The Other Information City

Not too many cities have the distinction of becoming words that are a part of language, and more often than not when this distinction is given to cities, it is generally as a pejorative. Thus, to be 'sent to Coventry' was an honour given only to criminals. The latest entry to the list of City words is Bangalore, and in the unofficial dictionary of the global information order, 'to be Bangalored' signifies the loss of one's job in the first world, through the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) process to India or any other developing country.

Not content with its recent sobriquet, Bangalore however intends to transcend its Bangaloreness, and instead aspires to be Singapore. Thus all the official self-representation of Bangalore positions itself as the Singapore of India, and this metaphor is not only at the level of the symbolic, but also through the various joint ventures between the government of Singapore and the Government of Karnataka, as well as between a number of large private companies in Singapore and Bangalore. It is also not surprising that the Master Plan for the proposed IT corridor (of which I will say more later), a massive plan to create a corridor covering 7,500 hectares of land has been prepared by a Singaporean company Jurong.

This schizophrenic desire be another city is of course not limited to Bangalore, and it seems to be like a Post Globalization anxiety that afflicts a number of Indian cities. As cities like Mumbai, Hyderabad, Delhi, Bangalore, Kolkata and Chennai rapidly move into this new network of the global economy, large sections of their middle classes begin to live in a present that is far removed from a majority of the people who live and work these cities. There is in many ways a disjuncture of temporal experience within the national space. Big cities and metropolises are being reconfigured, dislocated from their national location and inserted into the grid of the global economy. Every major city in the contemporary seems to have a not very hidden schizophrenic desire. For every city there is a mythical other that it will one day transform into, and in many ways is destined towards. Bangalore aspires to be Singapore; Mumbai violently desires Shanghai and Delhi slouches towards London. In each of these cities the master planners and the corporate elite are hard at work transforming the architecture, the built up form and the design of the city to overcome their messy temporal now ness.

There is little doubt that in the past ten years, Bangalore has attained almost a mythical status as the silicon valley of India and emerged as one of the important nodes for the global flow of services, serving as the back end of many corporations across the world. Over the past ten years we have seen a significant transformation of Bangalore with the emergence of the dominant narrative of Bangalore as the silicon valley of India, a symbol of the emergence of India as an IT superpower, and as a global city working in virtual time with the US in terms of the provision of IT enabled services. If dams were the most important symbols of post colonial India's entry into the modern, the IT industry has emerged as the most important symbol of India's entry into the global or into the new modernity marked by the pre-eminent position given to knowledge based services.

Bangalore now positions itself as the preeminent 'information city', the 'network city' and The 'Biotech' city, and has actively worked to shed its sleepy image as the garden city or pensioners paradise. Besides, with the kind of urbanization that one has seen in Bangalore in the past decade, the only gardens that one is likely to see are the

software parks. The growth in the upwardly mobile professional class in Bangalore has also resulted in significant changes in the built up form of Bangalore. All the older architectural forms are flattened to allow for high-rise apartments, most of which are high walled and have their own security. The only non-rich who can even enter these places are the people who work as domestic workers, gardeners etc. Old media spaces such as cinema halls are broken down to give rise to new shopping malls cum multiplexes, and the current pride of joy of Bangalore is a huge shopping mall called The Forum, boasting of a multiplex with Gold Class seats which cost Rs. 500 per head.

Unlike a city like Mumbai where the divide between the worlds of the urban elite and the urban poor are still tied together by railways line and the sheer narrowness of the city, in Bangalore one can often forget the fact that there are more than 700 slums accounting for almost 40 % of the population. The relationship of these cities to their national location, which once made them hospitable sites for the poorer sections who came there in search of livelihoods, has now completely changed.

