

state simply any more that we are documentarists, or media practitioners, or contemporary artists. Our interests and activities have broadened themselves to include not only contemporary art but also media history and research, criticism, archives and databases, building open and public spaces for cultural practice, new media and digital art, work with texts, sound and words, still photography and graphic design, the Internet, computers, cyberculture and architecture.

On Sarai, the space where we work

In 2000, we were able to create a place for ourselves and for our work at Sarai - a programme of the CSDS (Centre for the Study of Developing Societies) - that we initiated with Ravi Vasudevan and Ravi Sundaram. The past six years have seen our work expand dramatically both in range and in depth.

Sarai - www.sarai.net - is a space where we find the creative freedom to pursue different projects, find inter-disciplinary and hybrid contexts for creative work and develop a sustained engagement with the city and different forms of media practice.

We work in the media lab at Sarai, which is a studio or atelier where most of our work is produced in collaboration or with the assistance of our other practitioner and researcher colleagues. We are also actively engaged in Sarai's Cybermohalla project, which engages with critical and imaginative energies of young people in three working class neighbourhoods in Delhi, based in free software equipped labs, working to create an ongoing body of work reflecting on urban conditions and everyday life.

Sarai takes its name from the caravan-serais for which medieval Delhi was well known. Sarais were spaces that were as hospitable to signals, and to acts of communication, as they were to the people who transmitted them.

The Sarai initiative interprets this sense of the word "sarai" to mean a very public space where different intellectual, creative, and practice driven energies can intersect in an open and dynamic manner to give rise to an imaginative reconstitution of urban public culture, new/old media practice, research, and critical cultural intervention. This framework emerges from our understanding in the Sarai programme that digital media, electronic cultures, and telecommunication networks need to be seen as enmeshed and emerging from within the history of communicative practices in South Asia. This is the context within which our practice is situated.

On The Different Forms We Engage With

Our work as Raqs takes different forms. We have produced installations which have often involved a strong video and sound component, along with text and signage, but of late objects, often placed annotationally in relation to the video, sound and texts have also begun appearing in our work.

Many of these projects have been exhibited at various bienniales and international contemporary art exhibitions; we have also been published widely. We do a fair bit of writing, often as part of the exercise of clarifying our own ideas, and sometimes these texts get published in books, journals and websites. Some of these texts have been translated into Hindi, Chinese, French, Serbian, Farsi and German. We have also enjoyed interacting with art and media students, in India, Germany, Switzerland, Taiwan and the United States.

We have also worked on print projects, broadsheets and posters. And we have created websites as part of the public rendition of our projects. We actively participate in the editing and production of the Sarai Readers. And the entire contents of each of the Sarai Readers is available for free download from the Sarai website. Additionally, we produce events and conferences at Sarai, teach, organize workshops and participate in online discussions.

On Methodologies of Collective Work

As far as methodologies of collective work are concerned, we have functioned as a collective for around fourteen years now. We find our work enriched by disagreement, difference and constant debate. Our work is as informed by occasional epiphanic moments in which all three of us spontaneously agree on a particular idea as it is by long and protracted argument, through which an idea is distilled and refined.

We generally spend a long time conceptualizing, and researching, a theme or an idea. We write to each other all the time, and develop images and concepts through constant interaction, and by bringing new materials to each other's attention. We push each other a lot, and take liberties with each other's ideas. Over the years we have been able to evolve a level of trust that ensures that criticism is not seen as threatening or hostile, but is in fact the basis of a robust solidarity of common research for the most rigorous and precise image or concept.

Our background is in documentary film, where it is not unusual to think of the creative process as being something that involves a constellation of people, skills and interests. In a sense, you could call this the 'situation' that was conducive to collective work and thinking. It was something that we matured into quite naturally as part of our training and our apprenticeship in documentary filmmaking

Bands are part of the phenomenon of popular music, and scientists usually work in teams as well. There is nothing special about being in a collective, and we would not want to romanticize it, because we don't think of ourselves as romantics, at least not insofar as the creative process is concerned, but it does multiply the eyes and ears at your disposal and this makes it possible to remain vigilant about ensuring that we don't get too comfortable in our selves.

But more concretely, everything that we do is discussed threadbare between the three of us, and we insist on locating the authorship of all our work as something that lies in the intersection of what each of us brings to the work.

We are sometimes asked who does what in the collective, and the simple answer is that we do not believe in a formal division of labour, or in the individual ownership of ideas. It was to resist the particularly deathly alienation of creative work in the media industry based on a fetish of 'individual' labour that we forged a collective practice that guaranteed our creative autonomy, and we have no intentions of compromising on this.

It is more important for us to think of whether an idea or an image has strength and contributes to an argument that we are working on than to worry about who originated the idea. Each of us has particular interests, skills and propensities (and these are not rigid or mutually exclusive) but it is in the playing together of these elements that our work gets

produced. And a lot of things are cooked in the process of research, in which the alloys that make the final renditions are realized. Research for us is essentially a dialogic process. We bring different things to the table, and then work through a process of seeing how they speak to each other.

