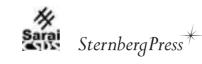
- 1. A place that takes so much space in thought, that everyone starts seeing it.
- 1.1 The contemplation of which will make even the vastness of the ocean seem little.
- 2. What stakes will you take? How far are you willing to go?
- 2.1 And for others?
- 2.2 A bird quenches its thirst in a pond, sees its reflection in it, and spreads its wings to dart into the sky and become part of it.
- 3. Who will our world belong to? This is not the question.
- 3.1 What will constitute it? That is what is at stake.
- 4. Uncertainty itself is a journey.



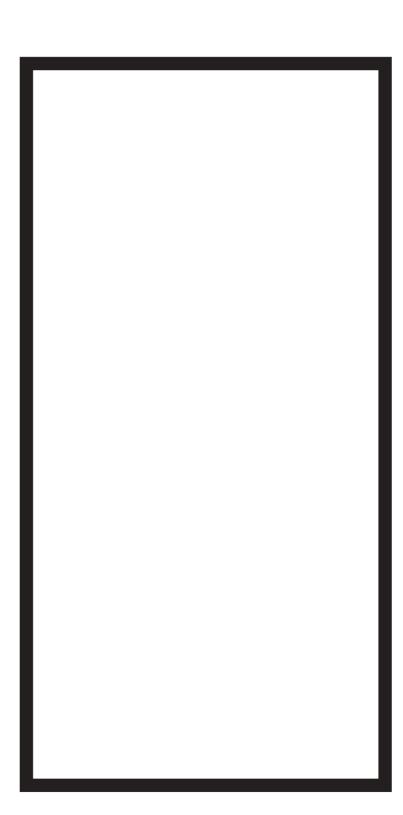




Cybermohalla Ensemble and Nikolaus Hirsch / Michel M



# CYBERMOHALLA HUB



Cybermohalla Ensemble and Nikolaus Hirsch / Michel Müller

with

Can Altay Solomon Benjamin Vahni Capildeo Rana Dasgupta Nico Dockx, Helena Sidiropoulos and Michel van Beirendonck Ivana Franke Matthew Fuller Matthias Görlich Rupali Gupte Graham Harwood Hu Fang Martand Khosla Amitabh Kumar Zak Kyes Lawrence Liang Naeem Mohaiemen Sharmistha Mohanty Nina Möntmann Vivek Narayanan Hans Ulrich Obrist Jacques Rancière Raqs Media Collective Christoph Schäfer Aman Sethi **Prasad Shetty** 

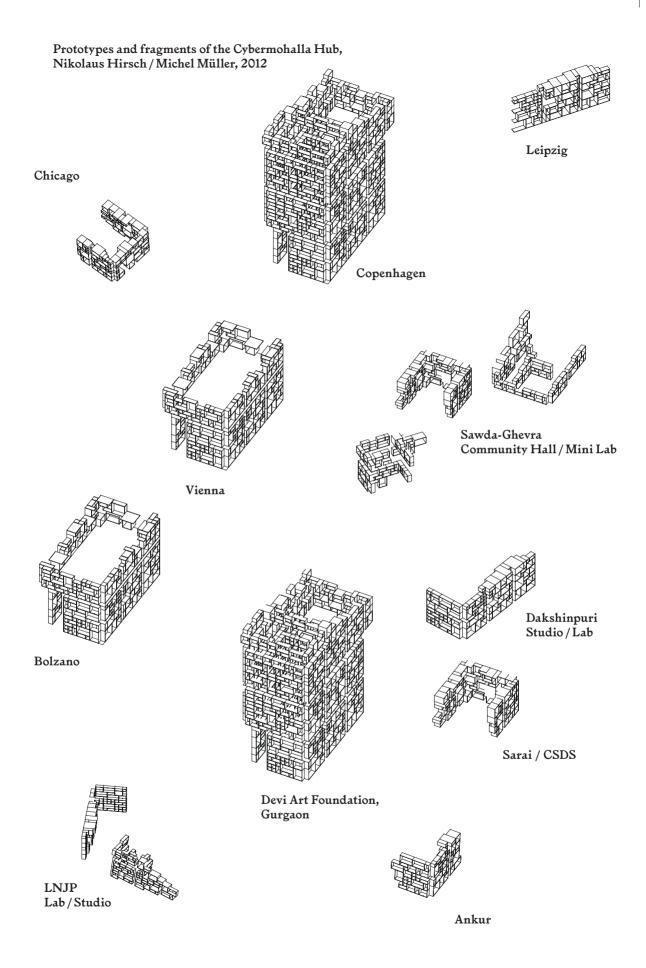
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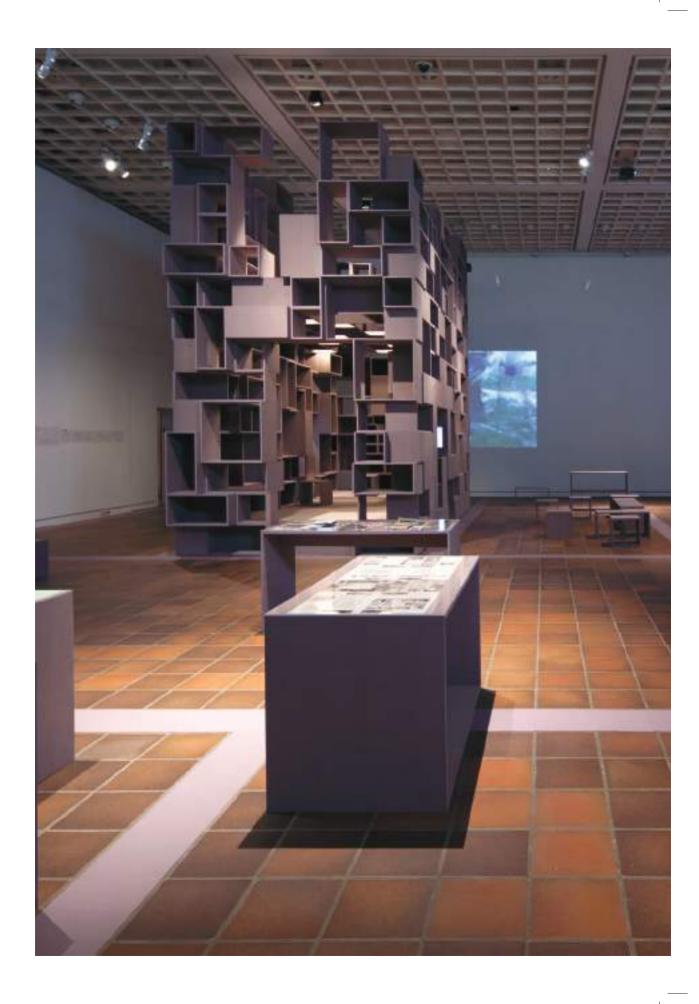
Bhrigupati Singh Ravi Sundaram

Daniela Zyman

Superflex

Nikolaus Hirsch and Shveta Sarda







Cybermohalla Hub at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Copenhagen, Nikolaus Hirsch / Michel Müller, Cybermohalla Ensemble, and Zak Kyes, 2011 (photo: Louisiana Museum of Modern Art)















Sawda-Ghevra, Delhi, 2006-07 (photos: Cybermohalla Ensemble)



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## **PREFACE**

Cybermohalla Hub and a book about it were to be made together. The hub kept getting delayed, while the possibility of the publication continued to develop. When we first discussed it in 2009, the book presented a challenge: a book about architecture requires that the site be outlined and contextualized, while the hub had incubated in, and emerged out of, an environment — the Cybermohalla environment — which is not only a cluster of physical spaces, but also, critically, a dense conversational milieu that has formed over a decade. The challenge grew as a number of books about projects in urban contexts framed "voices" from within contexts as "experience," and understanding about their built environments, contexts, and processes as "interpretation" and "knowledge-making." A mode of urban thinking is becoming current, one that evens out all forms of knowledge other than that of the "expert" as inputs from local, or native, informants. But what if we start from a premise of equality in the creation of knowledge?

Over two years, in discussions between the editorial collective and Cybermohalla Ensemble, an idea for the making of this book took form. In 2011, the ensemble proposed investigations, propositions, and speculations, in a form that gave a sense of their questions and reflections, and emerged from their practice and thinking. These, along with the design of the hub, were sent to people — mostly with whom Cybermohalla has been in dialogue, and others with whom Nikolaus Hirsch and Michel Müller, Sarai, and Ankur have been in conversation — to elicit their responses and elaborations. Just as the hub's design

opens itself onto the street and its unpredictable flows, this book has sought to open itself to conversations, ideas, images, projections, doubts, critiques, voyages, and insights emanating from many locations and tendencies.

Some of the crucial reflections within the conversations towards imagining the hub were on the porous, incremental, and disruptive nature of urban life; the durational, introspective, and challenging terms of intellectual and creative life; and a building as an invitation to being and thinking together. If one has to move beyond the intimation of material conditions of life as the determining factor for what is possible to be said and imagined, it becomes important that the ways we think about what constitutes knowledge, time, and the impulse of creation be made central to the argument of an architecture in the city. That is what we hope the reader will encounter in this book.

We thank all the contributors to this book. We would also like to thank the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Copenhagen, for their generous support of the book and hosting the publication workshop within the installation of the Cybermohalla Hub. Our deep appreciation goes to the Graham Foundation, Chicago, as the other crucial funder of the book, to HIVOS, Bangalore, and Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary, Vienna, for their long-term support of this endeavor.

Nikolaus Hirsch and Shveta Sarda Frankfurt am Main and Delhi, October 2011

## INTRODUCTION

The Delhi-based Cybermohalla Ensemble is a collective of ten writers and practitioners that emerged out of many years of Cybermohalla,<sup>†</sup> a dispersed network of labs and studios for experimentation and exploration across Delhi. The process was initiated in LNJP Colony in Central Delhi by two institutions, the Sarai program of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) and Ankur: Society for Alternatives in Education, in May 2001. Around 500 young people from different working class neighborhoods passed through these labs over seven years (2001–07).

In September 2006, within the Cybermohalla environment, an idea of a building emerged. The building was a proposal for initiating a dialogue on infrastructures for intellectual life, and the idea was sent out to a handful of people who had been in close dialogue with Cybermohalla over the years. Among them was the Delhi-based Raqs Media Collective, who at that time was working on an artwork with Frankfurt-based architects Nikolaus Hirsch and Michel Müller—a collaboration initiated by Monique Behr, a curator based in Frankfurt. Nikolaus, Michel, and Monique traveled to Delhi in May 2007, on the occasion of the launch of the book Bahurupiya Shehr (Trickster City) by the Cybermohalla Ensemble and their colleagues in the various labs.

What was a proposal for a building in mid-2006 became a series of rough sketches on paper by May 2007, which became a three-dimensional wall in Hirsch and Müller's studio in Frankfurt, and then, by March 2008, became part of an exhibition at the Swedish Architecture Museum in Stockholm. Hirsch and Müller proposed models of buildings for different situations: a design that could be made on an empty plot, a design that could fit into an already existing structure, a mobile building that could mutate and find its host in different contexts through travel. By then the building had been named Cybermohalla Hub, which signifies a connection between different modes of practice, places, imaginaries, a transmitter, a joint, and a part constituted of infinite parts.

After 2006, through jolts of sudden disruptions, Cybermohalla Ensemble's conception of the city transformed. The ensemble witnessed the demolition of the thirty-year-old, incrementally built Nangla Maanchi by the river Yamuna, one of the neighborhoods in which a Cybermohalla lab had existed for two years and, alongside it, saw the beginning of the formation of a new "resettlement colony" in a northwest periphery of Delhi, Sawda-Ghevra, where the grid on which the colony would be built over the years was laid out by the municipality. From the beginning of the dialogue between the ensemble and Nikolaus Hirsch

<sup>\*</sup> In Hindi and Urdu mohalla means neighborhood.

and Michel Müller, Sawda-Ghevra was one of the possible locations for the hub. As the hub began to be fleshed out and gained a fullness of form, the question of its dimensions became important. The simple act of inserting a small place of gathering into the grid, as a building that was neither a house nor a workspace, became a playful thought of reimagining urban life. The hub was from then on imagined on three-by-six meters, which is the standard plot size for a house within the grid of Sawda-Ghevra.

Nikolaus Hirsch and Michel Müller were invited by Raqs Media Collective to make a 1:1 prototype of the building in "The Rest of Now," part of the international exhibition Manifesta 7 in Bolzano, Italy (in July 2008), where it was realized with students of Akademie der Bildenden Künste Stuttgart. From August 2008, Ankur, with the support of Sarai, initiated dialogues with the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) to get a long-term lease to construct the hub in Sawda-Ghevra and run it as a public building. Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary in Vienna came forward with support for the physical realization of the hub in Delhi.

Sawda-Ghevra, an area designed as a rigid grid, where gentle contraventions to the plan by residents are part of the texture of everyday life, has for a while now been a place to which the hub has been intimately connected. Conversations with the MCD continued for a long time, with the hope that two adjacent plots of three-by-six meters in Sawda-Ghevra would be leased for the hub. A potential plot in which the hub could be constructed in Sawda-Ghevra was considered, and material for construction, which could, for instance, withstand climate changes, was worked out. When the double plot changed, and a different plot was proposed by the MCD, the design underwent further changes.

In 2011, a new prototype of the hub was realized in the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Copenhagen, as part of the exhibition "Living," curated by Kjeld Kjeldsen, and different considerations towards its actual construction in Delhi were brought to bear in this version. The vision for the hub is constantly evolving, being revised, remade, and reconstituted.

The hub could be built anywhere, just as it has been in the last five years of its life: in Stockholm, Bolzano, Vienna, and Copenhagen. And in Delhi it could potentially be built in Burari, Loni, Greater Noida, Sawda-Ghevra, Badarpur, Jharoda, or Dakshinpuri—that is, any context that would be hospitable to it. Cybermohalla Ensemble has been drawing different places across Delhi into its imaginary of the hub, speculating on where it can be made, so it may become a gift to this immense and beautiful city, and fuel imaginations of infrastructures for intellectual and creative life in our contemporary.

Editorial Collective (Jeebesh Bagchi, Nikolaus Hirsch, Prabhat K. Jha, Michel Müller, Shveta Sarda, Azra Tabassum) Delhi and Frankfurt am Main, October 2011

# IT TAKES A CARAVAN OF TRAVELERS TO MAKE A CITY



The Hindi word for "where" is "jahan." The word for "world," too, is "jahan."

From above, does one recognize what so many lives come in search of in the secret cavity of the city?

The eagle soars in the vast sky, scanning the ground. It approaches the city. In a split second, with its immense wings, it creates a tumult in the atmosphere. Then it returns once again to its solitary roving in the sky.



I

Her body is slight; her gaze steady. She is sitting by the road on a makeshift bench. Her hair is black and curly; one eye is magnified by her thick glasses. She is clutching her headscarf, contemplating the naked patch of land before her. One day a fountain will burst out from here. She knows. The mound of earth that covers the ground will be moistened; that which has been discarded will turn into gold. This place will breathe. It will make place for lives to nest within it.

This land doesn't seem lifeless to her. Her eyes dance over it, teasing it.

A firm gust of wind has begun to blow.

It appeared slowly, but gathered momentum, arousing the sand. The sand clings to the earth; it is unwilling to move. The wind promises it the intoxication of flight. How long can the sand refuse?

The sand is rising; it is carried away.

Her eyes smart with the dust. She rubs them. Each time she opens her eyes and looks, the scene before her has changed. Is all this in her imagination? Is the world and everything in it whirling?

The dust settles. A curtain is raised. Something has germinated.

Has the fertile soil given birth to these bodies? Has an inspired wind carried them here? From how they are in the place, it doesn't seem this place is new to these figures. It seems they know it takes a caravan of travelers to forge a place.

II

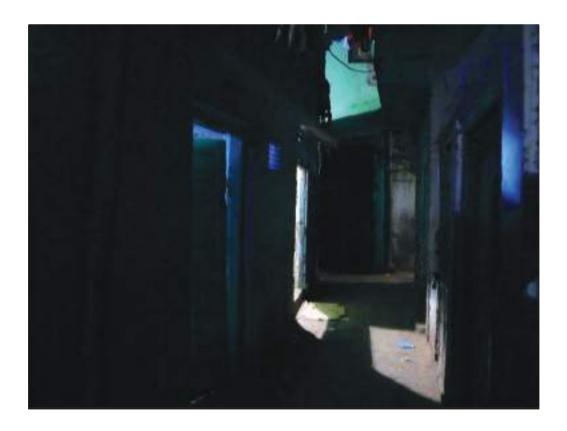


When sunlight is incomplete, our sense of time too becomes inconclusive.

#### III

Here, paths disappear for travelers who seek only to remain within what they already know. This is a story we have heard many times, told in many ways, and passed on to many milieus.





# THE ELEVENTH QUESTION

The first ten questions come easily. With them, we create a traffic of experience between ourselves and others. We get to know enough to form a story in our minds. But after that, where can the conversation go?

"Ask me a question that is outside my work and my relationships."

Everyone has people in his or her life who continually pose this question.

This is the realm of the eleventh question. Conversations that we have with people leave behind more questions. They can lead to questions that were unknown to us. We call them "after questions."

#### SOME FRAGMENTS FROM CONVERSATIONS

1. What was the day that affected and brought you into a special connection with the world?

A man came to my recycling shop with a sack filled with old ornaments. They looked like copper. I bought them at two rupees per kilo, sold them at twice the rate. I liked a stone-studded bracelet, and kept it for my wife. When I showed it to a friend, I discovered it was silver. So, the sack had been filled with silver! I started paying attention to what is what, and today I can tell just by holding something if it is gold or silver, or if perhaps I have a real pearl in my hands. Platinum is the only metal I don't recognize; I haven't seen it. Mementos and oblivion extend our worlds. One has to be prepared to receive brilliance in one's life.

