <http://www.sarai.net/compositions/texts/works/longdistance.htm>

## Release

### MGM vs. Grokster: "My Way" to "Our" Way

In October 2001, Metro-Goldwyn-Meyer and twenty-eight of the world's largest entertainment companies took the makers and distributors of the Grokster, Morpheus and Kazaa softwares to court, alleging secondary copyright violation. They held that the distributors of the software were directly responsible for the infringing activities of users of the system. MGM vs. Grokster came up for hearing before a bench of the US Supreme Court on 29 March 2005. Arguments are currently in progress, and a decision is expected by the end of June this year.

Grokster, like other P2P softwares such as Kazaa, LimeWire and BitTorrent, enables users connected to a network, such as the Internet, to share files with each other. These could be music files, video files and even digitised books. The industry has traditionally been suspicious of technologies that enable the circulation of cultural material in ways and forms that cannot be controlled by the owners of the copyright on that material. An anxiety rattled up by the immense transformative possibilities opened up by new media and digital technology tools on the one hand, and a parallel tightening of an international intellectual property regime on the other. The Grokster case is not the first instance of such a suit. In 1999, AGM music filed a similar suit against the makers of Napster, a similar file-sharing software.

At the juridical level, the Grokster case is a question of technological innovation and its limits, when situated within a regime that places an equally high value on the protection of the intellectual property of other innovators, such as artists, authors, musicians, etc., which technologies like Grokster are seen to threaten, violate and undermine. A precedent had been set in 1984 with Sony Corporation of America vs. Universal City Studios, or the Batamax case. The US Supreme Court ruled that a company was not liable for creating a technology that some customers may use for copyright infringing purposes, so long as the technology lends itself to substantial, commercially viable non-infringing uses.

However a consideration of the Grokster case would have to take into account the fact that this is as much about the 'case' and all that surrounds it as a cluster of transmissible signals, as it is about the bare facts of the case itself.

The many avatars of Grokster - a posting on a list, an announcement on a website, a transcript in an archive, an entry in a blog, perhaps a conversation between a judge and his teenage grandson - gesture to the cumulative effects of what happens when something enters a network capable of allowing the simultaneous exchange of information between an ever-expanding constituency of interested parties.

Ideas multiply and go places. And so does the simple idea of file sharing. From a court case to a web log to a posting to the words in the paper that you hold in your hand to the next set of hands that hold the paper, and so on.

A lawsuit against a technology of transmission itself becomes the object of transmission along the byways of the Net. Information travels across the neurons of the Net sparking off connections, sometimes at random. A Washington lawyer who attended the oral submission before the Supreme Court describes this on his blog, an artist who uses file-sharing software to upload and share his music with peers features news of the case on his site, a website begins a countdown of all the technologies that would be retrospectively prohibited if the Court rules against the technology, a law school decides to upload the oral transcripts in pdf format on its portal. A group of artists get together and file *amicus curiae* (friends of the court) briefs in favour of Grokster, just as other artists signed by the recording labels file briefs against it. A critical mass gathers around the case, so that regardless of whether the final judgment is in its favour or not, it (and along with it, the idea of file sharing) has nonetheless entered the accretive memory of the network.

The circulation of things is crucially about the patterns of usage that emerge around them. Circulation builds cultures and contexts of sociality, in which things are gifted, shared, transformed, repurposed and remixed. In a network, Frank Sinatra's "My Way" is open to becoming "his way" and "her way". Sometimes maybe even "our way". Then, these 'ways' enter the everydayness of discourse and practice and it becomes difficult to create barriers to block them.

For more information on this case see:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MGM\\_v.\\_Grokster](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MGM_v._Grokster) and [http://www.elf.org/PP/P2P/MGM\\_v\\_Grokster/](http://www.elf.org/PP/P2P/MGM_v_Grokster/)

To download a full text version in pdf format of the oral submission before the United States Supreme Court, see:

<http://p2p.weblogsinc.com/entry/123400016/039286>