This urbanism in India has become a significant theatre of elite engagement with claims of globalization. Consumption, "information" society and the new economy, spatialised imprints of the media industry like multiplexes/malls, and lifestyle and suburbia go hand in hand with the cries of urban decay and pollution, and managing populations that are increasingly restless in the new arrangements.[1]

Co-existing parallel with these spectacular global visions, are also networks of local economies, always lacking the infrastructural provisions and state backing unlike the IT companies, but equally mobile. This city weaves in its core the ‘unorganized’ and ‘unplanned’ growth of the city, both economically and spatially. It is here that the urban poor comprising a quarter of the city reside and carry out trade in conditions that make a decent living standard unattainable. While the older illegal city of slums and squatters has been in existence for a while, in the past ten years there has been another layer that has been integrated into the experience and narration of this illegal city. The proliferation of non-legal media practices ranging from pirated VCD's, DVD, MP3's to grey market mobile phones and pirate book sellers on the streets informs the tactile practices and imagination of the illegal city. This is the other information city that exists, and it is certainly not unique to Bangalore, and just in the manner that Bangalore has become a metaphor of the new global information era, the other information city exists as a metaphorical manner in which we can think through the idea of information practices that cannot be accounted by either statist or corporate imaginations of information orders.

This photo essay attempts to look at this other information city in relation to the official representation of Bangalore. When I began writing this piece intended it to be an analytical piece on the idea of the information city and the other information city, but when I tried capturing the experience of the official and the unofficial information cities of Bangalore, it was almost impossible to stick to a coherent linear narrative. I guess, one of the consequences of a splintered urbanism is also a splintered narrative, and instead I have chosen to use a more journalistic form, the photo essay to speak of the multiple personalities of Bangalore. Since we are speaking about the cyber city, this essay acts as a virtual tour and for those more historically inclined, I would suggest Janaki Nair’s excellent history of Bangalore.

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[1] Ravi Sundaram, Uncanny Networks,

At The Heart of the Information City

Starting for no other reason than convention, at the heart of the city, our first stop is at a curious sculpture on M. G.Road. The sculpture “Applied DNA” was created by noted artists Yussuf Arrakal and donated to the Biotech city by Biocon, the largest Biotech companies in India, situated off the electronic city.

Overlooking the historic Bible Society building in the background the sculpture allows us to think through a number of questions. What does it mean to think of a city in terms of its relation to information? When Bangalore claims to be a networked city in terms of information, it is also a significant symbolic move which recognizes the re ordering of the idea of value in the contemporary. If Bangalore was marked by its status as a city of the public sector and its strengths in the manufacturing sector from the fifties through the eighties, there is a shift in the discourse in the contemporary. Relying on its software and biotech industry, the city had adapted to the emerging global economic order whose chief planner is the World Trade Organization, and its chief architect the World Intellectual Property Organization.

If the older logic of property in the manufacturing age was marked by the materiality of the mechanical means of production, in the information age it is attached to the world of the intangible, the immaterial intellectual property. Even as Arrakal’s Applied DNA seeks to serve as the triumphant landmark of the new urban memory, it is useful to recall not so distant memories to pay attention to the kinds of conflicts that are taking place in the new property regime.

In 2002, the government of Karnataka decided to set up a Biotech city on the lines of the electronic city. This was more or less at the behest of companies like Biocon which complained of the lack of prime land. The land that was identified for the setting up of the Biotech city was land situated on the premises of the University of

Agricultural Sciences (UAS). There were a number of protests by the students and faculty of the UAS who argued that the UAS had carefully established a place, which had very valuable biodiversity, which would be threatened by the construction of the Biotech City on its premises. A number of the faculty and students sat in to protest the official laying of the foundation stone. The protest turned violent when the police started roughing up some of the students, and the then IT Secretary of Bnagalore, Vivek Kulkarni oversaw a Lathi Charge which included breaking into the students dormitories to arrest students. A number of students and faculty were injured in the process, and police complaints were filed against the IT secretary as well as certain police officials. Till date, there has been no action taken against those accused.

A number of farmer movements have also been at the center of the priests against biotechnology and the patenting of seeds and life forms. A few years ago, the Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha, a farmers organizations, broke into the outlet of Kentucky Fried Chicken and sat in for more than five hours till they were arrested by the police for disrupting public peace and damaging private property. At the heart of the conflict over biotechnology lies a battle over the very idea of the ownership and control of forms of knowledge and information, which are seen to be detrimental to public interest and endangering century old modes of practice and knowledge sharing.