2. When do you feel, "I will now have to think about the way life is lived?"

I was preparing to board a train when I saw something on the platform: a pair of binoculars and a drum. They were on top of someone's luggage. Binoculars bring close something that is very distant from you. The sound of a drum travels far and draws others towards it. In both there is distance, desire, and urgency. The way in which we find ourselves present in them is the question.

The desire to move is immeasurable. Its power to make you want to hold something distant can be immense. All of us live with these tugs, this tension within us. To what extent we let ourselves be enchanted by this, and what kind of effect this will have on others—sometimes this is determined by the limits we impose on ourselves. I have been driving trains for many years, but even now, each time I'm in the driver's seat, this thought becomes very present and alive in me.

3. How do you choose your own exhaustion, that is, an exhaustion that you do not curse?

I am not complete. Neither am I incomplete. How large, how dense, how fluid can I be? My form is unfinished; time is always grappling with its unpredictability. If time tells me to stand on my feet, I run. If it tells me to gather with my hands, I give away. I prepare my body, and I leave it to become something else. Time keeps note of my presences and absences; it adds them up and tries to make me whole. I must make detours, avoid its checkpoints, find shelters, infect my companions, search new flows. I continuously make myself unfit for time, keep unmaking myself, not becoming complete.

4. What are the moments in life when you feel or have encountered in others a restlessness for a new "where" in life?

He was lost. Everyone was asking him where he wanted to go. Did he know? Even that this question was now open to him? They kept asking him. Was this question becoming open to them too? They were disappearing into it.

The posters on the walls were torn, the faces on them unrecognizable. There was one face whose eyes were whole, but its jaw was tattered. "Where will you go?" The sky darkened. The question was still alive.

He wasn't looking at anyone. He spread out his palm and with the fingers of his other hand, began to erase something.

The question "where?" was open to him, and with him it reopened, even if for a brief moment, to everyone else too.

#### SOME "AFTER QUESTIONS"

PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE ARE WAYS IN WHICH TIME HAS BEEN DIVIDED. DO YOU PLAY WITH OTHER WAYS TO EXPRESS TIME?

IF THINGS WERE TO FORFEIT THEIR PRESENT FORM AND START BECOMING SOMETHING ELSE, WHAT IS THE ONE THING THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO KEEP AS IT IS?

WHEN DO YOU FEEL YOU WOULD LIKE TO LOSE YOUR OWN SELF?

SOMEONE SAID TO US, "EVERYONE IN THE WORLD IS SLOWLY FORGETTING EVERYTHING." IF YOU LOOK AT THE WORLD WITH THIS UNDERSTANDING, WHAT DO YOU SENSE?

AT WHICH MOMENTS IN LIFE, AND WHEN, HAVE YOU FELT YOURSELF EXPERIENCING MAGNIFICENCE?

WHAT IS THE EMOTION YOU HAVE NOT YET EXPERIENCED BUT WOULD LIKE TO?

WHEN DO YOU FEEL COUNTLESS VERSIONS OF YOURSELF ARE ALL OVER THE CITY, AND WHEN DO YOU FEEL YOU ARE ALONE IN IT?

IF YOU WERE TO INVENT A GROUP OR A GATHERING OF YOUR CHOICE, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

#### AND IN THIS WAY, SHE UNRAVELED AN ENTIRE CITY

Someone said to us, "Everyone in the world is slowly forgetting everything." If you look at the world with this understanding, what do you sense? What kinds of thoughts, imaginations, and difficulties emerge in your mind?

#### SUNDAY, 6:30 P.M.

She said: "Then it would become very difficult to find a language to recount life. I would then need to search anew, not once, but over and over again, both within myself and around me, and ask the questions 'What is life? How does life come about?""

She said: "I won't remember anything. I would have to find new ways of bringing into recognition that in which I am. I may have to name everything all over again. Maybe I wouldn't call a roof a roof, not even call it a veil, nor sky. What then would I call it? I wouldn't be alone in forgetting—everyone would be in a state of having forgotten."

#### MONDAY, 8:00 P.M.

She said: "Everyone would have forgotten things to different degrees. Even animals would have forgotten their names and where they belong. We would have forgotten whether we are in their midst or they in ours. Everything would be level."

She said: "When the conductor would ask passengers for their tickets, some would have forgotten what a ticket is—that they need one—and some would say they forgot to buy one. It would be impossible to penalize anyone.

If things were to forfeit their present forms and start becoming something else, what is the one thing that you would like to keep as it is?

#### TUESDAY, 10:00 P.M.

She said: "Whenever I look at the wall clock and see it ticking, I feel time is weighing down on me. I wish then that time would not have dominion over my age, my thoughts, my feelings; I wish that this way of seeing time had never been invented."

She said: "Walls on which clocks are hung, pockets into which mobile phones go, the alarm of the city's time keeper at eight every morning, the sound of a TV serial from another house, which murmurs what time of the day it is. We've created so many ways in which we keep time or, maybe we could say, in which time keeps us. If time is a sentry, I would like to undo its guard."

She said: "Sorry, what was it that you asked?"

At which moments in life, and when, have you felt yourself experiencing magnificence?

#### FRIDAY, 4:00 P.M.

She said: "When you encounter a moment in which the past is not an armature, and the future is not a question—I feel that not only I, but others too, experience magnificence at such moments."

#### FRIDAY, 6:15 P.M.

She said: "I was trying to make a difficult decision about my life. People said to me, 'How will you take care of your three children?' They asked me to remember the time that had passed and how good it had been. To remember and live with—and through—that memory. But I didn't want my life to be the way it had been. Everyone understood, but they still tried to deter me. I think such moments, in which you tussle with and think about what is, are magnificent. They are moments in which you take things in your own hands. You don't make the past a shield to block off a time that is yet to come. These moments come in everyone's lives. These moments are special. They were for me."

When do you feel countless versions of yourself are all over the city, and when do you feel you are alone in it?

#### TUESDAY, 2:00 P.M.

She said: "When something that I'm thinking about generates a tension around me, I feel I am utterly alone. And when I share what I'm thinking with others, I feel that thing within me can have a life around and outside me."

#### TUESDAY, 7:00 P.M.

She said: "Because then, what is inside me would not remain mine alone. It would become everyone's. Then, to fight it, struggle with it, argue with it, extend and elaborate it would not be something I would do alone, but with others. They would become part of me, and I of them. Isn't that what countless versions of oneself means: to become part of another's thought trajectory? Even if you don't know someone—don't know their biography, have never thought of them before that moment—you still see them and feel they are like you, and you are like them."

#### AND WE TALKED TILL SHE FELL ASLEEP

When I said: "Someone said to us, 'Everyone in the world is slowly forgetting everything.' If you look at the world with this understanding, what do you sense? What kinds of thoughts, imaginations, difficulties emerge in your mind?"

She said: "Sometimes life gives people such joy that they forget everything. Then, all other moments seem bland to them."

So I said: "What do you see when you think of a world in which blandness has been forgotten?"

She said: "We will see ourselves in everything! We will lose our sense of measure. People will want to get involved in every single thing. How we live each day will change."

I said: "Will our hunger change? Will we then step out of our familiar zones and become part of life in a different way?"

Then she said: "The distance between where I am and where you belong will be extinguished. The entire world is where I am—that's how it will be. 'Who am I? What is my identity?' These questions will become weightless. People will ask each other questions of a different kind. New questions will have to be invented. All those who are strangers to me today will be close."

I said: "This is not a hunger that can ever be satisfied! What do you think will be the flavor of the questions that emerge from such hunger?"

She said: "Well, I suppose everyone will need to discover a flavor that is their own."

## TO STAND BEFORE THIS

Reverberation, velocity, allure, vibration, enigma, groundless, steam, trembling, warmth, instability, restlessness, worlding, potential, knocking, force, contact, cut... these are words that keep appearing before and between us whenever we get engrossed

in thinking, conversing, and writing. They strike us, escape us, reappear, and chase us, even as we chase them. We're sharing with you here our understanding of two of these words. We plan to fall into a dictionary with many more of them.

#### To stand before STEAM

The interlude between an escape from one guise to another.

It is a veil. It doesn't let the purpose of its effect be revealed.

The image of the state between the self melting away and taking flight with another.

That which brings everything else into vibration.

Nothing is lost, nothing has been misplaced, but the location of each thing has changed. Someone's attempt to take herself towards invisibility.

Every single thing is emerging out of itself and becoming part of something else.

And if not, it is colliding with other things, scattering and dispersing throughout the environment.

#### To stand before POTENTIAL

The pierce of a thorn.

The intoxication of a potent brew.

A journey without destination.

A frenzied dance: infectious, unmindful, active.

The collision of multiplicity; it brings forth imaginations and wanderings.

Giving oneself up to a dream state.

Being part of a search for the unknown with many others; not knowing what one may find, or invent.

Sometimes you feel stuck, and at other times a vast expanse opens out before you.

# FEARLESS SPEECH / FEARLESS LISTENING

A friend of mine from childhood recently started working. When I met her, I asked her, "Do you like it? Are you enjoying the freedom that comes with stepping out of the house every day?" She looked at me for a long moment, then smiled and said, "The strangest thing about going to work is that everyone wants me to talk about it, but it seems to me no one really wants to listen." When she saw I was a little confused about how to tell her that I sincerely wanted to know, she elaborated:

One person asks me about freedom, another about exhaustion, someone else about the difficulty of working, and yet another about the exhilaration of finding my own way in the world. It is as if the frames through which I can speak are outside of me. I keep talking, but it seems to me that whatever I say to someone, he or she already knows it. Moreover, if I become quiet at home for a few hours, my family thinks I'm hiding something, and if I intervene confidently in any debate in my own house, my visiting relatives object and say that I've become a loudmouth ever since I started working. So, if there's one thing I can say with absolute certainty about my going out to work, it's this: it has affected and changed what I can say and how much I should speak.

My friend was telling me something fundamental: that whenever we start something new, or depart from our routine in even small ways, the first thing that happens is a shift in how we encounter speech. This set me thinking. Are there thresholds of speech in daily life that we are not permitted to cross? What would happen if we were to cross them?

I started paying attention at home. I filled notebook after notebook transcribing conversations. I wrote down everything anyone said. Simple conversations my mother had with us, conversations between us and our guests, what someone said after a visit to a doctor or to her son's teacher at school, at weddings, when someone was born, when a stranger knocked at the door, when people gathered to offer condolences for someone's death.

Months passed. My notebooks, and my mind, filled with words. It was festival season. One evening, my friends and I stepped out into the neighborhood to watch traveling magicians perform. Everywhere, the audience stood mesmerized; many requested certain tricks, each more difficult than the last. It suddenly struck me:

a magician can't say, "It's impossible!" My mind raced through my notes from the last few months. I thought: my mother can't say to me or my brothers and sisters, "I forgot." A doctor can't say to her patient, "I don't know, I'm still learning." A teacher can't say to her student, "I don't understand."

As I turned back home, I remembered how once there had been a bitter fight between my mother and my eldest brother, and he had said, "I would have told you, but you wouldn't have been able to bear it." Things didn't remain the same at home after that. Hadn't my friend poignantly said, "It seems to me no one really wants to listen"?

The more I thought about it, the more it seemed to me that we create thresholds of listening which determine what and how much we will hear, and, in turn, what speech we will allow around us. "What is my capacity to listen?" I wondered. "How and when is it challenged?" As I lay in bed, I thought, "Are there people around me who might want to say something to me but hesitate because they think I don't have in me the capacity to listen?"

I switched on the light, opened my notebook to a fresh page and wrote: "Fearless speech requires fearless listening."

## ON WRITING

This is an extract from one of the essays we are writing about our conception of writing, the imagination of readers, and intellectual life. A longer version of "On Writing" was shared at a writers' conference, "Almost Island," New Delhi, 2011.

An invitation into writing does not come from the real, the imaginary, from thoughts, or concepts. Rather, it is the conversation between these that brings us into writing. Nothing can create a puzzle about itself on its own: it can do so only when it comes to be joined with something else. In everyone's life, there are things that are beyond the visible; that are their own enigma. Writing is neither about explaining that enigma, nor about making it explicit. Rather, a text is created by how far, how deep into the puzzle, the enigma, one can and is willing to go.

What is the relationship we are forming with that enigma? Many questions arise when we bring that relationship into our thoughts. It is from this that a text gets its form.

Things are never fixed in a state of being settled or unsettled. Things are always already in movement in multiple directions. They are in a process of carrying many along with them. They are not alone. They are in polyphony. It is when we extract them from what we see and experience that the question of the weave of a text emerges.

What is being woven?

Writing is not about putting things into a defined orbit, as a compère would. Writing is about piecing together a "where," and this propels the "self" into a search for a where. In writing, "where" and the "self" can be found in the interstices between reality, experience, and the imagination. But here one has to think about and make sense of what each thing that is appearing, opens out. When we make the everyday collide with the imagination, what is the force of life that emerges? It is not about giving fixed form to life, but about being open to what this collision gives rise to.

A cup of tea is part of everyone's everyday. One drinks tea every day. Often times at home, and also outside, and alone. Why do I bring a cup of tea into my text? What does it mean to do so? It doesn't mean that, in a text, a scene is in need of an environment within which it may unfold. Rather, the struggle is in figuring out what thought a cup of tea is going to strike and trigger. And also, what thought made it appear in one's mind in the first place. That which has struck you, is an anchor. In accepting this anchor as a riddle with which to move ahead, more things strike you and a direction appears.

What is this "strike"? A place holds within it an extensive scene; the eye takes flight through it. You take flight by drawing the ambience within you, and you write not the effect of what happened but, rather, you try and read, make sense of where something you are expressing

will reach, or be made to reach, if you narrate what has happened. When you are in search of something, collisions are inadvertant. These collisions open out the possibility of thought.

Through our text "It Made News" (in *Trickster City*), we tried to think about the decisions that the writer would have had to make while writing it:

#### IT MADE NEWS By Lakhmi Chand Kohli

That morning, newspapers disappeared the moment they reached the vending stalls. Wherever one looked, people were reading. Dakshinpuri is mentioned in the papers. J-K-L blocks are abuzz; everyone is eager to know what unexpected, enormous event had caused even their name to appear in the papers.

December 16, 2000: In Dakshinpuri, a young man named "Raji" was stabbed and killed at 11:00 p.m. yesterday. The police has identified three suspects. One has been arrested. A search is on for the other two.

Everybody scanned the report to locate familiar names. Groups huddled around newspapers, curious to know what had been written. Then they slowly dispersed, turning towards their homes to prepare for the day.

The sun was overhead. The street filled with students returning from school. Two boys ran past everyone. Soon afterwards, policemen advanced through the street, escorting a lad. Young men retreated into their homes. Men covered their card games with bedsheets. Autorickshaw drivers moved their three-wheelers to the side. Everything abated.

All eyes in the street were riveted on the boy. Hushed, the neighborhood puzzled over which block he was from. The policemen walked through this wordless gathering, their fingers gripping the boy's hands. His face looked downcast; it was clear he had been beaten.

"Stop, brother! Stop!" A woman's voice pierced through from a distance. She was running towards the policemen.

"Arre, stop, brother," she yelled. "I will teach this bastard a lesson. He has made life hell for me. I will kill him today." She had come close now. "I'll rest only after killing him. Stop, brother."

All eyes shifted to her. More people stepped out of

their homes; the onlookers stepped closer. "Brother, step aside," the woman stopped in front of one of the policemen. "He is going to die today." She took off one of her slippers.

She was sobbing. She picked up the slipper and began hitting the boy.

Once here, there again, relentlessly, ruthlessly. The boy cried out in pain. The woman's hands didn't stop.

"You will die today."

There was no chance of intervening.

On his face, his back, his chest, his head. She hit him. And she continued to cry. Onlookers blurred around the scene. Everything slowed. The boy now bled from his nose and mouth.

"Stand up! Stand up or I will kill you. You bastard! You wretch! You are no longer my son. If you ever set foot in my house again, you will die. Even if it means I will be hanged. Get out of my sight, you fiend!"

The boy, half dead by now, started to stand up.

"Don't just keep standing there! Today a mother will bear blame for having killed her own son. Get lost. Go away. Run!"

The boy caught his breath. Stumbled and fell, mustered up strength, and ran.

The woman stood there, crying, her folded hands mutely addressing the crowd.

She began to walk. Blending into the red uniforms of girls returning from school, she disappeared.

Everyone stood where they were, tense, watching the policemen.

#### THE DECISIONS

To not steer it into a particular direction—neither towards power, nor towards the one on whom power operates. It is an attempt to think without making a moral judgement. Neither to oppose nor side with something. It is with this in mind that it becomes possible to seek a new language.

What does an "ending" of a text mean? Is it the end of the text, or the story unfolding in it, or of thought, imagination, or the mystery that the text is weaving? Where does the end arrive? When the answer that was being sought has been found? Or there, where the text has left us with a new question? And what if the end stands before you in contradiction to your expectation? What if it takes that turn which makes the text exceed its own limits? Limits that are held in place by a scale-like form of thinking: that are either to affirm or oppose.

It is only when you withdraw yourself from this form of thinking that the possibility of surprise arises. The mystery within your own text reveals itself. It is a mystery for the writer as much as for the reader.

This text does not attempt to be illegible to the reader, but often it does draw him or her into confusion. Who is going where? Who is standing where? Where is the reader looking from? And where is the writer traveling to? Many such questions weave themselves into a web around the text. Considered by itself, the ending of this text, too, is a question. It is a question that constitutes the text and leaves the reader with: "What is it that has happened?"