We also work a lot with other people - curators, writers, designers, editors, researchers, architects, artists, and performers. We enjoy this process and learn a great deal from these interactions. They open out new areas of thinking and bring new energies into our work. They change and enlarge our neighbourhood, if you like. We think of ourselves as situated within a neighbourhood of practices.

On the idea of a 'Neighbourhood of Practices'

When we speak of a neighbourhood of practices, we mean the resonances and affinities and alliances that form between different forms of the generation and sharing of knowledge, ways of looking at the world, curiosities, different methods of recording and registering reality, or being expressive with images, sound, words, signs and any kind of information or code.

There are seepages and flows between different kinds of practice, as between let us say the practice of photography and the practice of constructing html pages which transforms a webpage into a constantly evolving photographic album, or between video and sound, where a soundtrack and a visual track annotate rather than illustrate each other. Then there can be other kinds of seepage and flows, as between information held or contained in different vessels and containers that may range from being locked in and shut tight, to those that are designed to allow their contents to pour freely. Sometimes, to borrow a metaphor or two from physics, a change in the temperature surrounding a vessel or in the surface tension of its casing material can lead to instances of condensation, or seepage. The material flows because of a change in the conditions in which it finds itself. Many forms of cultural activity catalyse such changes in state, and the result is that something that was shut tight begins to flow, or to pour freely. Conversely, something that flowed freely may freeze, or evaporate.

The terrain of a cluster of practices is changed by the things that course or flow through it. Just as water erodes and cuts channels through rock, the free flow of cultural material creates channels through the terrain of culture. These can then be navigated, bringing distant shores together or joining upstream and downstream in a way that reconfigures the way we think of neighbourhood. Suddenly we realize that we have many more neighbours.

On the way our city, Delhi, shapes and Influences our practice

Speaking of influences, probably one of the biggest influences on our work is the city of Delhi, where we live and work. We respond to the many temporal complexities of our city, to its interlacing of past, present and future, to its beauty, its wealth, its generosity, its violence, squalor and paranoia. We respond to it as a global city, as a city that is enmeshed in a dense matrix of information that spreads deep into the hinterlands of India, as much as it does into the wider world. We respond to its many languages and contending histories, and to the constant tussle between what we have called elsewhere 'the civil war between the master plan and the moment' which characterizes the generalized crisis of legality in the city. All of these features work their way into our practice. But

this does not prevent us from seeing culture in it's volatility. We are committed to the idea that cities like Delhi need to be seen as nodes in the circulation of ideas and meanings, so that they must become a lattice of sarais or public houses where art, discourse, new sensibilities from all over the world can converge.

On the significance of Locality and Space in our work

Locality is a difficult and problematic word, deeply bound up as it is with ideas of spatiality and location. If it has to be used at all, we would prefer to gloss it in a way that has to do with relation and context rather than spatial proximity. A non-spatial proximity or affinity, born out of relations and contexts, need not be any less 'real' than one that is spatially expressed or organized. This makes us reframe the value of the term 'virtual'. As more and more processes involve an interaction between online and offline facets, the term 'virtual' encounters intense pressure. An expensive high street store which is formidable exactly by virtue of the spatial and architectonic statement that it makes about itself may be less physically accessible, and more of an 'image' than an online store where you could purchase the same commodities without the anxiety of not knowing how to behave. In this case, it is probably the store and not the online space that is more 'virtual'. Paradoxes like these reveal the difficulty of 'virtuality' as a category.

We agree that it can be extremely productive to think about relatedness and translocality, provided we also think of an ethic of place and hospitality. The two seem to pull in two different directions, but to us this is important and the tension they yield when considered together is a productive one.

"The first imperative, that of crossing borders, translates as a scepticism of the rhetoric of bounded identities, and relates to our understanding of the role of the practitioner as a 'journeyman', as the peripatetic who maps an alternative world by her journey through it. The second, derived from our observation of the pains that people take in terms of building a shelter against the odds of the law in a city like Delhi, insists however on a practice that is located in space, and rooted in experience, that houses itself in a concrete 'somewhere' on its own terms, not of the powers that govern spaces. It is this fragile insistence on provisional stability, which allows for journeys to be made to and from destinations, and for the mapping of routes with resting places in between". (X Notes on Practice, Raqs Media Collective, 2004, <http://www.raqsmediacollective.net/texts1.html>)

Translocality need not be seen as a necessary abandonment of what one starts out with. At the same time, we are never too confident about 'one's own culture'. It is hard to take seriously ideas that say culture can be owned. It is difficult for us, therefore, to appropriate a singular idea of culture as our 'own'.

On our Education and Background

Our education was in filmmaking; the three of us met at a media school, at the Mass Communication Research Centre at Jamia Millia Islamia in Delhi, and we worked within a documentary film and video milieu in the mid 90s.

Looking back, we can now say that we found ourselves working in directions that were to become more concretely realized within contemporary art as a result of our search for a precise formal and aesthetic language with which to embody the curiosities and concerns that we had. We were looking for

methods that would enable us to realize our work in the form of essays.