Interestingly just across the Applied DNA sculpture is the Mahatma Gandhi Park. More popularly known as Gandhi statue, this intersection has been designated by the government as the official spot for protests and rallies. The designation of official spots of protests of course gestures towards the shift in the discourse around public spaces. All protests require prior police permission, and there are either designated posts such as the Gandhi statue or designated routes accompanied by police personnel for these protests. The Gandhi statue has thus been a site for various protests ranging from sexuality minority groups to trade unions to the Kannada Film industry. In the recent past, there have been a number of protests organized here against the new Patent Regime in India.

With the passing of the Third Patents Amendment Act, India becomes fully complaint with the TRIPS agreement, and it introduced product patents for drugs and also makes significant amendments to allow for more Biotech patents.

Bangalore has always had a rich tradition of public activity and protests in different parts of the city were a common sight. But after the decline of the trade unions, there is very little direct public action that one sees. A few years ago we were involved in a protest against he decision of the Supreme Court in the Narmada Bachao Andolan case, and while the protest was a sanctioned one which was supposed to be in Gandhi statue, the protestors moved towards MG Road and Brigade road and were eventually arrested. They were subsequently informed that the last such attempt to take over Brigade road had been in the seventies. The police were equally clear that one of the reasons for filing criminal charges against all those arrested was the fact that the protestors had disrupted Brigade Road, the holy symbolic spot of global capitalism in Bangalore.

The careful guarding of spaces which are symbolic of capital is of course not a new phenomenon, and the history of urban space has been to some extent the history of gentrification, of urban renewal that speaks the language of consensus rather than conflict. Also given the mediatised world that we live in, often the only conflicts that count are the ones that make the news otherwise they are not deemed news worthy. In Bangalore, given that a number of the large newspapers and media houses are situated in and around the Brigade Road, MG Road nexus, any large-scale protests in these areas would attract media attention. It is after all relatively easy for a journalist to

walk out of his office and cover a story than travel to a remote part of the city to cover a protest that no one can see anyway.

This initializing by the media of key conflicts binds diverse movements, groups, concerns and cities. One of the most invisible aspects of the information city has been the kind of conflicts that are taking place around the question of land. The government of Karnataka has proposed an IT Corridor that runs from the ITPL in the north of the city down to the electronic city in the southeastern parts of the city. This plan covers a massive area of 7500 hectares (Approximately one and a half times the size of Paris). It has in the past two years been acquiring land for the IT corridor using a strange combination of violent state might and private bargaining capacity of IT Companies.

The process of acquisition is perhaps worth narrating. A legislation called the Karnataka Industrial Areas Development Act expands the doctrine of ‘eminent domain’ (the absolute authority of the state to acquire land) to fit the demands of a land hungry information industry. The world of the intangible does seem to have some materiality and tangibility after all. The principle of eminent domain has of

course been the classical mechanism through which the modernizing state has displaced innumerable tribals, indigenous and other non-modern peoples for the past fifty years for large development projects. Under the Land Acquisition Act one only needed to satisfy the requirement of ‘public purpose’ to acquire land, but under the KIADA you don’t even need to do that any longer. An IT company merely needs to notify the government of the land that it is interested in, and the government then acquires the land for the company.

There have been a number of protest and opposition against the IT Corridor with a large number of people arguing that a number of these projects are merely land scams which the government is also a party to, but in terms of media coverage most of these protests are never covered.

Pictures Courtesy: Solly Benjamin

The demands for land by the IT sector are huge, given the requirements of large campus like spaces. These spaces are built like large US college campuses with in house malls, mini golf courses, swimming pools, gyms, air conditioned work spaces and well landscaped gardens to provide a comfortable work and play environment for the software engineers, the vast labour pool of the information city.