Where the text leaves us—what is in that "leaving"? It is neither to stabilize us nor leave us in a state of instability. Neither to allow to solidify nor slither past. That is to say, it is not as if the text leads you into a dark alley, but neither does it guide you towards a particular destination. To leave can be to offer a foothold. It has in it a sense of balance as to how much to do and turn, and that, if pushed too roughly, it can break. An ending—it can be the end of that place, the story, the text, or of the scene, but not of the tendency that nests in the weave of the text.

The text begins with a newspaper; the sense that something enormous, but fluid, has happened. The event and the news, both, are contained within the sheets of the newspaper.

Something has happened. That something has made news. What has happened and its environment, both have shrunk into the newspaper. The newspaper creates an atmosphere. This brings the newspaper into a reverberation. This reverberation is the sense that the news is not merely news, but rather it has torn through many groups and places as it lands in their midst.

This reverberation is not uniform. It has varying amplitude for the mother, for the men with the auto rickshaws, for the onlookers. This reverberation has the effect not of knitting together, but of perforating a place.

A place is made of many languages. Newspapers also bring a particular language with them. When a language lands in a place, what does it mean?

Just as a place is made and changes, so, too, language finds itself in a spiral of transformation. When a place draws things into itself, it also searches for language with which to speak, to express this. When we fall into a place, a language emerges and seeds, and, even as we maintain a distance from it, we keep absorbing it. As we speak and listen—in the relentless passage of time—language, its instability, and its mutation all get their sustenance. From pain to complaint, to cajoling, to appealing, it keeps finding its passage.

Language—of complaint.
Language—of supplication.
Language—of appeal.
Language—of filling in a form.
Language—of institutions.
Language—of personal letters.
Language—of publicity.

Reading keeps negotiating between negation and affirmation. This keeps the edges of language in a state of examination.

Where should I write from? I know the place, but, still, how do I stand before it?

When do we feel that we are meeting our own place, scenes, and relationships for the first time? To belong to a place, to be at a place and to be in a place. It is when you step back from these relationships, formed over known durations, that you find yourself confronting a place. With what understanding about a place are you present in it, if this itself becomes your starting point?

To remove yourself from your situation and your location is to come into an argument with your own fixed introductions. Writing demands that you always be within such argument. The question "where" refines and thickens the intersection between the ambits of first, second, and third person. Why do you want to encounter the place that you know—this is what has to be asked.

Which effects of things should I write about? Which effects of things should I travel with?

We came upon a diary of a man; a diary in which he had written about his everyday. Reading from one day to the next gives the sense that something big has transpired. In the diary, he had written about what happened during his day, but the bigger sense is of what had been left behind.

The dilemma we feel when reading the diary is about not letting our thoughts drift into the causes of the effects of everyday; how not to spin a tale about what happens when the effect of the day ebbs. It is when you extract your thoughts out of thinking about cause, reason, and evidence that the attempt at thinking emerges.

In thinking about the question "Where should I write from?" the question to the self will have been: "Which 'where' will I end up creating in the process?" After all, the "I" in this text is not of the writer alone, but of an entire place.

We would like to elaborate this point by talking through the "survey."

The survey we speak of is one that is conducted by agencies of the state to determine the "legitimate" dwellers of a place and to distinguish them from the "illegitimate" dwellers. These are door-to-door surveys. In a given neighborhood, conducting a survey of just the 1,500 families who reside in its single-level constructions takes the municipal officers several months.

During the survey, the question of "I" seemed to be moving into a poly-vocal "I" that cannot be summed up as a single "I."

Every place maintains a veil and also keeps certain things in view. Both (veiling and making transparent) work together to let a place breathe.

The survey is the eye of the state working with the view to gauge, measure, and assess a place. That which is being examined—how is it being examined? What does an understanding of this examination mean?

When something is examined, the examination brings all the signs of change through which a place has lived till then into crisis.

The life of a place over thirty-five years, the signs of life that have made it, its struggle to keep itself alive in the eyes of the city, its weave, which is made by threading every strand of the self each day. How will the examination fare before all this?

The more you understand about being gauged, measured, assessed, and marked, the more difficult it becomes to write it. This is not a crisis of how you will narrate a place, but of whether it is possible at all to reproduce yourself.

Such encounters make you confront the question of writing by dislodging yourself. It is one's face-off with oneself.

The challenge is to think and write from within the possible collision that may occur between the force with which you are moving towards something and the force that is traveling towards you. This collision is not about turning away from your moral obligations towards a place; rather, it is about sensing the force within the sediment of the enigmas, mysteries, challenges, and relationships of that place, and battling with yourself: with how you think about that place, the lens through which you see it, your knowledge, your body language, your formed and settled imaginations.

To write by dislodging yourself does not mean to write in opposition to something or someone. It is to cross the borders of your thoughts and be faced with your own self.

Many eyes beholding each other; to write from within this web of glances.

What is this "within"? Is it a place, a position? "Within" is the edge of something, of finding a balance there.

When you are "within," you can travel in any direction. Travel from place to place, person to person, thing to thing. No two journeys are the same in form or sharpness. Each has its own particular impact and capacity to cut through things. It can be light or thick, slanted or spiral. It has no end, and neither does one set out to return. It is a journey without a return ticket. Text and writing live out this relationship between movement and there being no point of return.

Here is an extract from a text we wrote in 2003. The text is called "I Ashoki." It has been written with Ashokiji, a man who cleans sewers, in mind.

The boy who had come to file the complaint was also there. He was looking at me with surprised eyes. Maybe he was thinking that when he had come to the office, I was wearing clean clothes and talking to him like an officer. But today he was surprised seeing me in my dirty clothes. I was laughing within. In his eyes, I was first an officer, a sahib. He had called me sir. But what would he call me now? Maybe he was also thinking of the same thing.

By writing through "I," the writer has stepped out of his own "I." Writing from outside "I" doesn't mean writing through "he," or through a name. And whose "I" you take on also makes a difference. The policeman's "I"? The onlooker's "I"? The "I" of the boy who ran away? His mother's "I"? When the "I" disappears it may be the moment at which you are deepest within yourself. Such being within yourself is to stand in argument with your self.

Where has the writer written this text from? The writer has reached some threshold in his thought, and that is where he is writing the text from. He is standing where his thought has brought him. He cannot withdraw into a simple, coherent "I."

The text is not an eyewitness account. It cannot be: it has been written from where the writer was thinking when he wrote it. Some thought has come to him, with the magnetic pull of which he has tugged that scene from far away near himself, drawn it into his today, to ignite his thinking. That is, he is thinking a question through, in the process of which this scene comes to his mind, and he pulls it close to make it dialogue with his present question.

To write without falling into the extremes of being someone in the know and being unaware.

If you write as someone who is of that place, who knows the place, then you will unravel the mystery of the place, make it apparent. If you write as a passerby, as a stranger, then you will do little more than express surprise, or turn what you have seen into an example to illustrate your thoughts. In either state, you will not be able to move closer to the enigma which is an integral part of the making of the place.

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## DISMANTLING THE CITY

I have glimpsed the making and unmaking of these texts; there is no great mystery there. They have been born out of conversation, into solitude, and back into conversation again. They have been carefully stitched and woven together, questioned, revised, argued, agreed upon, repurposed into their present—still malleable?—form. "Collaborative authorship" (that trendy current excitement of aesthetic domains) is not an objective but only an essential starting point: one that allows all kinds of voices, pronouns, points of view, modes—the elicited folded quietly into the overheard—of engagement, of all kinds of forms and orders of knowledge, all to play on a level field, to echo and to interrupt each other.

Here we find the sentence that anchors into the everyday and then the sentence that, suddenly, cuts away. "Time does not stop; it fashions new encirclements." When you touch, I disappear. The eleventh question has no answer: so what does the eleventh question produce? And is it this constant motion that triggers the strangeness, the disturbance, the "difficulty," the unsettling effect of these words, the relentless movement that sometimes feels almost like evasion until it stops for a moment, looks you in the eye? For the barely hidden secret of most reading, it is meant to be a confirmation and perhaps minor augmentation of things we already know, a search for consolation in familiar shapes. Any established genre—whether novel, or social history, or biography, or catalogue essay—by now, signals its meaning, knows its answers, dwells on its variations. As for planning documents, they are doomed to replicate themselves through successive eras, half-awake, half-innocent, half-cynical, again and again. Here, there is a different ethic trying to get to work, one that, almost in abeyance of its own desires, insists not on arrival but on continually reaching new points of departure. When two speak in this book, they do not simply reflect each other, forming a closed circle; instead, they move in tangents outward. Haunted by lights—but if one light shines on another, others shine away from each other.

What does this imply, then, for form in this work? How does form, which is content, make itself legible? Up to now, up to what is visible here, up to the moment that briefly crystallizes itself in these words, this book that is both pause and mark of passing—the answer seems to be in concision and collection, a gathering of what only appear to be short works, each but an inevitably glancing look at a thread of conversation that has been worked out over long hours, months, even years of internal conversation. Within each of these snapshots, these stills, lines of thought and force have congealed into fragments; then fragments assemble to make larger fragments. If characters were a notable part of *Trickster City*, an earlier Cybermohalla book, here we hear voices, but almost never characters—so voices serve the functions of opposition, interruption, layering.

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Interestingly, "time," as a concept, is often invoked by name and troubled, almost as if to warn how, in a book, a piece of writing, or a photograph, time can never be fully captured, and exists only as shadow. Yet "time" here seems to me partly a foil for the more central but perhaps less explicit subject of this book, "space," or more precisely "location." Location is one of the questions raised by the Cybermohalla Hub project, conceived in collaboration with Nikolaus Hirsch and Michel Müller, and something very interesting and strange seems to be happening to the idea of location in all of the current work of Cybermohalla Ensemble.

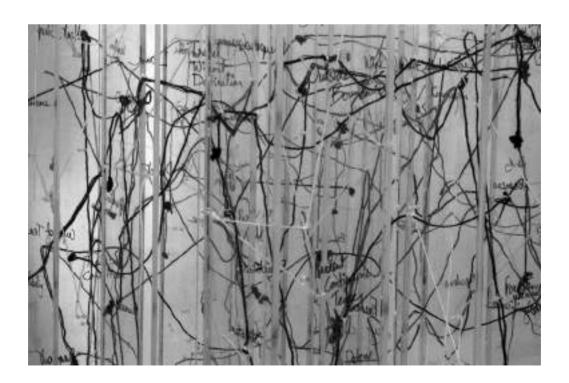
How do we think about this? I am puzzling, for instance, over what has actually happened to "the city," once a central figure, I believe, of Cybermohalla Ensemble's thinking and also that of Sarai, even as the rhetoric of the city—and of the "mega city," or the mega-mega city—now looms larger than ever on the horizon of global developmentalist visions. From the earliest of writings by Cybermohalla, the city was never a ghastly, dystopian vision but a place of collective hope, a place of settling, where the stranger was welcomed and enjoined to build worlds from whatever materials were available. Within the city, the neighborhood was located at a scale that made it even more tangible and intimate. This song still reverberates through the first piece in this book, "It Takes a Caravan of Travelers to Make a City," yet maybe in a more questioning, tentative tone. As the book progresses, however, "the city" as a frame seems to fall away; what comes in its place, maybe, is flux, movement, fragment, resonance; not settling, but endlessly inventive strategies of flight, survival, reinvention. If I am right in my reading of this, then is it time to completely dismantle the very concept, "city"? And if the city is already a chimera that has fallen away, been thoroughly dismantled, then how, why, will it linger to bewitch this pause and/or the ones that follow it? We are trapped in language: the pressure for equivalence this brings. These things are still held in tension. And still: their absorption in the lull and lilt and loop of *this* place, and not any other.

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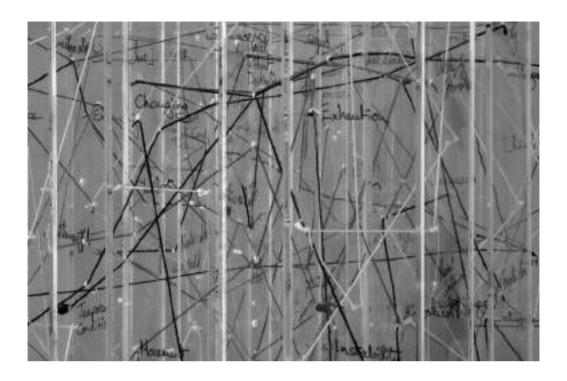
# MACRO, MESO

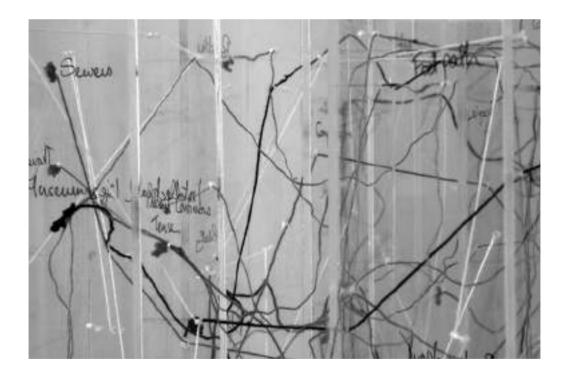
Mac•ro•do•main \'mækroʊ-doʊ'meɪn \ noun, rigid structures of the state. Defined through laws and upheld through penal disciplinary action implemented by regulatory institutions created and recognized by the state.

Meso•do•main \'me-zō-doʊ'meɪn \ noun, flexible social structures saturated with loose changing connections of varied urban organisms. Defined through unpredictable thoughts and multiple interpretations of reality. Often informed by collective memories and intangible connections. Boundaryless and self-regulated.



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Images of mappings of the city extracted and interpreted from Cybermohalla Ensemble texts. The macro dictates tautness, while the fluid narratives of the inner meso transform continuously.

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# THE NEW DELHI TRANSCENDENTALISTS

I write from experience, partly my own. I spent an afternoon with the Cybermohalla Ensemble some months back and, more recently, a day with this text of theirs. I count it as a day well spent. We are given only a few such days in which we do not skim but reread life and find someone to savor it with. That afternoon, I was reading out excerpts from a book I am writing at the ensemble's workspace in LNJP. It is a book of anthropology, which is one among a few modes of examining life. I subsequently read those excerpts to professional anthropologists in Delhi, Bangalore, and the US, many of great repute. I got more difficult, ardent, and searching questions from the ensemble than from most professional examiners the world over. This is not to disparage my fellow professionals. Our investigative methods, that is to say, our approach to life may share some affinities. For instance, a colleague of mine, widely regarded as among the most adventurous anthropologists in the world today, recently wrote a book for which he went back to his old field site in rural Sierra Leone, described by a recent UN report as among the "least livable" places in the world. My colleague did not want those he knew there to be seen as undead, and began his book by asking a few old friends and acquaintances in the area what they would count as their sweetest and hardest moments.

The ensemble have a name for such questions: they call it the "eleventh question." The sample questions they suggest are even more delicate and adventurous than those posed by my colleague. Consider for instance: "What was the day that affected and brought you into a special connection with the world?" Or: "If things were to forfeit their present forms and start becoming something else, what is the one thing that you would like to keep as it is?" Or: "When do you feel countless versions of your self are all over the city, and when do you feel you are alone in it?" The anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss called anthropology "the view from afar." The ensemble desires to go further and nearer. "The eagle soars in the vast sky, scanning the ground." One who desires heights cannot be unmindful of what is lower or lowest, since that too may rise: "The sand clings to the earth; it is unwilling to move. The wind promises it the intoxication of flight. How long can the sand refuse?" Can one still speak like this in public? Would we take it more or less seriously or legitimately if we called these words poetry or philosophy or anthropology?

I refer to disciplines and to professions not to award certificates, but to invoke a different order of merit in the examination of life. The ensemble, I contend, have arrived at a mode of expression that exists prior to (but does not necessarily devalue or negate) the division of intellectual and expressive labors into different professions: philosophy, literature, anthropology, and photography. Perhaps one pays a price for not being

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a professional—and for being one. Some years back, a different ensemble that lived in my present neighborhood of Boston reaped rich rewards for a resonant endeavor. They were called the New England Transcendentalists. Their occupation, in a sentence, was to explore the joining of the metaphysical and the ordinary. Something like this impulse is expressed in Heeraprasad's diaries: "To be alive is to live with a recurring obsession for qualities beyond the ordinary measure." What is beyond, both suffuses and withdraws from the ordinary just as life separates from, and rejoins, itself in death and regeneration: "Spent 32 rupees on my bicycle. It is repaired. Mortality is part of life, but it is disavowed in the conception of radiant milieus. Everything else is ordinary."

Have I overvalued or devalued the ensemble by this cross-national comparison? Have I denied their specificity? Would we understand their mode of expression better in "its own context"? And what is its context? Delhi, some might say. And who in Delhi speaks like this today, as a transcendentalist? Many, the ensemble tell us: Heeraprasad and the traindriver struck by the binocular and the drum, and others, if we know how and at what moment to ask the eleventh question. Such questions are not asked in public, in civil society. And yet, they are not wholly private. By finding this collective privacy, the ensemble transfigure Delhi, making it newer than those who only berate its public culture; some say it is newly depraved, some say it was always so and has only worsened. To transfigure, that is to find animate life, one must learn to move and to be still. To be still one may have to move. In this sense, this particular text perhaps announces a different step, a more intensely transcendental turn even than what Trickster City had offered. The ensemble has aged by a few years. How old are they now? Maybe they grew younger as their wonderment increased.