From around 1998, when we were in the process of thinking Sarai, we became very interested in the role that information and intellectual property plays in society. This made us engage a great deal with new media practices that were emerging globally, and particularly with the ethics of the open source and free software movement. All of these processes have left their trace on our evolution.

On how we see ourselves today in the art world, especially in an international context

We think that being in the art world provides us a great deal of flexibility to articulate our practice.

The absence of 'formats' that dictate the nature of form in television and mainstream media also means a greater aesthetic liberty than in any other field. Moreover, the art world is not an academic enclosure; one can be provoked to bring together a range of curiosities, impulses and interests which would be difficult to achieve in most spaces. There is also an acceptance of the necessity to evolve theoretically sophisticated, well researched works and processes without compromising on expressive and affective registers.

Finally, the international nature of exhibition means that we tread a global space, one in which our concerns do not have to be framed only in national terms. The major international biennales also have a new public - a new, young public, that goes to see contemporary art because art is a space for reflection and questioning about the world. The numbers of people who come to see contemporary art, and the importance with which they view this activity as having significance in their lives in a cognitive, even ethical sense, is very humbling, and exciting at the same time. And we always find that the conversations that we have with complete strangers about the way we see the world in our work leave us enriched. That is a great gift and it feeds into our work all the time.

Our experience of showing work at international exhibitions has been by and large very positive. The tyranny of the need to 'explain' oneself to the other and be the 'native informant' is much less in contemporary art as compared to other fields of representation. It is not altogether absent, and sometimes one does face the somewhat tiresome and unthinking ignorance that it is still possible for some European and North American intellectuals to have about the rest of the world. This usually ends up in the expectation that our work be more adequately 'Indian' (in which case it can be as opaque and enigmatic as we want it to be) or completely, and almost pedagogically transparent so that the visitor has to do no work to interpret and contextually situate what we do. Luckily this does not happen very often.

Finally, on some of the questions that we have been thinking about for a long time, and which make their presences felt in our work

How can a thought formulated in images be the starting point of a conversation?

What does listening feel like?

What architectures of knowledge making and creative acts produce micro-ecologies of participation and dynamics of viral circulation?

How can the question of identity be addressed without the tropes of identification?

How can the responsibility of bearing witness to the world be differentiated from confession, or responses to an interrogation?

How can we think about the connections between spaces outside of, or at a tangent to, the circuits of high visibility display of wealth and power?

What place do minor media practices and forms have in a world marked by consensus through spectacular media events?

 **Raqs Note for Nature Morte.rtf**
22K

The Pendulum Creative Residency

Further Detail

Beginning from 2004, Pendulum Art Gallery shall offer creative residency to young visual artists every year. The residency has been designed as a steppingstone for young artists seeking new challenges in the areas of painting and sculpture.

Dates: The residency is tenable in September/October every year for 6 weeks.

Facilities:

The gallery will provide the following facilities to assist the artist:

Board and lodging, feeding, basic work materials, open air studio, round trip, and N40,000.00 allowance for incidental expenses. Possibility of an exhibition at Pendulum Art Gallery and on its website.

Eligibility:

The residency at the moment is open to Nigerian, Ghanaian, or Beninois painter or sculptor not more than 30 years of age with working knowledge of the English language. At this stage, we can only support one resident at a time.

Part of the aim of this proposal, therefore, is to broaden the scope and capacity of the residency programme so that artists can be selected to participate from more African countries while facilities can be provided for up to three residents simultaneously. The grant being sought will enable Pendulum to beef up the existing facilities in terms of accommodation and work material so that the envisaged expansion of the programme can be effective from 2005.

Application Requirements:

The prospective residents will be required to send application directly to Pendulum Art Gallery in Lagos stating reasons for wanting to participate in the residency programme. They will also include 10 slides of recent works each with a corresponding slide list, a statement of intent not more than 250 words, and a current CV. Upon receiving the applications, the gallery will convene a panel of distinguished artists and critics to assess the entries and select those to be awarded the residency.

Goal

The major goal of the programme is to encourage greater cooperation among artists in the continent. As the resident artist(s) will be required to interact with the

local artists and children, they will have the opportunity of broadening their vision while also sharing their experience with the audience(s).

To achieve this maximally, the resident(s) may be required to conduct workshops and roundtables as veritable instruments of cultural exchange. Part of the goal is also to create new horizons in the propagation of art in Nigeria and Africa where galleries and other art institutions have dangerously entangled themselves in the "vicious" cycle of art mercantilism.

Estimate

Artists work material.....	\$4,400.00
Roundtrip for three artists in a year.....	\$4,500.00
Feeding for the artists-in-residence.....	\$3,900.00
Allowance for incidental expenses.....	\$2000.00
Exhibition, workshop, lecture by the artists-in-residence.....	\$6000.00
Logistics.....	\$3000.00

Total for one year for at least three residents.....\$23,800.00

Total for five years: \$119,000.00