The best example of this is of course the pride and joy of Bangalore, Infosys. A walk around Infosys makes it seem like a celebrity garden, and no visit of any dignitary to Bangalore is complete without a tour of Infosys. From the Prime Minister of Japan to Bill Clinton, they have all been here and planted trees named after them in the lawns of Infosys. But before we begin our tour of Infosys, a few cautionary tips for the

unseasoned IT Tourist.

When you enter Infosys, you will be photographed and given a temporary swipe badge which tracks your movements within Infosys. I wish I could include a sample of the badge but unfortunately the badge also informs you that it is the exclusive property of Infosys, which as to be handed back before you leave the premises. Also do not carry any weapons of mass destruction such as floppy discs, CD's etc while entering or leaving Infosys, after all you could be a thief carrying valuable intellectual property belonging to the company. While there do walk around the picture postcard lawns, and if you do have a chance to chat up with the malis (gardeners) who take care of the lawns, you may be a little surprised to find tout that these gardeners are often the farmers whose lands had been acquired for the IT city. The founder of Infosys had guaranteed all of them employment in exchange for their land, but unfortunately unlike the other employees at Infosys, these upgraded employees do not benefit from the wealth generating Employee Stock Options Scheme.

While there are a number of fascinating aspects of Infosys, one of the most fascinating building in Infosys is the Learning / Simulation center. This is the simultaneous space of everywhere and nowhere; it acts as a space, which is used to train software engineers who are deputed to onsite work in other countries to teach them about the culture and etiquette norms of places ranging from Denmark to Delaware, and Texas to Tanzania. Thus you have various sessions, from polite conversation to ordering a drink in a bar that are imparted.

The de territorialized nature of this space serves as perhaps the most poignant symbol of the new globalization which allows you to overcome the constraints of older notions of tie and space to create a world where Bangalore exists in virtual time with the US so that while they sleep we work, and while we sleep they work. The twenty-four hour workday is facilitated by high bandwidth transfers of data and information. The call centers also depend on a similar sense of simulation, where mimesis intersects with work, where labour and performance are indistinguishable. Bangalore moved form a sleepy city to a city that never sleeps, or at least for a number of young people working in call centers, their working day begins at 9 at night, when they adopt new identities, new accents, new languages and new skills to service clients sitting thousands of miles away. Welcome to the world of immaterial labour, a world of aspiration and struggle, of new subjectivities and realities.

A call centre worker in the suburb of Delhi, performs a Californian accent as she pursues a loan defaulter in a poor Los Angeles neighbourhood on the telephone. She threatens and cajoles him. She scares him, gets underneath his skin, because she is scared that he won't agree to pay, and that this will translate as a cut in her salary. Latitudes away from him, she has a window open on her computer telling her about the weather in his backyard, his credit history, his employment record, his prison record. Her skin is darker than his, but her voice is trained to be whiter on the phone. Her night is his day. She is a remote agent with a talent for

In keeping with the city's own idea of self as a virtual and deterritorialised space, we can now move from the workplace of the new IT worker and the emerging upper middle class to their space of play. A walk through most parts of Bangalore reveal similar patterns, the building of new malls and shopping complexes. Malls have for a long time been considered as the epitome of non-spaces, with their emphasis on similarity, malls have often been seen to be 'spaces where you are most unlikely to meet people who are unlike yourself'. In countries like Singapore the art of malls have been taken a notch up, with subways leading from one mall to the other, so that technically it is possible to navigate your way around the city via a complex network of malls. One of the largest and busiest malls in Bangalore is The Forum, situated on Hosur road in Koramangala. Koramangala is the up market side of the city where most of the IT professionals live, and Hosur road leads straight up to the electronic city.