Those less wonderstruck are apt to accuse wanderers of being unconcerned about worldly matters, such as politics, for instance. In what sense are the ensemble political, or are they not? They do not, for instance, call for the abolition of private property. There may be world enough in common, even without abolitions. "When the cool twilight sky turns deep blue and becomes an image of limitlessness, it produces a restless interruption. That thing which belongs to the entire world [...]: somewhere it builds a connection between us all." Is such stargazing not worldly enough? We recognize an affinity with even the most hardheaded world makers and destroyers. The state too, for instance, examines and surveys life, the ensemble tell us. How does one see more than or differently from a state? Their suggestion: "Many eyes beholding each other—to write from within this web of glances."

Consider that they could have written as representatives: we the urban youth, we the truth-speakers. We are often on safer ground, politically, when we claim a stable identity. To explore, we un-secure our ground. Where, then, do we write from? They could have written as insiders, as those who have seen a state bulldozer at closer quarters. What is an insider close to? "What is this 'within'? Is it a place; a position?" The ensemble does not

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deny positions and identities and locations. "When you are 'within,' you can travel in any direction. Travel from place to place, from person to person, from thing to thing." To inhabit a wholly stable "I" is to give up travel. Such instability is not necessarily a luxury; it may be a condition of life. Consider "I Ashoki," a text about a man who cleans sewers. Ashoki looks at himself through the eyes of a boy who saw him in clean clothes yesterday; today those clothes are dirty. Yesterday the boy called Ashoki "sir" (by mistake?). Ashoki wonders what he will call him today. The writer is next to Ashoki. To write, as the ensemble do, is to be beside oneself, in a sane sense. "To write without falling into the extremes of being someone in the know and being unaware," is how they put it.

We might call this a mode of thinking and writing that is independent of the state and of commerce. Dare we call it free speech? One must learn to be free if this is to be a free country, or more than that. To be free does not necessarily hinge on declaring ownership or opposition. Consider this stunning proposition: "Who will our world belong to? This is not the debate. What will constitute it—that is what is at stake." If the need arises, this mode of belonging may reconstitute itself; that is to say, challenge the present constitution and the state in which we find ourselves. "The dust of rebellious thought rises. Sparks travel from soul to soul." Call this imaginative contagion.

Where should such a free organism reside as it comes of age? The New England Transcendentalists sought to be joined to, but also separate from, their milieu: "I lived a mile from my nearest neighbor, far enough to be seen," is how Henry David Thoreau put it. Some among them built ashrams and farms, in search of a collective solitude—a disassociated association. The ensemble calls their proposed residence a hub. How is a hub different from an ashram or a farm? Scientists tell us that animate life originated when a cell grew a membrane, thereby separating itself, while still amidst, the surrounding amniotic soup. This was the first step. Next, the cell became a polymer and connected with others to create a higher order. A hub is a membrane. It signals connection and separation. Is it separate enough? Put differently, we might ask: is it possible to meditate in the city? It depends on how we open out to life, as the ensemble shows us in their present meditations. Perhaps the government will not grant them permission to build a hub. It will be the government's loss, and ours, if a city cannot make space for an animating energy. The energy, however, does not need permission to endure, to discharge, and renew itself.

## WHAT IF...

### SCENE I

The pigeon flew. It became a crow. The city by the ocean keeps within its boundary. It silently searches for answers in the turbulence of waves.

The doors are ajar.
Where is everyone?
On the fiftieth floor,
water drips from a tap.
A path had as
if opened up,
and is now folding
in on itself.

It must have been a passing caravan that stirred everything up; left a strong wind in its wake.
Yet, the buildings are unwilling to lose their color, let go of their form.

The windows, too, have opened; they are ready to embrace the storm.

It seems the entire city has become mine today.

### **SCENE II**

What if I were to start looking for something here to take to the recycling market?

What if this is preparation for an audition?

A poet is singing from his book.

No! It's the day of an auction.

Stories have cast off their costumes and are putting together new ones.

Everyone has come here to escape the beginning and the end of things.

Will an image of the storm that has passed be glimpsed in a storm that is yet to come?

### **SCENE III**

An ocean is always in movement.

But still it waits for a storm

After which, what will remain, what will change, what will get left behind, and how long it will be remembered — this, even the ocean doesn't know.

# SCENE I





















D Company, directed by Vishram Sawant, 2005

# SCENE II





















Weekend, directed by Jean-Luc Godard, 1967

# SCENE III





















Mobile Sketches: Memory Card 01, Cybermohalla Ensemble, 2008

## TO STAND BEFORE THIS II

To stand before SPEED

A crashed time.
A collision with routine.
The clash with premises as one settles.
To be pulled without being held.

To stand before REVERBERATION

It is for both: the one it belongs to and the one it reaches.

Doesn't look for its destination. A frenzied scattering.

Extending the imagination of transmission.

To stand before PUZZLE

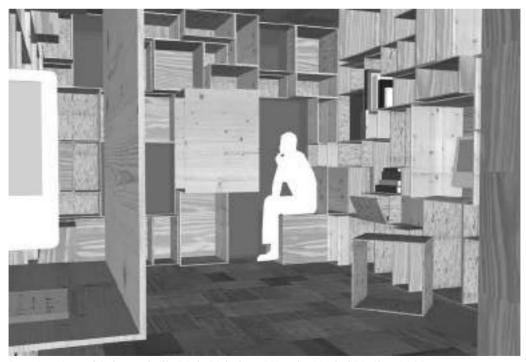
To become many.
A net of veils.
To make yourself incomplete in the imagination of another.
An uncommon guise.

To stand before MISSING

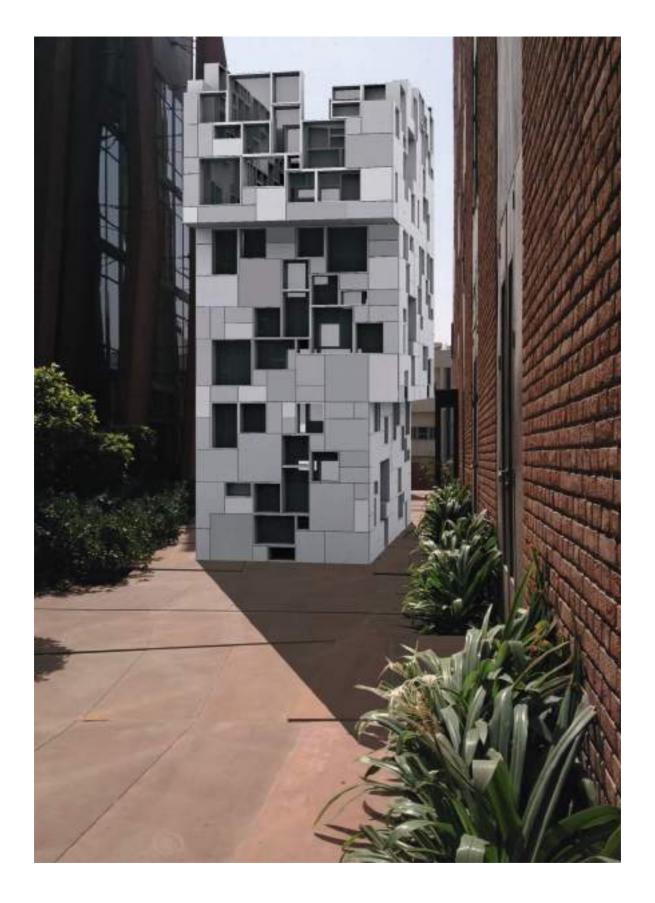
It is not explicit, but its effect is everywhere. A shadow between action and reaction. A commotion in search of reasons.



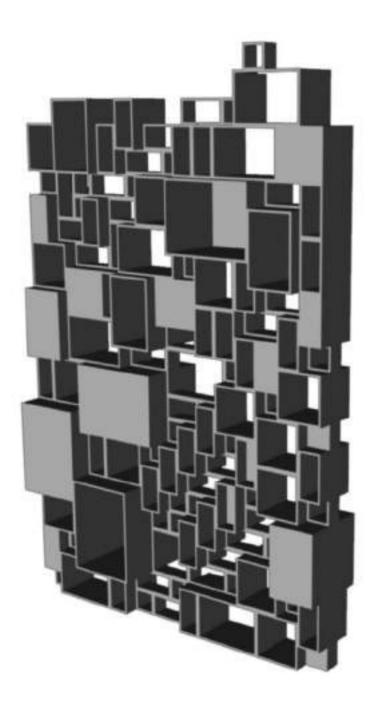
Model of Cybermohalla Hub, Nikolaus Hirsch/Michel Müller, 2007

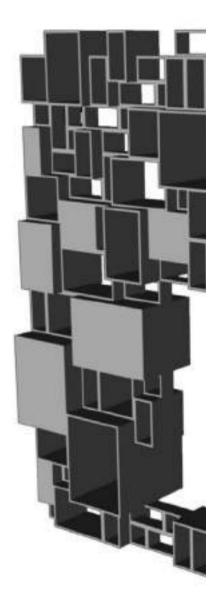


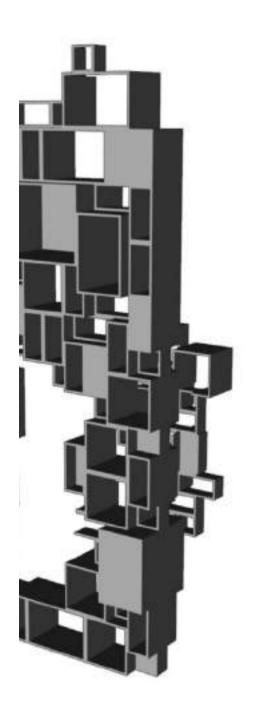
Interior view of Cybermohalla Hub, Nikolaus Hirsch / Michel Müller, 2009

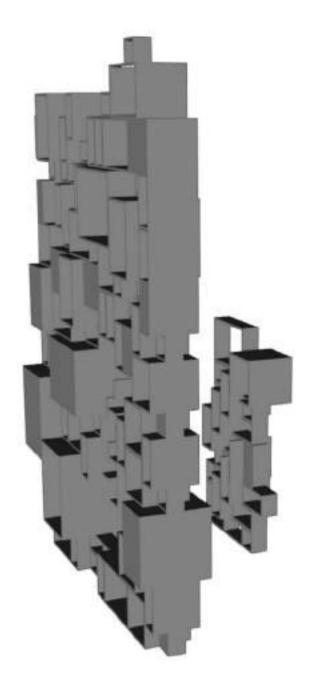


Cybermohalla Hub at the Devi Art Foundation, Gurgaon, Nikolaus Hirsch / Michel Müller, 2012









40 Hu Fang

# SCENE (AT CYBERMOHALLA)

# MIRACLES THAT SLIP THROUGH THE CRACKS

A sound artist and amateur musician told me that when he enters a certain space he is able to subconsciously feel that space, and anticipate what will occur there. He likes to play at table magic—the kind of tricks that even at an intimate distance can produce a sense of wonder (making miracles happen right before your eyes!). In the course of our conversation, I realized a sense of the miraculous can actually emerge from "interstices": between different individual sets of expectations and the spaces between different bodies and sensibilities. "Miracles" always slip through the cracks.

**FILM STUDIO** 





When visiting the Pyongyang Film Studios (the location site for the Korean Art Film Studios), you can feel the same energy as at Shenzhen's Window of the World or any similar kind of theme park: the studio carries

people's feelings as they are captivated by their own capabilities and devoted to re-sculpting reality.

The origins of the film studio and the production of feature films are related. Feature films always represent a certain perspective—and consciousness—based on a particular protagonist who experiences encounters in a particular environment while the film studio filters out the chaos of reality and produces an environment that can better serve the theme of the film.

Perhaps fundamentally we live out different kinds of features: sometimes one plays the lead role, while at others one is thankful not to have top billing.

Some say that life in North Korea resembles a kind of performance, as though a certain unified power directs the people's every action. From another perspective, others sentimentally say: here can be found the purity of spirit and the conviction that has already been lost in Chinese society.

Perhaps this contradiction can reach its resolution in the film studio: you can live the life you want to lead.

### THIS DAY

It seemed like the start of yet another ordinary day. What if this were the first day of man, or its last?

Those hostages sitting in that tour bus for almost an entire day with that frustrated policeman on August 23, 2010,¹ their day—in which they were victims of the mistakes of others—a day of relations produced by systemic corruption (isn't it amazing that every day is not like this?), is impossible to

Hu Fang 41

imagine. The approach of that moment when they bade their farewells ... actually, just as I write these lines, in some corner of the world this kind of parting is taking place.

Owing to the world's ruthlessness, and its immense size, individuals have almost no means of resistance. What does it mean to be aware of "this day"? What kind of hopes should we have for this day—or should we just give up?

### THE SILENT CINEMA





It is related to the movie of the empty theater; the movie of the projection that has gradually faded until you can only see darkness; the movie of your friends getting up from their seats and prompting other people out of theirs; the movie in which the only thing that appears are those two words: "The End." It is only later that you suddenly see the movie of the vegetable market downstairs, the movie of the sidewalks, the movie of the home, or the movie of your loved one right beside you.

#### LIFE & DEATH IN VENICE





Stills from Life & Death in Venice, Ming Wong, three-channel video installation, 2010

In 1912, Thomas Mann published his novella *Death in Venice*. In 1971, that novella was adapted into a film of the same title by Luchino Visconti. And twenty-nine years later, the Singaporean artist Ming Wong made the three-channel video installation *Life & Death in Venice* (2010), which is based on Visconti's film.

Ming Wong plays the film's two main characters: the elderly artist Aschenbach and the beautiful youth Tadzio. Ming Wong's video retains the essential plot of Visconti's film: in surreptitiously gazing at the youth, Aschenbach flounders in his own dangerous and hopeless search for beauty; the youth's gesture of raising his finger to the sky becomes the death knell that rings for Achenbach's life. In this video installation, time and space once again become indeterminate elements that both call into question and provoke viewers themselves to enter the endless cycle of desire and separation.

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#### THE END OF A DAY



Shopping center in Beijing



Still from Every Day Except Christmas, Lindsay Anderson, 1957

After the last group of people has left the shopping center, you'd think it would be possible to see the center in a "state of rest," but on the street outside a line of trucks, preparing to unload their cargo, is already waiting for the workers who will direct their entry to finish their cigarettes and chatting. This lively atmosphere is enough to turn midnight into daybreak, when the center's stomach will wait again for the stroke of midnight.

We usually assume that a city follows a kind of diurnal rhythm, based on the order of time, but we hardly

realize that throughout all twenty-four hours of every day the city is home to activities that exceed our imagination.

Dziga Vertov's Kino-Eye (1924) once drew our sight into the space of the city by presenting scenes from our daily lives and—behind those scenes—the ceaseless transformations of everything. Accordingly, Kino-Eye became a means for us to sculpt the myths of contemporary life. Looking at the films of the British movement Free Cinema. from O Dreamland (1953) to Every Day Except Christmas (1957), one wonders what kind of scenes our own conditions of contemporary life will present, after several decades and viewed from across the expanse of time. Our clothes, gestures, diet, occupations, pastimes, and pleasures allow us to see how the machinery of society enters into and shapes the individual, day-in and day-out, and how individuals—revolving in response to a daily order abundant with rules—have worn down time.

In its observation of the world, Kino-Eye in fact unexpectedly attained a consciousness of super-human time.

Translation from Chinese by Andrew Maerkle

<sup>1.</sup> The Manila hostage crisis occurred when a dismissed Philippine National Police officer took over a tour bus in Rizal Park, Manila, on August 23, 2010. Disgruntled former senior inspector Rolando Mendoza, from the Manila Police District hijacked a tour bus carrying twenty-five people (twenty tourists and a tour guide from Hong Kong, and four Filipinos) in an attempt to get back his job. The governments of the Philippines and Hong Kong launched separate investigations into the incident. Both investigations concluded that the victims were unlawfully killed, and blamed the death of eight hostages on the mishandling of the incident by Philippine officials.

Naeem Mohaiemen 43

# OUR REVOLUTIONARY PARTY LEADER: SCENE II







Thirty-seven years ago, Raisuddin wrote a journal entry about the Maoist movement: "But no, I learnt to my total shock that our revolutionary party leader was only twenty-eight years old. He preferred to wear smart, sharply turned-out pant-shirts and expensive sunglasses. In fact, he was the sort of 'ultra-modern' man we used to get jealous of in a past life."

It's banal to talk in parallels, but it comes anyway. Bengal tiger hoe geche pussycat. What are they talking about, now, here? Looking back as he walks, throwing words at friends. Friends and followers.

Cat's Eye is having a sale. Twenty percent off.

Kintu shala oder LOGO ta prominent, I don't want to be maagna ad.

What about Pohela Boishakh, tokhon

to BanglaLink tiger porechili? Ota to different. Multinational, kintu Egyptian owner!

I just don't like that slim fit: edge shrinks after one wash.

Ektu dieting kor, shob thik hoye jabe ...

When Dhaka police erected security barricades around Louis Kahn's building, the city lost its largest public space. The rise of Bashundhara Mall as hub (for chaos, people, traffic snarls, chilla-chilli) can be traced back to that moment.

Bashundhara authorities recently instituted a "No photography" rule.

So put that thing away.

Vahni Capildeo

# TO STAND BEFORE: SPEECH ~ ~ ~ SILENCE

It is easier to touch a shape of air than to speak to you.

Here they call it "thinking too much." Thought has nothing to do with it. The moment of encounter between myself and another; the encounter-before-crossing; the moment of encounter-about-to-become event (long scratch of glass on glass, mutual crystal transfer): "too much."

How too much? The instantaneousness with which a world opens within me and I am sightless, tremulous, rooted to the spot before whomsoeverit-must-be-and-you-alone:

Another sky, washing out and out, filled with birds creating and obeying a summons, an arc: the percussive seagull crying an ocean somewhere; the golden hardwood doors of eagle wings slamming a warning to walkers to flatten their path away from the nest at the peak; the unsettling flock of smaller birds intimating the existence of a gable, a tower, spare masonry: caught up in the sense of habitual, never-accustomed flight (yours, mine) I am silent before you (everything) and the adorable mispronunciations of names.

