

## World Information City- Bangalore

14<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> November 2005

*A Brief Report – Shuddhabrata Sengupta (Raqs Media Collective/Sarai-CSDS)*

Bangalore is a city located at the heart of the new information economy. It is a city that wakes and sleeps information. The centrality of Bangalore, and other South Asian cities such as Delhi and Mumbai, and their suburbs in the new emerging international information economy provoked a network of three institutions engaged in a critical understanding of new media practices – the Sarai Programme at the Centre for Developing Societies (Delhi), the Waag Society (Amsterdam) and Netbase – Institute for New Culture Technologies (Vienna) to collaborate with organizations in Bangalore (The Alternative Law Forum, Mahiti.org, and a host of other local initiatives) to organize the recently concluded 'World Information City' (WIC) events in Bangalore. The event made lawyers into artists, it made artists into researchers and curators, architects into performers, and it provoked media practitioners into becoming conference organizers.

WIC - B is one of a series of events and processes titled World Information.Org - initiated by the Netbase (Vienna) in partnership with organizations and initiatives in different parts of the world to focus attention on cultural, social and political aspects of information in the contemporary world. Previous 'editions' of World Information.Org have taken place in Vienna, Brussels, Amsterdam, Belgrade and Novi Sad. For more details, see <http://world-information.org/wio>

WIC – B (14<sup>th</sup> - 19<sup>th</sup> November) featured new media art interventions, media interventions in public space, performances, a conference, publications and a series of workshops. The event aimed to initiate reflections on the histories of different information regimes, on the transformation of urban spaces in the emerging global information economy, on the realities of intellectual property, surveillance and censorship (and efforts to counter them), on the efforts to found and sustain (as well as erode) 'commons' of information, and to consider ways in which practices of knowledge, interpretation and creativity uphold, transgress or subvert governing protocols of social, cultural and political life.

The encounter between practitioners, critics and theorists, based in Europe, India and elsewhere that the event was able to initiate was in some ways quite unprecedented. Indian new media artists such as Ashok Sukumaran re-interpreted the newness of new media by creating an interactive 'illumination' installation around an old cinema theatre in Bangalore. Shaina Anand, a new media practitioner from Mumbai, worked with local cable operators and media practitioners to stream short films that reflected on piracy, cultures of technological improvisation, the relationship between land ownership and digital mapping and the micro politics of local media. Design competitions that saw entries for innovative 'billboards' from designers (Sebastian Leutgert and others) in Europe and India resulted in a series of colourful and provocative interventions in the visual landscape of Bangalore. Christoph Schaeffer, a hamburg based artist worked on an installation that interpreted new housing developments in Bangalore and their relationship to television culture. These were presented in

tandem with an exhibition of new media work curated by Ayisha Abraham and Namita Malhotra (an artist and a researcher-practitioner based in Bangalore) that encouraged the visitor to walk through several venues in a busy street, looking at works placed in a centre for film viewing (Centre for Film and Drama), an art and architecture gallery (Co-Lab) and a hall mainly used for weddings and other social functions (the Jehangir Kothari Hall). This exhibition which can be said the first of its kind in India, featured works (*A/S/L*, *The Ectropy Index*, *Network of No\_Des*) by the Raqs Media Collective and their colleagues in the Sarai Media Lab, an information interface made by the Alternative Law Forum (Now Showing) as well as internet based real time sound piece that relied on a P2P network by S A Rajivan. The exhibition also featured a fascinating work by well known Bangalore based artist Sheela Gowda that used sound and the urban infrastructure, to broadcast 'radio' through plumbing pipes.

A visitor to WIC-B could take in a walk through new media works, watch local cable channel content, go on a bus tour through the underbelly of the new IT landscape of Bangalore with urbanist Solomon Benjamin, listen to keynote addresses and conversations with David Lyon (an authority on surveillance regimes), Shahid Amin (an eminent historian), Arundhati Roy (writer) and Florain Schneider ('No Border' Activist and Media Practitioner) and participate in a conference that featured presentations by Felix Stalder (Nettime), Erik Kleutenberg (de Balie), researchers at the Sarai Programme talk on surveillance, call centre work and transformations in cinema viewing, witness how Subramanya Sastry (a Bangalore based programmer) uses an innovative open source software 'Newsrack' to undertake a personal curation of news media, debate the emergence of the cyborg in Indian cities with Nishant Shah and participate in a critical workshop on the intersection of militarism, science and communications with Marko Peljan (Makrolab). In the evenings, the visitor could see a play on call centre work, or listen to electronic music generated through workshops during the earlier days,

The event generated a context for a dynamic, lively critical discussion and a nuanced view of information practices at a global level. It will certainly continue to resonate in conversations that happen, not only in Bangalore, but in Delhi, Vienna, Amsterdam and elsewhere.