Within The Forum, the two largest attractions are Landmark and PVR. Landmark is a large book cum music and movie store that caters to the media demands of the IT city. There is never a time when this store is not packed with people buying the latest DVD's, VCD's, software, games and books. The store combines the ultimate shopping experience satisfying the requirements of most people. After you have finished with shopping at Landmark, you can always catch a movie at the PVR with its 8 screens catering to all kinds of tastes and wallets. The premium ticket in the PVR is the gold class ticket for which you pay Rs. 500 to be treated as a star. Of course there is a fair amount of window-shopping that happens with the Forum becoming a premium tourist spot. In the eighties a cinema hall in Bangalore Abhinay was somewhat of a tourist hall because it was the only place in Bangalore which had an elevator, so large number of people would go to Abhinay to ride the elevators. Eventually they had to close the elevator because too many people were riding on it without actually watching the movie, I wonder if the fate of shopping malls in India will be similar?

The range of food that you can get in the Forum is wide and expensive, ranging from the McDonalds to the Chaats, but they have to face some stiff competition. The

competition however does not work inside The Forum but just outside it, on the roadside. The emergence of a place like The Forum has proved to be highly beneficial to the informal sector that plies cheaper clothes, food, books and music. And this for me is the world of the eternal contradiction, unpredictability and energy of cities in India. While the Forum posses a lot of seductive charms, sometimes it prices its seduction a little too high, in which case people can then eye the books or music they desire in The Forum and buy it off on the road. Alternatively if you are someone who does not even look like you belong in the Forum, then you can always enjoy the same space as the beautiful people who come to the Forum while paying a much lower price outside.

Co-existing parallel with these spectacular global visions, are also networks of local economies, always lacking the infrastructural provisions and state backing unlike the IT companies, but equally mobile. This city weaves in its core the ‘unorganized’ and ‘unplanned’ growth of the city, both economically and spatially. It is here that the urban poor comprising a quarter of the city reside and carry out trade in conditions that make a decent living standard unattainable. While the older illegal city of slums, hawkers and squatters has been in existence for a while, in the past ten years there has been another layer that has been integrated into the experience and narration of this illegal city. The proliferation of non-legal media practices ranging from pirated VCD's, DVD, MP3's to grey market mobile phones informs the practices and imagination of the illegal city. In a city like Bangalore, which prides itself on being the information city, this can be the cause of embarrassment for the government and the corporates, and the reason or innumerable delights for a large number of people.

This other information city is clearly marked in terms of its illegality vis a vis the global IP regime, and every once in a while the government is forced to declare its intention to make Bangalore a zero piracy zone. This is a rather naïve hope, given the long history that precedes the formation of this parallel information economy. Beyond a point it would be boring to speak about the other information city in terms of its legal status, and I think it would be useful to move towards other kinds of accounts to have a take on the informal media sector that is emerging.

Ravi Sundaram’s work on theorizing the phenomenon of piracy and non-legal media networks is very significant[2]. According to Sundaram, this world of non-legal media in a number of south Asian cities, marked as it is by an ad hoc innovativeness, and its

[2] See generally, Ravi Sundaram, Recycling modernity: Pirate electronic cultures in India, Sarai Reader 01: The Public Domain, 12, Ravi Sundaram, Beyond the Nationalist Panopticon: the Experience of Cyberpublics in India, available at http://amsterdam.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-9611/msg00018.html and Uncanny Networks: Pirate, Urban and new Globalization, Economic and Political Weekly, January 3, 2004.

various strategies of survival, is the world of recycled modernity. It exists in the quotidian spaces of the everyday and cannot be understood within the terms of the earlier publics (the nationalist public and the elite public sphere). Fueled by aspirations of upward mobility, it is an account of the claims to modernity made by a class of people, otherwise unaccounted for by the metanarrative of the nationalist project of modernity. These cultures of recycling do not however exhibit any of the characteristic valour or romance of counter publics.

Beginning with the audiocassette revolution in the eighties and moving rapidly into the worlds of computers and digital entertainment, this world has been based on a dispersed logic of production and consumption, and marked by is preponderant illegality. This rearticulated entry point into the modern is also contemporaneous with the emergence of the global moment and this arrival of the global via media, new forms of labour such as call centers, the software industry in India etc replace the earlier configuration of national/ modern with the global modern. While understanding the issue of entry points that one makes into the modern it now becomes critically important for us to recognize that the shifts in registers of imagination that the global brings upon the national/ modern configuration.