The creation of this inner world (that expands into the outer, carries all before it) destroys the instant of encounter, making an almost immeasurably small but acutely perceptible interval; the neat rip of an abyss in which eyes wander or are dropped, voices falter or rise headlong, and the body rearranges itself into a perhaps less than social attitude:

Desert heat pushes you back, even before the metallic etiquette of polite words applies itself and seals up your tender tentative of speech; green and moist blossoming begins to crack up the arch stonework of greeting and the unique transformation of love lays out a courtyard for friendship that perhaps wanted a lesser space, perhaps wanted only a bench in the shade, perhaps has become an exile beyond welcome who turns away bewildered by plenitude.

### But what do they see?

Here in my adult life I have stood outside a community doorway, a decade ago, having knocked and about to exit, dressed in martial-arts white, and been asked by a woman very little my senior with a voice of blankets, "Who do you belong to?" for she saw a foreign child.

Vahni Capildeo 45

Here in my family life I have sat within a commercial doorway, in the decade previous, ensconced with my shopping bags in the waiting area, wearing purple silk and expecting my mother's arrival, and been told by a bob-haired woman with a voice of posters, "I'm sorry, I haven't got anything," for she saw a beggar.

It is easier to touch a shape of air than to speak to you.

I have seen the eyes of a woman fill entirely with black (cornea and iris), not the eyeholes of a mask but the active blackness of a surge in the universe inimical to the development of life.

I have seen the eyes of a man fill entirely with blue (cornea and iris), not a lake into which to step but lapis lazuli, the animate statue of a jackal elevated to Egyptian godhood bringing in judgment on the human soul before him.

I have seen the eyes of a boy whirl like a Chinese dragon's and on another occasion seen the woman who fostered a strenuous, undeclared love of him make articulate conversation in his absence about something not-him while she herself seemed to be dissolving dissolving like a round of pearls dropped one by one into a cup of expensive, acidic drink.

It is easier to touch a shape of air than to speak to you  $\sim \sim$  snail balanced on a box hedge reaching for a pink rose petal shed by force of rain and barely at any distance from the singing nerves, the brown thorns.

Here you are.

46 Graham Harwood

# BEYOND LANGUAGE AND GESTURE

Bathing in a sea of unpronounceable words.

A place in which things always remain just out of sight,

just out of reach, over horizons, and out of earshot.

It narrows at this point, pushes in on us, breaks the skin, infects us with its atmosphere.

Pressuring us, discovering us anew.

Some things want to escape into language, find form, voices in a mist. It arrives this way, ill-formed, monstrous, tormented, and despised in the corners of our eyes.

It emerges now, from the gaps between words; the frame, developing, evolving, pulsating under the skin, audible only to those with the frequencies to hear.

We attempt to build it, naked amputees, without eyes, in silence.

The things that cannot be said or gestured.

Nina Möntmann 47

## WAYS OF EXPRESSING

I don't know anybody, including myself, who writes—whether it be regularly on a professional basis or occasionally and more in the background of their main activities—and does not aver that writing is really torture. To be sure, there are uplifting and even lighthearted moments, moments in which you have already conceived and formulated something that makes sense to you, and then, naturally, the moment of relief when the text is sent off, and the moment of happiness when the publication arrives in the post. Nevertheless, at the beginning there is a struggle, each and every time, a wrestling with ideas, with language, with possibilities, precedents, and above all with oneself. Even Susan Sontag writes that this wrestling at the beginning of a text is only overcome during the process of reworking: "And though the rewriting —and the rereading—sound like effort, they are actually the most pleasurable parts of writing. Sometimes the only pleasurable parts." The familiar staring at the sheet of white paper or the empty document on the screen, trying things out, shifting bits around, deleting, is strenuous; this can hardly be denied, and probably also cannot be changed. Writers must be able to bear the ups and downs of self-appraisal between annihilating criticism and satisfying validation. Possibly this is even an essential part of writing. Writers will therefore not even try to escape from this procedure in any way.

When and how in life is it best to start writing? How do you learn to deal with language and your own imagination in such a way that it leads to a wellversed kind of writing? Creative writing is a discipline that, with a few exceptions, is offered at universities only in the anglophone world. Learning about a creative mode of expression such as a novel, diary, report, play, film script, or poem in a group goes against a strict curriculum and the teaching of rules. Instead, with writing games, inhibitions to writing are lessened and gradually a method is learned with which an inner perspective can be combined with an outer perspective on what you yourself have experienced. An environment has to be created that enables the necessary openness to carry out experiments without orientation toward a fixed aim, simultaneously creating a professional intimacy that engenders a readiness to expose yourself to an honest and detailed self-perception. What has been experienced and imagined should be written down even in a still clumsy form, and a small readership should be imagined that listens and spins further perspectives in the discussion or points to alternative imaginings, thereby reflecting your own language in others' ways of expressing themselves.

Of course, you also write first of all to experience for yourself what you have written. Sontag remarks, "To write is to practice, with particular intensity and attentiveness, the art of reading. You write in order to read what you've written and see if it's OK and, since of course it never is, to rewrite it—once, twice, as many times as it takes to get it to be something you can bear to reread." Nevertheless, only when this reading does not take place for yourself exclusively, but is incorporated into

48 Nina Möntmann

a communicative process, is a situation provided to young writers which engenders a training in creative writing in the broadest sense.

The writing process within the Cybermohalla labs is presented precisely in this sense: "Each week begins with everyone listening to the new texts that all the others in the labs have written. This act of narrating, and listening, leads to thinking about what questions can be asked of each others' experience, what words can be found to link each others' experience. Questions that are asked are often incorporated into the telling. Words and phrases that resonate with others' experience find themselves in newer texts, in other tellings."3 Can, therefore, the Cybermohalla labs be educational for a kind of creative writing? Cybermohalla leaves open the necessary, undefined space for creative and changing processes that is mirrored also in the hub's design: "The hub is a proposal, a speculation."4

Translated from the German by Michael Eldred

<sup>1.</sup> Susan Sontag, "Directions: Write, Read, Rewrite. Repeat Steps 2 and 3 as Needed," *New York Times*, December 18, 2000.

<sup>2.</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3.</sup> See http://www.sarai.net/practices/cybermohalla/minor-practices/writing-texts.

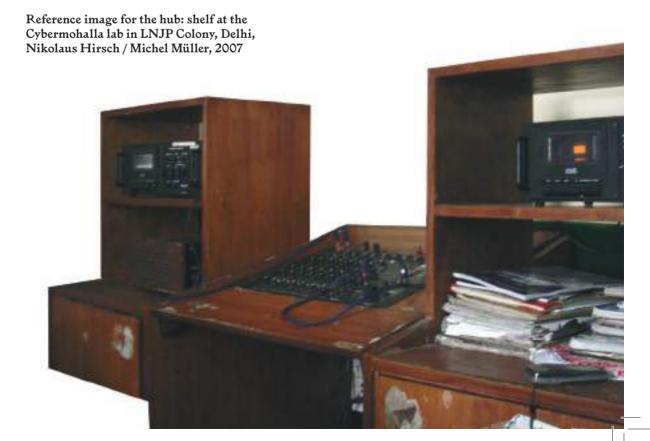
<sup>4.</sup> See comments by Nikolaus Hirsch and Azra Tabassum on p. 125 of this publication.













Reference image for the hub: wall and ceiling at the Cybermohalla lab in Dakshinpuri, Delhi, 2007 (photomontage recreated by Cybermohalla Ensemble, 2011)



Prototype drawing for the Swedish Museum of Architecture, Stockholm, Nikolaus Hirsch / Michel Müller, 2008

Cybermohalla Hub, scaled for three-by-six-meter plot, Sawda-Ghevra, Delhi, Nikolaus Hirsch/Michel Müller, 2009



# PRELUDE TO AN IMAGINARY STORY

Let's talk about the desert!

Can the desert

perhaps be an oasis?

Let's explore the desert in search of a fluxus island to curb and eliminate our ego entirely.

# SPECULATIONS AND PROPOSITIONS FOR THE HUB

- 1. A place that takes so much space in thought, that everyone starts seeing it.
- 1.1 The contemplation of which will make even the vastness of the ocean seem little.
- 2. What stakes will you take? How far are you willing to go?
- 2.1 And for others?
- 2.2 A bird quenches its thirst in a pond, sees its reflection in it, and spreads its wings to dart into the sky and become part of it.
- 3. Who will our world belong to? This is not the question.
- 3.1 What will constitute it? That is what is at stake.
- 4. Uncertainty itself is a journey.

## A PROPOSAL ON THREE LEVELS

(September 2006)

Every space—room, house, street, locality—lives through its histories, creates and dwells in its own cultures of listening, creates its own rhythms of time and being, and generates its myriad ways of responding to the world. Time, experience, and the flow of energies through a space transform it. Events, occurrences, and happenings mark it. The humdrum of the everyday inflects it. Growing up, generations stretch its seams in different, unpredictable directions. Each space builds different skills within it, celebrates its festivals and rituals, watches changes that touch it deeply, and those that pass it by.

#### THE THREE LEVELS

GROUND LEVEL

This level is for interaction with the surroundings. It could have a transparent facade.

Can ideas, insights, and observations of shared public locales be animated as practices in a constructed space so as to create and draw energy from a multiplicity of encounters?

Can practices generate dynamics that operate outside the protocols of host and guest, curator and public, residents and passersby?

Can imprints left behind by passersby become trajectories that chart newer terrains? Do they signpost future explorations?

FIRST LEVEL

This level is for reflection, listening, browsing, and reading. It will need to hold a broad variety of materials and presences.

Can we deepen and expand our culture of listening so that we traverse with agility the fraught relation between seeking recognition and having been "heard"?

Can we generate ways of thinking about sharing that are beyond the confessional, archival, and pedagogic?

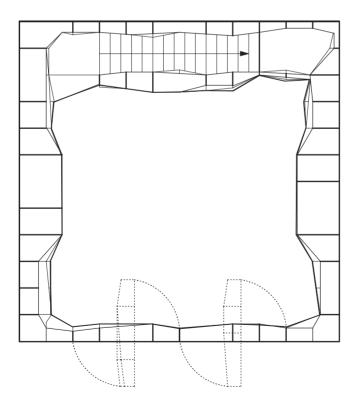
### SECOND LEVEL

This level is for sustained engagement between peers over long durations, taking on challenges to create vocabularies and concepts for the time in which we live. It would need spaces within it for both solitude and gathering.

In what ways can arguments and rhythms of diverse and individual excitement, will, stubbornness, desire, and energy reside in and shape a space?

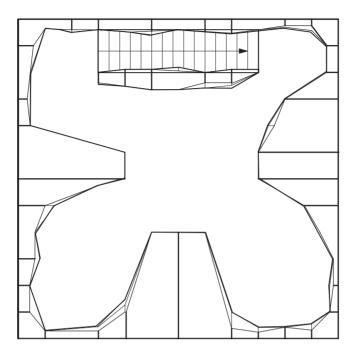
The proposed space is on three levels; it could be located in Dakshinpuri, Delhi. We shall invite an architect to respond to this proposal by creating a design for such a space.

### **INTERFACE**



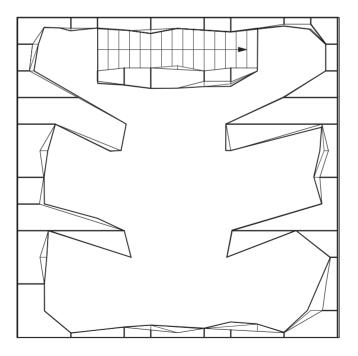
Nikolaus Hirsch/Michel Müller's response to Cybermohalla's proposal for a building (ground level), 2007

## LISTENING



First level

LAB



Second level

## A GIFT TO THE CITY

The question of what can be imagined beyond the lab surfaced in 2005. Some of the people at the lab had been around three days, some three weeks, some three months, and some three years.

A fresh imagination of space was needed.

A place that can hold within it both solitude and restless gatherings. A place in which different durations of practice and becoming coexist. A place that nurtures imaginations which embrace many places, people, ideas.

It is said that a place to dwell and a place to work form an axis around which social life rotates. But what are the forms that enhance the cultural and intellectual life which surrounds and animates us?

For instance, what form of structures could be imagined for our friends who have moved on from the labs but retained a desire to continue the threads of conversations initiated at the labs?

Places can be temporary yet invite enduring conversation. It was clear to us that many temporary structures need to be imagined and brought to life.

Still, there must be places that sustain practice, conversations, and investigations over long durations: like a studio.

In the studio we encountered the question, "How will we build a conversation that moves beyond the worlds of work and relationships?" This inaugurated our search for the "eleventh question."

In September 2006, we wrote an internal note, proposing a building in three levels, with each floor crafted around different questions.

And then a doubt: "Where will such a building find its full potential? In a place that has gathered density over years? In a place that has a question mark about its own future? In a place that is just beginning to weave itself into the city? Or will the full potential of such a place be found by its always being in movement?"

To us, the hub, as it has emerged over the last four years, is a resource through which we move towards many. We hope to see it realized in the city. We see it as our gift to the city. Just as a book, when it is published, belongs to everyone in unique ways, we hope that some day the idea of the hub will find many makers and be part of different lives in myriad ways.

58 Daniela Zyman

## IT WAS THE BEST DAY TODAY

The day the hub will open will be a winter's day; the sun will be out, but the air will be chilly. We will gather to see it with our own eyes—finally. We will be anxious about starting work in this beautiful new hub. We will be proud that after years of doubt and despair—having been frustrated by the administration and the municipality, having written essays and books, blogs and poetry, presenting it to the world in exhibitions and collections—we have realized it. We will learn to feel the satisfaction of having realized it.

Will it be at the outer edges of Delhi? Will it be in a place to which no subway will take us? Will it be where no proper roads have yet been paved for taxis to shuttle us from the heart of the metropolis? Will it be in the pockets that seemingly resist speculative urbanism? Will it be in the gentrified neighborhoods, with their workshops, studios, and rent-controlled housing? Or any other place in the city, for that matter? How many will inhabit this new New Delhi? Eighteen million? Nineteen million? Or twenty-three?

What if we fully accept the forthcoming presence of the hub? What does it tell us?

We will be in a city that will no longer be this city, this city of today that is certainly no longer the city we knew before the XIX Commonwealth Games of 2010. Here, the subway matrix will crisscross its subsurface; municipal bus lines will threaten to replace the law-defying cyclists, nervously zigzagging bikers, and caravans of rickshaws. Will it be a city that aspires to be an urban backdrop to the middle class (in the middle of what exactly)? Will it be a city that has evacuated all that doesn't move on wheels or is invested in automobile traffic and petrol-based mobility?

The forthcoming city will be a different one, no doubt. Changes will be radical.

Where were we, while the city—driven by a desire for positivity and performance—was being reorganized and consolidated? While acre after acre was being redrawn and re-charted?

"We were there," she says. "We recorded every stone that was displaced."

Yes, you were there indeed, overhearing the conversations of voices on buses, on trains, on street corners, and in your heads. You did not let go of your present in the search for what might be going on beyond, behind, and before. You were struggling to find words, to write, to redraw and recite, to remember and register every detail.

On that forthcoming day, it may be that no book will fit the shelves of the structure, no blog will be posted, and no photographic image will find exposure. Will we stare at the empty walls of the hub and wonder where the books, the blogs, the exhibition catalogues, and films and photographs have retracted to?

Will this be an inadequacy of the location? Or will we have changed our minds and hearts? Or, contrarily, will it be an indication that the hub is still becoming and everything is still unwritten?

Perhaps we will remember the moment in which we sensed, mapped, and engaged skeptically with that discursive rupture and discontinuity "beyond which it can be said that something different happens." In most what-if scenarios, the future is a possibility that is already happening, but is deferred infinitely. In the rhetoric of contingency, the gestures of transgression and negation are demobilized by an all-consuming vacuum. These vectors of uncertainty introduce precariousness into our assessment of the future. "What if ..." doesn't make things any clearer, it merely opens up gaps and creates new spaces that require negotiation, at every step, by all who accept responsibility in the present and engage in the delicate animation of the everyday.

The hub is wherever you are, wherever you speak from, and whomever you speak to. It is in constant construction—perhaps not physical or architectural, but in words and images, thoughts and conversations—on the level of your need, ambition, and reach.

The hub is you.

60 Rupali Gupte

### ARCHITECTURAL FICTION III

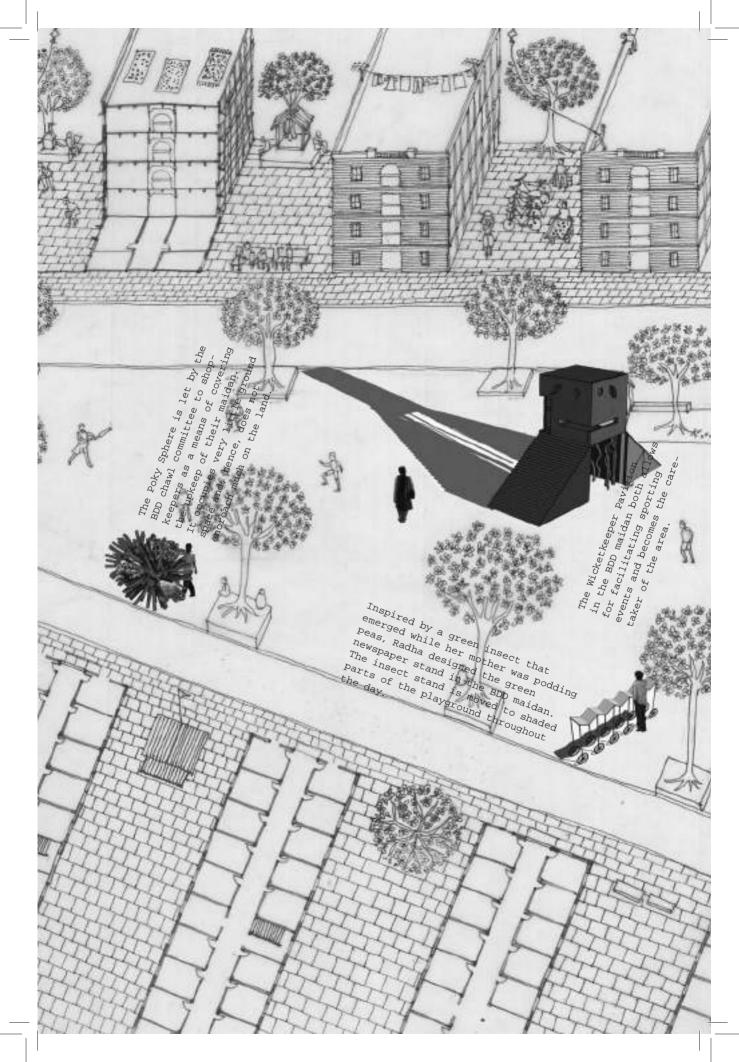
In the 1920s, *chawls* were built by the Bombay Development Department (BDD) in the heart of Mumbai to house millworkers. The land on which they linger today is coveted by many builders eager to erase them from the city's memory.

Revitalization is a hangover from a morose urban design discipline that sees a space as dead. The architect has to arrive at this conclusion to bag the project. Planning consultants have learned the language of crisis to be able to insert themselves into the situation and take the position of saviors.

There is no space here for idleness, conversation, gossip, and narrative.

Architectural Fiction III is an architecture of banal conversations, memories, and idiosyncrasies. It is an anthropomorphic architecture that sneaks in meaning and emotion. It wedges itself into the space of speculation. It enables Trojan insertions into the *chawl* complex, and possibly delays the temporal sequence of change.

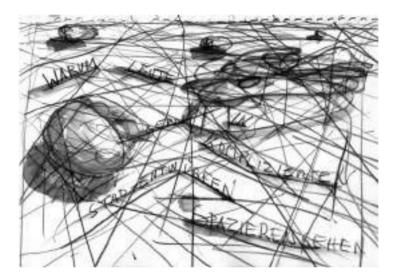
Architectural Fictions is part of a series of architectural projections developed from an earlier work that documents Mumbai chawls in the form of a drawn essay. It was presented in the exhibition "Jugaad Urbanism," Center for Architecture, New York, 2011



62 Christoph Schäfer



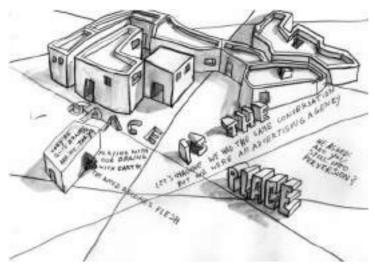
The Imaginary. The Production of Space. Social Struggles. Stories.



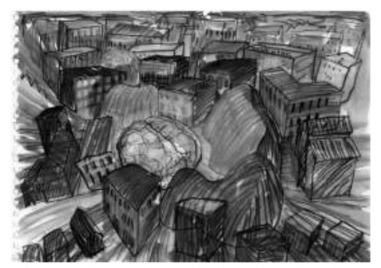
The City. The Memory.



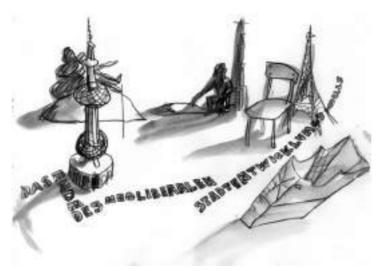
Thieves Like Us.



Space Is the Place.



Why Do People Enjoy Taking Walks through Complicated City Layouts?



The End of the Neoliberal Model of Urbanization.

### THE DIARIST

Six years ago, our friend Sunita Aryan shared with us the diaries of her late uncle Heeraprasad. It took us a long time to find a way to engage with these diaries that meticulously record the interactions and transactions that envelop a person through his life. What remained as a puzzle between us is the writer's insistent use of the enigmatic phrase "everything else is ordinary," at the end of many of his entries.

The following text is a fragment from a much larger work that is developing as we think through the diaries. It is our attempt at inventing a form that speaks to the thoughts we encountered while repeatedly reading the diaries, and writing and thinking about life between daily routines and that enigmatic phrase. We have reconstituted and reenacted the diary while retaining the sense of a singular life's passage, along with creating and infusing into it the thoughts and imaginations that we want to bring into the world.

We have had a long dialogue with the Raqs Media Collective while they were making their video work Strikes at Time (2011). We also discussed our respective works in progress and our readings of Jacques Rancière's The Nights of Labor (1981). One conversation revolved around their reading of a particular line from the book. We realized we felt a unique resonance with this line, and that it is what completes this cycle of diary entries. An edited version of this diary appears in Strikes at Time.

However, the puzzle of the phrase "everything else is ordinary," remains. It is inexhaustible.

#### **MONDAY**

Left home at 6:00 p.m., returned at 4:30 a.m.

Thought produces fallout.

The finer it is, the more dangerous. Spent 5 rupees on tea.

Bought this diary for 18 rupees. Got a pencil for a rupee and, with another rupee, purchased a pen.

Everything else is ordinary.

#### **TUESDAY**

Left for duty in the morning. Medicine for myself, for 32.50 rupees.

4 rupees on bus fare, oranges for 8 rupees.

20 rupees on photographs. The next episode of a story can be written only when you stake your life, your own self. I am proud of my abundant poetry. Everything else is ordinary.

#### WEDNESDAY

Stayed at home today. Drank and ate all day; it was intoxicating. Got my slippers mended. When you are searching you have to get up and move. The very idea of endeavor lies outside all boundaries.

### Everything else is ordinary.

#### **THURSDAY**

Bought grocery for 148 rupees. If dreams defy the dreamer, then? When a character doesn't follow the script, it can compel deeper reflection.

Rest of the news is pleasant.

#### **FRIDAY**

The day has dawned especially for me. I got back home at 4:45

in the morning.

180 rupees for electricity. Bought milk for 10 rupees.

What does it mean to belong to everyone? When the cool twilight sky turns deep blue and becomes an image of limitlessness, it produces a restless interruption. That thing which belongs to the entire world, that thing which evokes desire, or any sensation at all in the body or the mind: somewhere it builds a connection between us all.

It was the best day today.

#### **SATURDAY**

Anju's school fees.
A shawl for Kanti for 75 rupees.
Cigarettes and a matchbox
for 8 rupees.
Anita's letter has creased in
the safekeeping of my pocket.
Everything else is ordinary.

#### **SUNDAY**

It was Sunday, I stayed at home. Spent 32 rupees on my bicycle. It is repaired.

Mortality is part of life, but it is disavowed in the conceptions of radiant milieus.

Everything else is ordinary.

#### **TUESDAY**

I have lost Anita's letter.

#### **FRIDAY**

Arun got 800 rupees: his wages for December.

Truth is, in our attempt to bring things to a resolution, we write off possibilities.

This morning I posted a letter to Anita.

The rest is ordinary.

#### **MONDAY**

10 rupees to the miller. Couldn't sleep last night. Revolts are not mindful of the hour. Those who live life upside down can easily turn everything inside out. Starting today, duty is from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Everything else is ordinary.

#### **THURSDAY**

Arun lost his job. He said, "A life pulsating with discontent doesn't spend itself pursuing satisfaction." I was supposed to have a day off today. But Jigar Nath didn't come to work; I was told to fill in for him. Everything else is ordinary.

#### **FRIDAY**

Bus fare: 2 rupees to go, 2 rupees to return. Attendance at 6:40 a.m. Had lunch at 1:00 p.m. It's now 6:30 p.m. I've had tea, I'm writing in my diary. Preparing one's expressions of life through letters and books is to collide with the world. It's a busy life. Everything else is ordinary.

#### SATURDAY

We don't remember dreams, but through them we travel far in life. I had difficulty waking up in the morning. We went to Annia's house today

We went to Anuja's house today, bought things from the Saturday market.

Everything else is ordinary.

#### **SUNDAY**

A frying pan for 42 rupees, cigarettes for 8 rupees, 20 rupees on liquor.

20 rupees for milk, lunch for 50 rupees.

I went climbing up the hill with Paras today.

Beyond the summit of the world there is still more world.

Everything else is ordinary.

#### **MONDAY**

It rained all day.

The view unravels and takes flight the moment the window opens. The world seeks pleasure in uncertainty. That is why the self, and the way life is, have to be staked.

When the bird takes flight, it leaves the storm incomplete behind it. It's 7:30 in the evening, I'm writing in my diary.

Everything else is ordinary.

#### SATURDAY

Bought a radio for 150 rupees. Everything else was ordinary.

#### WEDNESDAY

I have been tense since evening. I've been drinking. I feel tired. Arun vomitted at night. I'm very worried about him. Having chosen the path of solitude, he is rebelling against his bodily needs. Everything else is ordinary.

#### **THURSDAY**

Kedari Nath and Bahadur came. We went to the hill. Inchoate expression and earthwork in the city—both are anxious to bring the new into this world. Everything else is ordinary.

#### **SUNDAY**

Through the suspended, colliding time of a story, the uncertain

storyteller makes sense of lost time.

#### SATURDAY Everything was ordinary.

SUNDAY
Stayed home.
Deewan Chand came.
Ghajaula too.
Life's needs have a mutinous disposition.
The rest has been okay.

#### **MONDAY**

Left for the hill with Manzar as soon as I got home. Kedari Nath and Mangu joined us there. The dust of rebellious thought rises. Sparks travel from soul to soul. It is ordinary.

#### **THURSDAY**

Withdrew 200 rupees from the bank.
With 8 rupees, bought dates.
Away from the labyrinth of an uncertain past, we move towards unknown time.
Spent the day restfully with the family.
Everything else was ordinary.

#### WEDNESDAY

Traveled all night with
Ser Bahadur in his taxi.
Buildings—sky—footpath
—boulders—swings—
memorials that weather.
In the long, sleepless nights
of this known, yet strange, vast
and magical city, from examples
we loan our expressions.
To ensnare reality, we have
kept with us the forms that

excitement and compassion take. The search for naked expression is a source of pride.
One of its beauties is the search for potential.
Everything else is ordinary.

#### **THURSDAY**

Took 2.5 kilos of mutton to the hill. Cooked it, ate it. Spent the night there. Everything is ordinary.

#### **FRIDAY**

Anarchic dreams know no limit. I bathed on duty, combed my hair there. Everything was ordinary.

#### **MONDAY**

Spent 12 rupees on my bicycle. Went to the hill. Keeping faith with unfamiliar inspiration, everyone must invent life anew. Everything else is ordinary.

#### **SUNDAY**

Tonight there has been discord at home. Anju started crying. Arun too became a bit fearful. I've been very restless.

#### **MONDAY**

Yesterday, I felt distanced from my son; I decided to stay at home today. The new doesn't arise by falling back on life's habitual ways. Everything else is ordinary.

#### **TUESDAY**

2 rupees on bus fare, 10 rupees on dates.

The improbable comes from not being within the realms of work,

excuses, surrender, assumptions, fears, and consequences.
Went to the hill.
Everything else is ordinary.

#### **MONDAY**

Interest on Ramsarup's loan, 220 rupees.
110 rupees to the meat shop.
50 rupees to the sweet seller.
10 rupees as donation, 20 rupees to DD Drama Company.
Got my wages.
For the first time in my life, I went to Patiala House Courts today—to give Ser Bahadur's bail.
It's possible that many hues of our lives are based on stories foretold.
Still, lives battle the ends of stories that do away with danger and risk.

#### **THURSDAY**

Have been annoyed all day. Everything was ordinary.

Everything else is ordinary.

#### **SUNDAY**

The search for employment, salary, and payment of debts is merely a question of hunger that can be repaired.

Arun has come back.

#### **MONDAY**

Ganga didn't come to work. I had to do a double shift. In the immense workshop the machines run effortlessly. But they generate the most dreadful, agonizing sounds. Power keeps its unrestrained nature under wraps. It manifests itself in the guise of moral choices. Ganga has become very infrequent at work.

Everything else is ordinary.

#### WEDNESDAY

I can't sleep. Everything is as it has always been, everything is ordinary.

#### **SATURDAY**

Got my payment: 2,635 rupees. Drank lemonade for 5 rupees. If I don't assault my own image, how will my sentence be reduced? Everything else is ordinary.

#### **TUESDAY**

Went to a dental hospital.

Met Ser Bahadur in
Connaught Place.

To be alive is to live with a
recurring obsession for qualities
beyond the ordinary measure.

The news otherwise is ordinary.

#### **SATURDAY**

Bought groceries for home. The vitality of the universe has been swallowed up by the search for results. Everything else is quite ordinary.

#### **FRIDAY**

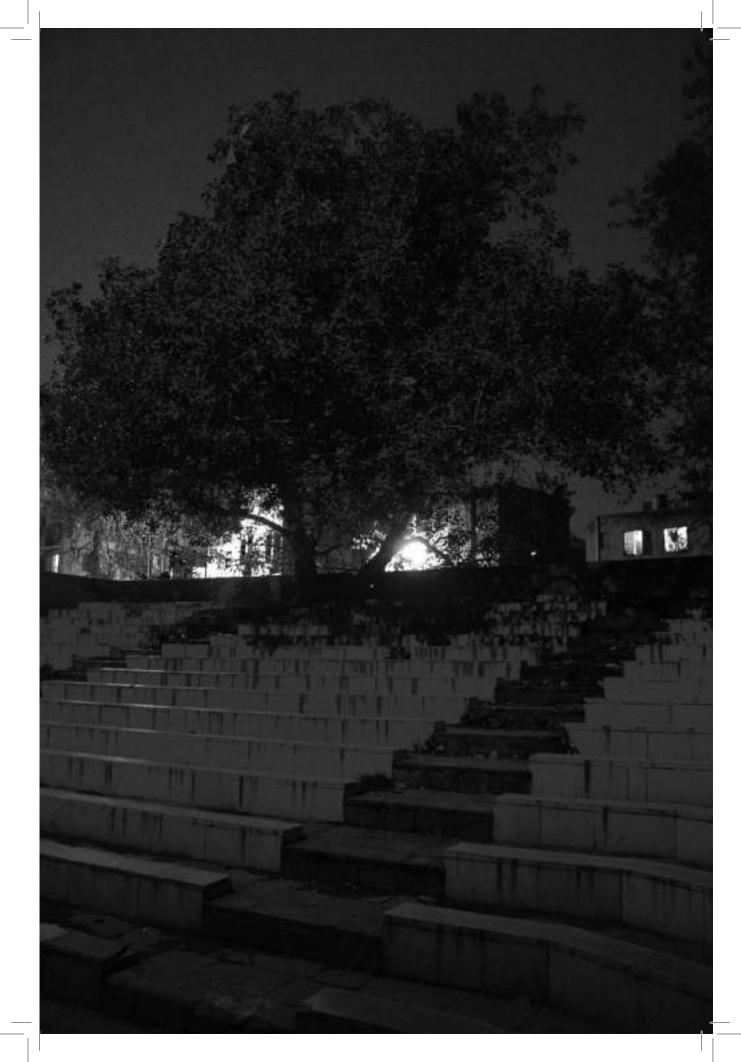
Celebrated Holi and Asha's birthday.
Bought liquor for 140 rupees.
Ate and drank a lot at the pradhan's house.

#### WEDNESDAY

I fought sleep all night. Intoxication is an inner reality. One must stop dreaming those dreams that have an *a priori* existence in the world.

#### **FRIDAY**

Left home at noon. I no longer have faith in time.





### A READER HEARS VOICES

A man finishes reading The Diarist and looks up.

A gentle voice:

Drafts of time are scattered everywhere. It is possible to alter the conclusions of night and day. How will it be expressed?

An agitated voice:

Darkness seems to be wrestling for a different location. The sun is rising.

A voice with laughter:

The place is stretching itself awake. Its connections are breaking. It cannot hold all its parts within itself.

A familiar voice:

There are no roads to barricade, no boundaries to defend, no historical gates that will stand guard.

A whisper:

All the words that have till now been uttered and heard are bursting out of their molds.

Another whisper:

Everyone is at the threshold of new stories.

A hoarse voice:

To what degree can reality be bent? To which extremes can imaginations be taken?

She laughed:

How complex can the weave of time be made? How nuanced can a scene be? The reader interjects:

It is not known how long this will take. These thoughts are like fuel to fire.

An excited voice:

That which is desired has to be created, that which has been made has to be thought, that which is possible to make has to be brought into existence.

A cautious voice:

How do maps introduce places? Through which signs are they recognized?

An alert voice:

The cartographer is holding an album that doesn't appear anywhere on the map.

The gentle voice returns:

There are countless ways of being in the world.

A sea of murmurs:

Look, even the spaceship that had been going elsewhere has turned back and is now heading this way.