The space of the neighborhood video libraries/ parlour was a crucial site for these everyday electronic transformations. They invariably tie into the history of older spaces of livelihood and labour, from egg shops to real estate agents and most commonly electronic repair shops that service home appliances. It is also important to distinguish between the video library and the video parlour. When videos came to India, they were rarely owned by people, and you would either hire the video for twenty four hours and watch the movies with your friends, families and neighbours, or you could choose to go to a video parlour which would play movies on video and TV sets, and charge around five rupees a movie.

> *P. Kithara opened a video parlour and a video library in the late 1980's. Using family money he invested one and half lakh rupees in opening the video library and another 2 lakh rupees in opening the parlour. The video parlour was situated in Rajajinagar, Bangalore, and was as described by Kothari: "No there was nothing like pretty. It was a small shady room, where some 10 benches or sometimes a small type of chair was offered. And on one stool one TV was kept, and the windows were closed or some black curtain was put just to create a black effect so that people could watch properly." The room seated about 100 people,*

and ticket prices were ten rupees a head. They showed the latest "English action fighting movies" since they were most in demand by the "low class and student" clientele. This also enabled the video parlour to show six shows a day. There were no fixed timings and the number of shows varied between "4,5,6 even 7. Because there was no interval, no news, no rules or regulation, no trailer or anything. Straight was the movie, so within two hours one movie was over. So if you are running it for 12 hours you can have 6 shows if the crowd is there. Otherwise one more show, one less show, it all depends."

The video parlour itself was started in an interesting way. "I was running a restaurant. In restaurant I was selling tea coffee, bondas and snacks. So in the dull hours there were hardly any people. So just there was a radio or a gramophone in the restaurant to entertain the customers. One would play radio. So the bright idea come to our mind that let's have TV and show on TV this video pictures. So when the video was on in the restaurant and there was regular table and chair, and people used to drink coffee and eat snacks and watch the movie freely. Somebody would watch for 10 minutes, half an hour 2 hours. Some crazy people might watch for entire 3 hours, enjoying one coffee. So then we observed that the business started growing steadily. Within one month we realised that business is more, and when we started the movie, it was house full. People used to sit for three hours, but we didn't much business. So slowly it came to our mind that if you order one thing you cannot sit for more than one hour. So if you wanted to see the whole picture for 3 hours you had to order 3 times. And there were chairs on both sides and half the people were sitting ulta (backwards). So slowly we thought, let us forget the benches and let everyone face the TV side, and we offered them only coffee in the hand. We closed down the puri bhaaji and heavy snacks, for which you require a table, and slowly slowly we increased the coffee charge also and then slowly we thought, you give us 10 rupees, forget coffee. So this is how it all started."

From Mayur Suresh, Working paper on history of video in india

Prabhu, a proprietor of what is now a vcd library speaks of how he started a video library in 1988. He began by renting out a VCR that he had bought, and then he paired up a friend and bought another VCR and began renting that out as well. Eventually after saving some money, they began to rent videocassettes from another shop near Galaxy theatre on Residency Road, at the rate of one rupee a day. They made copies of these cassettes and began to rent those out as well at about ten rupees a day. But one of the initial problems was that they had no where to set up shop. Eventually they rented out a portion of an egg shop in a local market area, and began their business from there. Business was booming, so to speak. "It was very good. We took all the 300 (cassettes) kept it in the shop, and we started distributing pamphlets everywhere. The response was excellent. Whenever there were new movies, everyone wanted them. We used to run, get the movies give them. Business was travelled like anything. We had a fantastic business immediately. Because we were the first people to start. From far away places people used to come for English Hindi, Tamil and all that."

Both Prabhu and Kothari narrate how people used to borrow. Some people who had VCR's used to rent a couple of movies at a time. But another common feature was the renting out of the VCR with several videocassettes along with it. VCR's were rented out for about a hundred rupees a day, and cassettes at the rate of about 20 rupees per day per cassette.