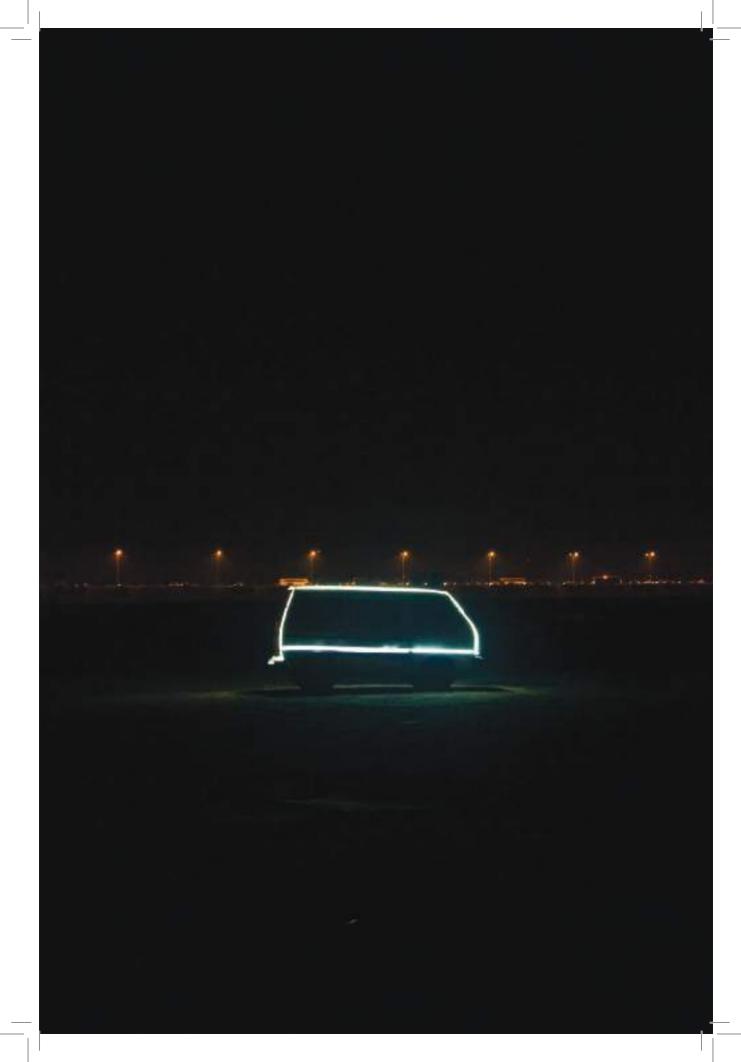


# HOW TO GET FROM HERE TO THERE









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# "I NO LONGER HAVE FAITH IN TIME"

"I no longer have faith in time," says Gauny in a letter to a friend. "Everything else is ordinary," says Heeraprasad in conclusion of many entries in his diary. What relationship can we establish between that loss of faith in time and this mention of the ordinary? This also means: what relationship between the "ordinary"—or the extraordinary—of a nineteenth-century French artisan and that of our contemporaries? What relationship between time and writing?

Gauny writes to one of the young Saint-Simonian "priests" who were preaching the new religion of work and love to the artisans. The latter was urging him to join the Saint-Simonian apostles who were about to go to Egypt, in order to achieve the mission of the time: spreading in the Eastern world the new Western faith—progress and universal peace and happiness through collective industrial work. Gauny answers he no longer has faith in this mission of the time. "Time" can no more be for him an object of faith because he is, he says, "too twisted" by its subversions. "Twisted" is the word chosen by the English translator, but the French word he uses also means "circled." Before meaning the long run of generations, transmission, progress, and so on, time, for the worker, means the constraint that leaves him bogged down in his place: the time of the day at work or of the day spent in search for work, or even the "ordinary" and implacable alternation of daily work and evening rest that separates the worker from the undivided time of leisure.

The loss of faith in time means a loss of faith in long-run programs promising future happiness. However, this loss of faith is no despair. It is another way of dealing with time, another way of transforming it: transforming not the future, but the present—the ordinary of time. Time is circling and twisting power. It cannot be attacked from the front. One has to walk round it, to transform the space that it constructs, the gestures that it imposes. This may be the work of the gaze that makes the arms stop in the workplace or surveys the landscape of the town with its monuments of glory and infamy. This is the work of the feet that transform the search for work into a free capacity of moving and of taking possession of the space of the city. This is the work of the hands when they change their use and substitute the pen for the tool. What Gauny opposes to the subversions of time that twist his body and circle his soul is a twofold operation. The first operation consists in loosening the circle of time through wandering in space. It is not a mere question of escaping the constraint. It is a question of experiencing the common. Grabbing hold of the perspective through the window or of the streets that cross over the kingdom of real estate, this means traveling through what "belongs to everyone." This might be what is meant by the

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construction of the "where" emphasized by the Cybermohalla Ensemble. The "where" is opposed to a certain idea of the "self." Emancipation is the discovery of an "individual" capacity which is at the same time the experience of sharing a common and impersonal world, belonging to everybody.

This is why the point is not only to circumvent time with space. Walking on the streets—or climbing the hill—is not enough to construct the space that belongs to everyone, the space within which "the dust of rebellious thought rises" and "sparks travel from soul to soul." What is required is a second operation, the one that deals directly with time. It consists in writing. And the first thing that has to be written is time. There are two main forms of this writing: the first one is poetry. Poetry first means transforming the circling power into a set of lines. This is why poetry has always been a favorite form of expression for those who enter into the world of writing for the first time. Poetry is not so much an expression of the self as it is the construction of a space, a spatial redistribution of time. The second form is the diary: the diary is an account of days, a first step in the reappropriation of time. The diary may be very close to the account book, only mentioning the expenses of the day. This may account for the enigmatic mention of "Everything else is ordinary," at the end of the entries in Heeraprasad's diary. If the remainder is "ordinary," not worth saying, this means that what comes before is extraordinary. We wonder, of course, what is extraordinary in the account of the 18 rupees given for the diary, the 2 rupees for the bus fare, or the 150 rupees for the radio. The answer, however, is quite obvious: the "extraordinary" starts with the very decision of writing, of buying the diary and the pen. Writing the ordinary is the first step in the way out of the ordinary, much in the same way as the starting point in the process of intellectual emancipation, according to Joseph Jacotot, may simply be the look at a calendar, the writing of a prayer, or the repetition of the first sentence of *Telemachus*. This is why it is not so strange to see Heeraprasad's diary switching from everyday expenses to philosophical views. Gauny had invented a "coenobitic economy," a budget for the emancipated worker that calculates, for each item, the optimal relationship between a minimum of expense and a maximum of freedom. Such an economy built an immediate link between the everyday budget of the worker and the way of life of the philosopher. It built it as a general formula of emancipation. The time of Heeraprasad and that of Cybermohalla Ensemble has become suspicious about general formulas of emancipation. This might be the reason why the account of the expenses for a frying pan, groceries, or radio set and the thoughts about time, life, art, and the universe appear separately in the diary, as two forms of distance with the "ordinary" that cannot be combined in a unique form of account.

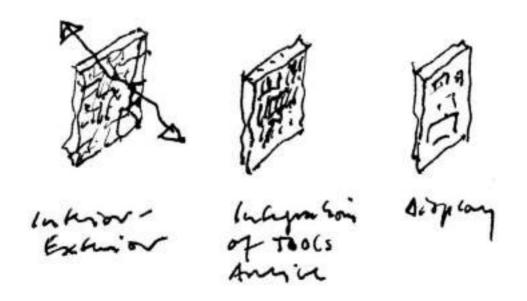
This is, at first sight, the main difference: Gauny could integrate the distance from the everyday within the "account" of the everyday in the narration of the day at work or the "emancipation budget." In his view, the day at work and the budget were worth telling everybody, in the same way as the poems. Both already wove a common world. It is not the same with

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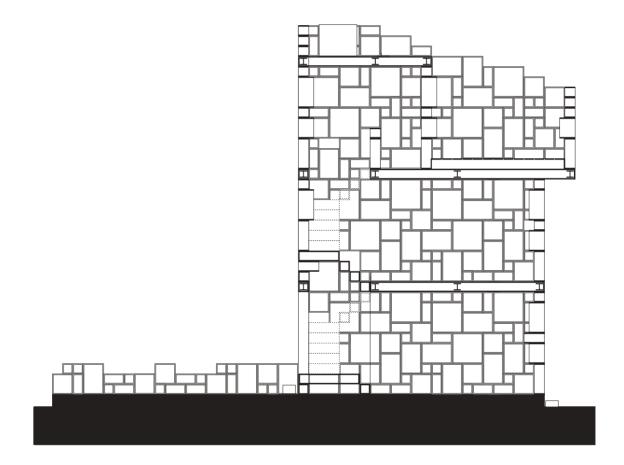
Heeraprasad. He tells us that he came back home at 4:00 a.m., so that we understand that he works during the night. Sometimes he complains that he must do the job of another. But we don't know what this job is. It probably means that this job belongs to the ordinary, it belongs to the "everything else" that is not worth telling. The common world woven by the act of writing seems to start when the time of the ordinary is over. This might also mean that the individual way into the world of writing is disconnected from a horizon of collective emancipation. I say "this might mean," because I still don't know "who" Heeraprasad is—I mean "who" as a subject, not as an individual. I don't know whether he is speaking only for himself or to a real or virtual interlocutor. After all, the disconnection that I see may be part of a deliberate strategy of irresolution. As he tells it: "In our attempt to bring things to a resolution, we write off possibilities." I can connect this choice of irresolution to a concern that is strongly emphasized in the book: the concern about "incompleteness" and the "enigma." Keeping the enigma unsolved, going "how far, how deep in the enigma one can," this is the condition for writing literature. There is a tension between this condition and the "making explicit" that seems to be inherent in the process of emancipation. Writing for Gauny means a radical jump from the world of the impossible into a universe of the possible, which has no limits. This is why he thinks it is possible to achieve in the same act the task of emancipation and the task of literature. He is not afraid of "writing off possibilities." For Heeraprasad, for Cybermohalla Ensemble, for us, the problem is different: the possible does no more than appear as the infinite land opened by the jump away from the impossible. Possibilities have to be spared, not because there are few of them but because we don't exactly know which among them are true possibilities. The very relationship between the possible and the impossible has lost its obviousness. This is why writing—and the common world created by writing—are more important than ever. This is also why the link between the common world of writing and the world of collective emancipation has become itself an enigma.



Reference image for the hub: Jharokha in the Cybermohalla lab in LNJP, Delhi, Nikolaus Hirsch/Michel Müller, 2007



Concept sketch, Nikolaus Hirsch/Michel Müller, 2007



# I AM IN TIME



I am in time, but not captive to time. I am the narrator and maker of my own time. Time has brought me to this point, but beyond this it will not decide the thresholds I will cross. I will decide my thresholds and be my own referee. I long to fall into a vastness.



What does this "I" want? Does it live with a fear? Fear that he will lose his thoughts amid the changes in place. Fear that the crack on which he stands will immobilize him. What is this presence? Does it have a name?



The "I" is like a warrior. It is in collision with its own self, its ways of thinking, the very basis of its thought, its expectations, its surroundings. But he does not go out to conquer the world.

#### I have come to know the secrets of time

I have come to know the secrets of time. My gaze can no longer be unmindful. What is the question I was being led by? Which question makes the edifices of these times irrelevant? Time is wandering as a vagabond. The dream to find drops of water in the desert will one day turn the ocean and make it surge this way. Now that all his friends are ready with their oars, why is he trying to quell the storm by claiming it is just a passing gust of wind and sand?



### I AM IN TIME: PART II

On hearing a reading of "I Am in Time," a debate broke out in the neighborhood. Here we share some extracts and our reflections.

#### AUNT NOORJEHAN'S ARGUMENT

Time cannot belong to anyone. If it is mine this moment, everything in its dominion will be on my side. But when it deceives me, it will cast me aside like a stranger; it will leave me to wander and will become someone else's. Time makes no promises to anyone. I used to think, "What is today?" Live in the splendor of each day. But remember how Balraj Sahni challenged time in the movie Waqt (Time)? The very next moment, a storm destroyed everything. He spent the next twenty years of his life as a castaway.

Time holds fear. Fear that one can never have an awareness of. Time will never side with someone who is proud in his heart. Time is always in argument with life. An entire lifetime passes, and one still cannot foresee when time will strike.

Time keeps itself under wraps: it doesn't reveal itself to anyone. One has to accept time in whichever form it appears. Even when it is on our side, and even then, when it is estranged from us. Time is one thing that meets us in different ways throughout our life. You say time has revealed its secret to you? You sound as if this is a game of love, which can be played by making estimates. If not this, then that could happen, if not that, then this might work out. What question is he talking about that can make the edifices of time irrelevant?

Where I am, and why? Everyone asks these questions. Today I am sitting here, talking with you. Tell me, where is the search for a time yet to come?

#### LALU BABA'S ARGUMENT

The stories of my life, which I make as time passes, multiply as I age. My memory is not adequate enough to recount all the various times I have lived through. The hazy fragments of my memory mingle with the lives of many others. You can call my memories mine, or you can look for the world in them. What is in me is there in everyone. Life is generative. It has in it the potential to bring another life into being and to give it form.

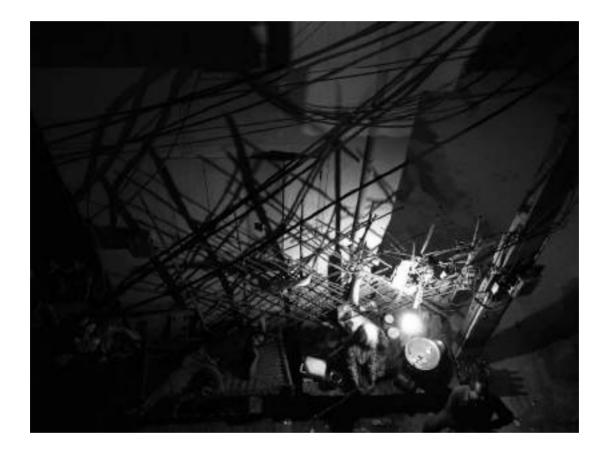
The puzzle of my life is always with me. I recognize its signs, but I can never pierce its secrets. Time is in me, and it is all around me.

When it wants to surprise me, it lets me win against itself. And the moment I believe I have control over time, it makes the slightest of movements, and that's enough to shatter my belief in my control over it. Even the tiniest moment of time can have immense powers of disruption. But try as you may, you cannot make it reveal itself to you. It is always with you, but always as a stranger.

#### **OUR AFTERTHOUGHTS**

In "I Am in Time," the narrator has made himself the creator of his present. He stands as a creator who challenges each day and puts himself at stake. He is searching for a force with which to draw new maps. Emptiness and scarcity do not frighten the narrator. Neither is he in search of filling some emptiness within. His route will lead towards those horizons in which thought can become its most magnificent. To you, oh cautious ones, the narrator would say, "The script of my life has not yet been written."

He will say, "I will find my own caravan."



### THAT THIS CAN HAPPEN

That the reordering of language is seeded only by the continual breakage and reordering of lived lives.

That a diary can be something other than an offshoot of leisure, a journal of peaceful days only sometimes shattered and gathered back again; that it can be a recording of the quietest, most subterranean tremors

—the implosion of a living being.

That new forms of writing come from moral courage, not experiments on the page.

That it is possible for this courage to be collective, and not claim a first person pronoun.

This is a collision. It stops me.

That the individual can be differently constituted.

That it can be made from broken pieces of the now, and glued to things that have been whole in this land for centuries.

That here appear the inward and outward, inseparable.

That there are no characters: there are people impelled to act or prevented from action; there are no plots: there are collisions and encounters, velocities of movement; no points of view, but philosophies.

That these are not documents but investigations of the soul.

That there is no bitterness, nor a false peace.

My new book is out.

That the only urgency is to be within the unraveling of things, in a stretched time; to be within the labor of language, and let the product be one of many consequences.

The new is geological: it takes its time.

What can be whole only within itself? Everything is broken somewhere; deeply, inexorably, and through this place of brokenness it leaves itself. It lets itself be entered.

That narrative is given, narration is not.

Outside, the dark morning sky of the monsoons, the rain on its way, parrots in urgent flight among trees.

That nothing is self-contained.

That all of this is more than enough.

Suddenly, while the parrots are in midair between branches, the sunlight appears, growing stronger every moment, although in this season it earns no trust.

Only sometimes do the questions lose their spine, and become literal, become an indulgence of questions.

A question is not mist: it is the ground interrogating both the shovel and the bulldozer.

That there are ruthless certainties, only they always change.

That there may be a need now to unlearn confidence, to not take distance from collisions, to be stunned by a blow.

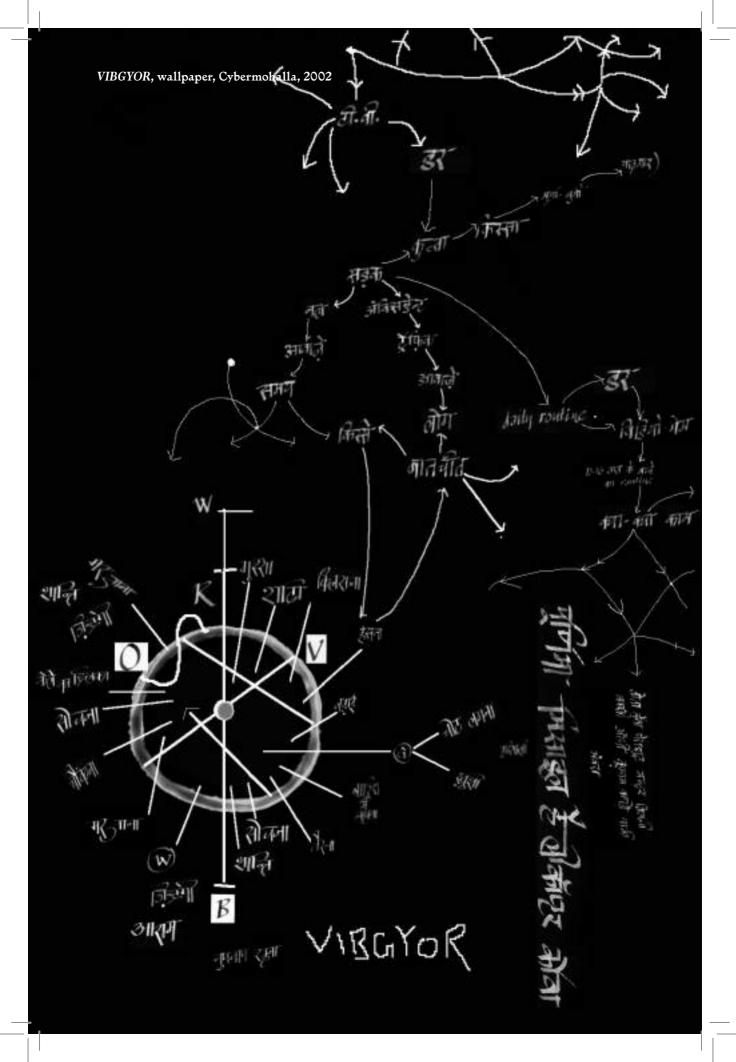
That this be in aloneness, and with others?