Through several narratives of viewers of video, it is interesting to note that the videocassette and the VCR become the subject of several practices. The simplest practice is that of merely renting videocassette for one day. People who had, or had

easy access to VCR's would rent out a movie or two for about 20 rupees each per day. "I'd rent wrestling videos and one or two times cricket videos. We rented Hindi and English movies very very rarely… once we rented gone with the wind. We never rented latest Malayalam movies because they were very rare and expensive… mostly old Malayalam movies."

One person speaks of a sort of network borrowing. "One of my friends used to borrow a cassette in the morning, and after watching it he used to give it to me, then I watched it and gave it to another friend. Like that we used to watch, and it was better because we all shared the cost."

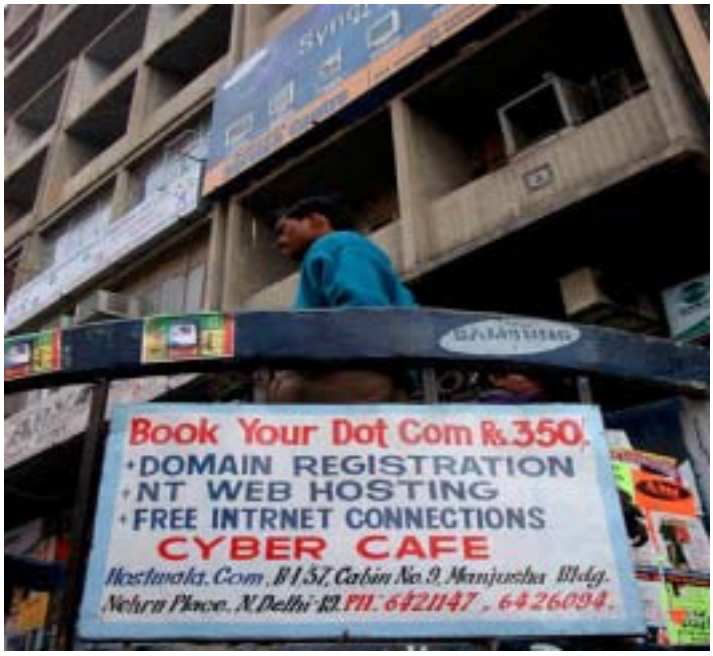
Another recurring narrative is that which has been told above. Groups of people used to get together and rent VCR's and many videocassettes for an entire night of continuous viewing. "We used to rent many video cassettes and a VCR and see it with family, and sometimes we used to call over neighbours…Twice over the week sometimes, but over the weekend definitely at least once. We used to live in a colony, so sometimes we used to call them over, or sometimes we took the movies and stuff to their place and watched."

From Mayur Suresh, Working paper on history of video in india

One of the most significant transformations that took place in terms of the information revolution in India was the setting up of a wide network of STD/ ISD booths. These were Public Telephone centers that allowed people to make both local and national calls. They were set up with the recognition that the answer to India's communication needs did not necessarily stem from the ability to provide every house with a phone connection, but to establish a public network which could be accessed by a wide range of people. The mushrooming of STD/ ISD booths in every city and town across India established the base through which the transformation of 'everyday electronics' would take place and set the infrastructural base for the other information city, one which was not based as much on ownership or possession as on the ability to access and be as part of information and communication networks.

Similarly when the Internet revolution happened, a number of the STD/ ISD booths simply converted themselves into cyber cafes that would service the cyber needs of a

large number of people.



The Media Market

The history of a number of the media markets in different parts of the country have a fascinating history. In cities like Delhi a large number of these spaces actually originate in the master plans of urban renewal where each of the markets are imagined as early non spaces much like many of the malls of today. But with the electronic revolution of the eighties, there is a massive transformation of these spaces, and today they are all seen as zones of IP wilderness where piracy and illegality are rampant.

In Bangalore, the names of the various markets also signal to interesting networks of globality and desire, which are very different from the global aspirations of the elite. The main media markets in Bangalore include ‘Burma Bazaar’, ‘Honk Kong bazaar’, ‘Singapore Bazaar” and ‘National Market’, speaking to interesting sets of connections. Since most of the grey market electronic products usually originated from South East Asia before being indigenized and produced in India. In recent times, the rumors of the Chinese take over have been the more interesting phenomenon and the promise of cheaper electronic goods has sparked of a new series of make shift bazaars which all call themselves, rather generically, as China bazaars selling everything form cheap locks, emergency lights, toy cars to DVD players.

A number of these media markets are also what enables the creation of a market for the legal producers of content. Much before the official entry of players like Magnasound in India, the appetite for sixties rock was met and created through places like Free School street in Calcutta. Most of the cassettes came fomr south east Asia even then, and it is interesting that there were classifications of originals and copies even within the grey market. Thus a cassette which had been smuggled into India from south east Asia would be an original, while a copy of it made in India would

qualify as a pirated copy, even though technically they were both pirated copies. A number of the media markets in Bangalore served as spaces where one could get compilations recorded in the eighties and early nineties. These compilations were highly prized amongst music lovers, and intricate systems of sharing and peer to peer distribution were in place, both for the sharing of information on which music was available where, as well as the music itself. Most of these cheap cassette stores ran without any legal problem since copyright had not been as big an issue then as it is now.

At the level of the everyday, the old prohibition and regulation on the social life of commodities have proved ineffective, urban residents are now assaulted with a deluge of cultural products, cassettes, CDs, MP3s, VCDs, cable television, grey market computers, cheap Chinese audio and video players, thousands of cheap print flyers, and signage everywhere. What is remarkable here is that the preponderance of these products comes from the grey or informal sector, outside the effective regulation of the state or large capital.

India today has the world's second largest music market, a large film industry with global dreams, a majority grey computer market, hundreds of thousands of tiny phone and word processing shops and cyber cafés. And as if from the ruins of urban planning new media bazaars, which supply these networks, have emerged existing in the cusp of legality and non-legality. Everyday a guerrilla war is raging, between new intellectual property raiders, the police and unceasing neighborhood demand for grey ware. At the heart of this extension of the visible has been the production of media commodities outside the legal property regimes of globalization.

Copy culture and non-legal distribution networks have been central to the spread of the media, in a way that distinctions between the technological and cultural seem blurred in daily life. A significant section of the urban population derives their media from these networks. Using the tactics of the fragmentary city, the pirate networks have frustrated every effort of the proprietary enforcement regime to control them[3].

However with the increased visibility of these media spaces and the special attention paid to them by copyright enforcers, in recent times there has been a shift from centralized markets that served as the main distribution areas for non legal media commodities to more fragmented and decentralized neighborhood spaces where media commodities are available. Just as in the eighties the audio cassette moved the idea of the media commodity from the showroom to the market, there is a similar move where the non legal media commodity is moving from specialized spaces to the more quotidian and banal market spaces competing with vegetables, household goods etc. In cities like Mumbai one sees a number of these media commodity sellers sharing spaces outside railways stations with other hawkers.

[3] Ravi Sundaram, Uncanny Networks, EPW Special Articles January 3, 2004

For those who are less interested in the question of legality v. illegality, and assuming that we don't have to go through the exercise of detoxifying the usual accounts of piracy, there are wider range of interesting issues and questions that can arise in this other information city from questions around the production networks, the distribution nodes, the question of livelihood, forms of circulation. As a cinephile, I am particularly fascinated in the changing dynamics of the aesthetics even within the pirate markets, there is an entire world of film for instance that has opened out in Bangalore as a result of the circulation of non Hollywood foreign films, independent films, documentaries, experimental films. I am interested in the question of how in a country like India where censorship still prevails severely for cinema, the grey market emerges as the domain in which free speech can circulate without restriction. If on the one hand there is a shrinking of older cinematic spaces (the recent closure of Plaza, Bangalore's oldest theatre to make way for a mall), there is also at the same time a massive expansion of new media spaces which dot not have the same claims upon a public as older media forms did.

Once we remove our legal lens, the possibilities of the other information city are endless.