The sun is gone again, and the sky is dark only on the far side.

That the ease with which words always come to us all has been refused.

That the right to utter has been earned, truly, and is not an inheritance by birth.

That this can happen.



Rana Dasgupta 89

# WHEN THE SKY UN-SHIMMERS

"When the bird takes flight, it leaves the storm incomplete behind it."

We are so used to the Viagra thrusts of this, our modern time, that we can hardly imagine being loved by time in any other way. But sometimes, just sometimes, it grasps us too quickly—an object darts across the horizon—and, implausibly, a crack appears in the sky. Sections unravel, joints undo, and finally the whole shimmering, precarious optical illusion collapses into the void. It lasts for the briefest instant. And yet, after that you can never believe entirely in the solidity of the heavens.





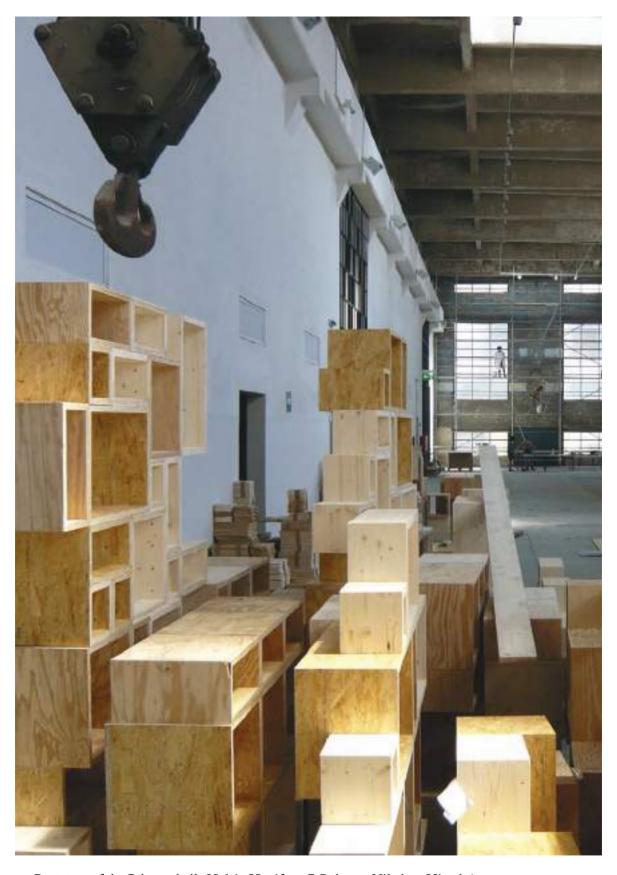
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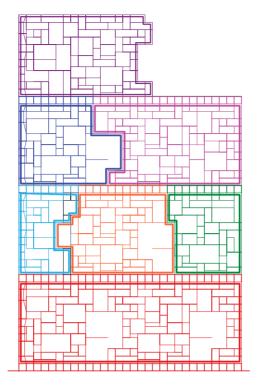




(photos: Monica Narula)

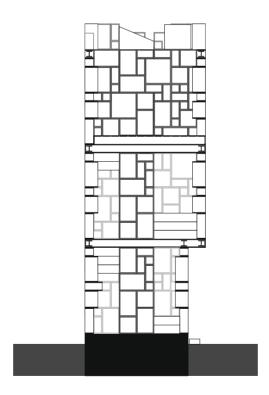


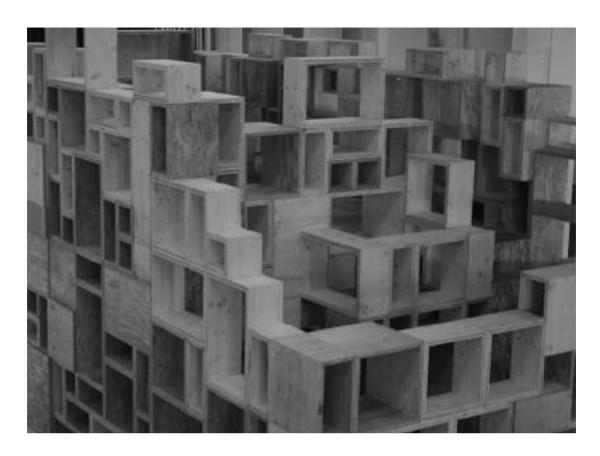
Prototype of the Cybermohalla Hub in Manifesta 7, Bolzano, Nikolaus Hirsch/Michel Müller in collaboration with Cybermohalla Ensemble, Daniel Dolder, and students at Akademie der Bildenden Künste Stuttgart, 2008



Arkitekturmuseet / Stockholm

Akademie der Bildenden Künste Stuttgart Manifesta 7 / Bolzano





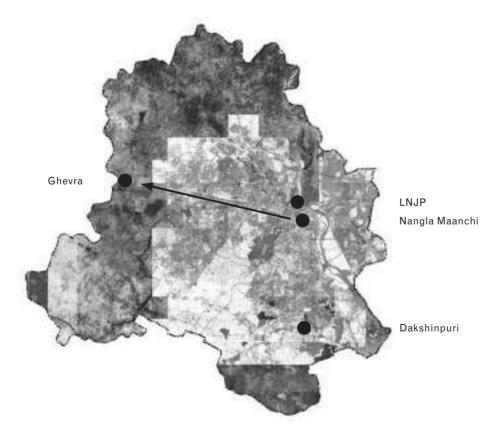




Prototype of the Cybermohalla Hub under construction at Manifesta 7, Bolzano, 2008 (photos: Shveta Sarda)



Prototype of the Cybermohalla Hub at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Copenhagen, 2011 (photo: Michel Müller)



 $Locations\ of\ Cybermohalla\ labs\ and\ studios\ mounted\ on\ the\ masterplan\ of\ Delhi,\ Nikolaus\ Hirsch\ /\ Michel\ M\"uller,\ 2007$ 

### TO STAND BEFORE THIS III

# To stand before INSTABILITY

At the bend between
a caravan and solitude.
To appear without
being marked.
Excitement, but without
an image.
It is not for me alone.
Sparks of subterfuge.
Where the mystery endures.
To arrive, halt, laze,
but not settle.

# To stand before PERFORATION

The encounters after one is lost. Contrary to your own moves.

# To stand before STUBBORNNESS

To dive a million times to create a storm. Between hiding and being visible. A cabinet of doubts. Surprising your own desires.

# To stand before COMMOTION

To reject identity and to find yourself in things, the world, time, and gifts. Unmarked travel.
To step into the world with new faces.

# To stand before HORIZON

Outside the bounds of "me,"
"mine," and "ours."
The expansive expression
of magic standing in equality
to the real world.
To accelerate collision.
An assessment of the limits of time.
The sensing of a line and a crack.

# To stand before TRANSPARENCY

A battle that can lead to being discarded. To break and take away. Like playing the game of memory loss with oneself. To live with the struggle of holding on to yourself and letting yourself go. 96 Matthias Görlich

#### Dear Cybermohalla Ensemble,

As we have had a lot of discussions on the issue, and as it is the focus of my work, I would like to concentrate on mapping as the topic of my contribution. Mapping—and how I learned to understand it during the last few years of working with urban planners and, in particular, after our discussions in Delhi—is a contested terrain.

For planners, mapping has always been a tool to claim land, to mark property, and to develop and communicate strategies for transforming space (with respect to the powerful actors involved in the process). These processes of transformation and their visual representation—the plan often deny the fact that they are dealing with existing structures of communication, personal relationships, and history, as well as future actors and non-actors, etc. So, within this understanding, mapping can be discussed controversially. As I learned from our discussions, the spatial scale of what is mapped is critical, and representing details and adding layers to a map open up space to being monitored and controlled.

In urban planning, and especially with all the current "participatory planning" efforts, there is another phenomenon that can be even more dangerous: "participatory mapping." That is, involving the inhabitants of a place in "self-mapping" (self-enumeration as in a well-known case by an organization in Mumbai, for example) in order to create complex maps that could then be channeled into anything: resettlement plans by city authorities, development designs of the real-estate market, controlling and expansion mechanisms by water and electricity supply companies. This is clearly dangerous for people who have been able to survive precisely because they had not been mapped. I am referring, here, to your discussion with an urban researcher in which you asked, "Why should one create an archive of one's own extinction?"

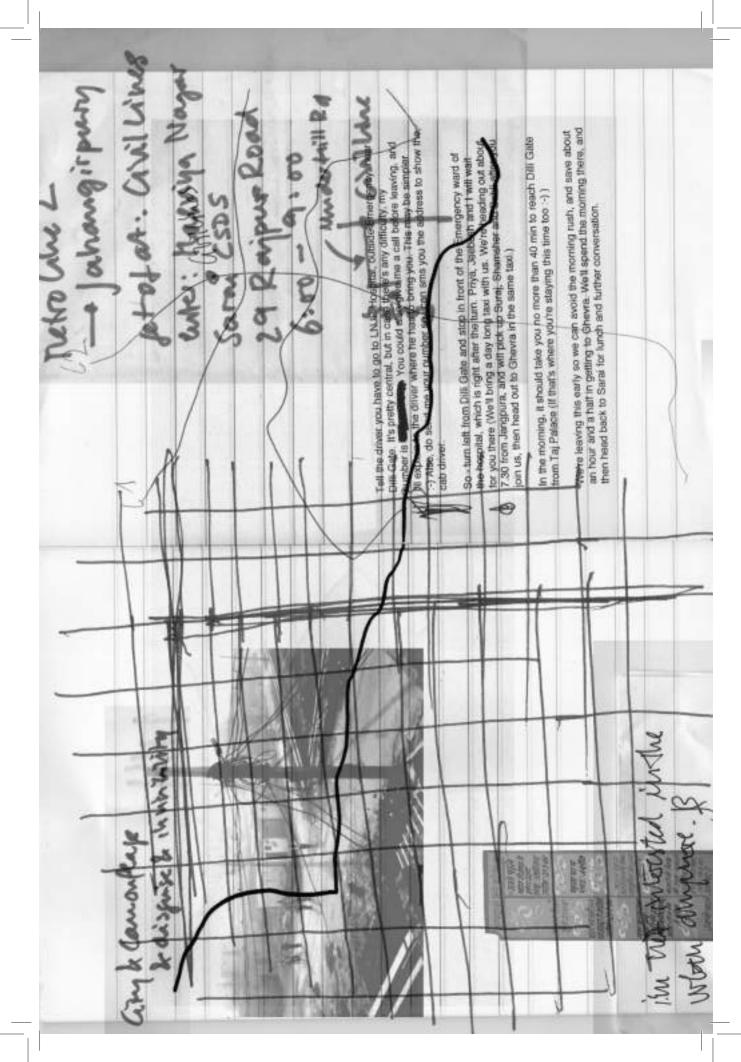
My understanding of mapping is somewhat different from that which I describe above. I, indeed, see mapping also as a way to speak about space and its transformation in a subjective way, using subjective language that is intended to remain visually silent on certain issues yet also able to be explicit about other issues. This "visual language" and its different forms of rhetoric is what I am interested in. A vocabulary that is capable of hiding, overacting, and "camouflaging" issues. Referring back to your conversations with the urban researcher: it is not about "making available" or "making legible," but striving to "sharpen our (very personal) ways of seeing space and structures."

So I went through the notes and sketches I had made two years ago during my visit to Sarai, and our journey to Sawda-Ghevra, in the far north-west of Delhi, as well as my notes and recollections from my visit to Delhi more recently, in which we discussed these topics. I found snippets of the trip from Sarai to Sawda-Ghevra and our walk around the neighborhood, and I have overlaid these with sketches and notes from my last trip (in which we had a conversation at Jeebesh's apartment). This is very personal and subjective documentation of how I experienced spatial aspects of Delhi, Sawda-Ghevra, and Cybermohalla. I would like to offer this as a starting point for a visual dialogue on space. I would like to ask you to respond to this first collage with your subjective perception of space. Please feel free to annotate, overlay, hide, add, cross out, extend, etc. Or to frame it with a quote by cartographer and author Mark Monmonier: "Not only is it easy to lie with maps, it is essential."

As my sketch focuses not on the local scale of Sawda-Ghevra but its connection to central Delhi, Sarai, the subway network, etc., maybe you could use it as a starting point. The idea is to create a shared record that works with the visual rhetoric of maps but also camouflages aspects that are not there to be legible.

The book will be out soon. So maybe my first step could be interesting (and disturbing) for the book. I am interested, most of all, in starting the process now and letting it develop over time.

All the best, Matthias



## THE SURVEY

Living today means living through many surveys. Surveys to ascertain your health, residence, resources, expenditure, education, desires, employment, travel routes, life journey, the people you know, and, of course, your identity. Surveys are conducted by the municipality, hospitals, security and welfare agencies, by social organizations, and, of course, also by researchers. Here are some responses from different surveys that never made it to any record.

Who are you?

- A traveler on this earth. An inhabitant of the sky.
- I am the shadow that casts a million shadows.
- A woman who stands by a story that is on the brink of being remembered and also being forgotten.

Where have you come from?

- I am invisible in the census. I stand outside the count.
- Some people came and moved on. I stayed back to make a drawing. I am a gust of wind upon which many pages have become stuck.

When did you come here?

- There was a harvest of photographs; one among them was cut loose.
- I left home to post a letter in the thick darkness of the night. Everyone else seemed to be roaming a letter in hand, without an address. Someone looked at me and smiled. I stayed back.

What do you do?

- We decorate the city once every month.
- I have invented 5,000 puzzles.

What all do you have in your house?

- A twenty-meter mattress.

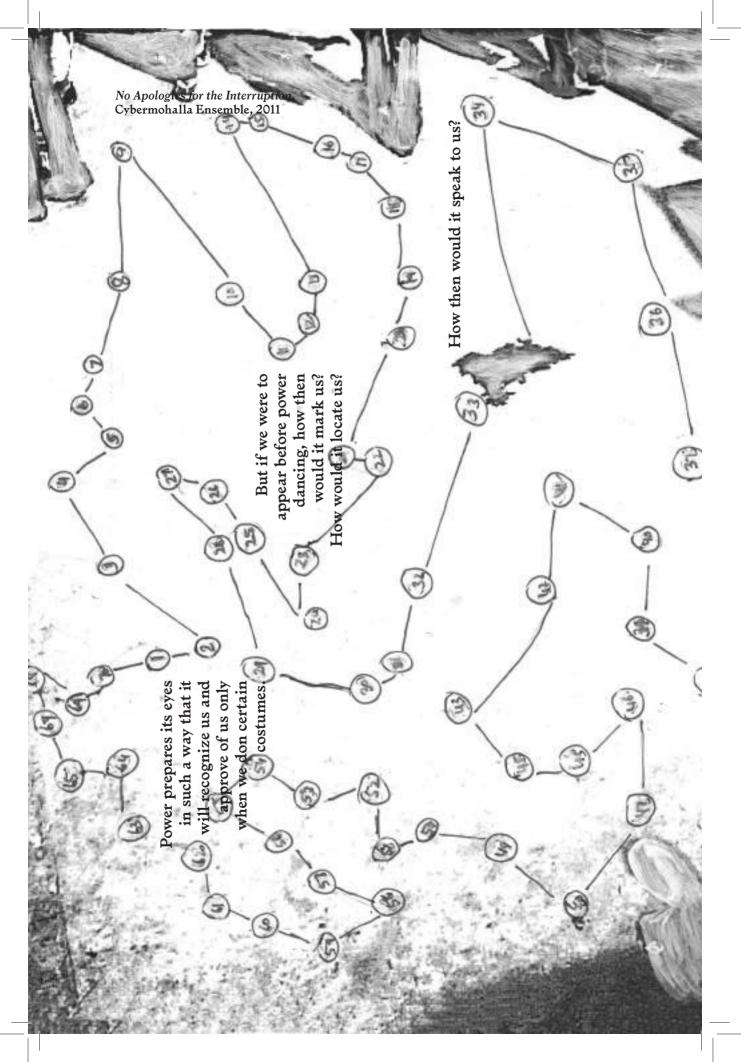
- There are 149 holes in my house.
- A clock. Some unread letters.
- An identity card in which the name and place of residence is blank.

What documents do you have of this place?

- There was a fire. There was a long line. A man was standing in the road. He was reading something out from a book. He pasted some pages on the wall. Everyone looked for their name on those pages. I have a photo that I took of myself with that man. That wall is the wall of my house.
- The missing person's poster, which was the first poster ever to adorn the walls of this place, carried my name.

What was this house made with?

- There was a blue brick on the wall in someone's house. Ants loved that brick. The brick is in the floor of my house.
- The iron beams are from Gujarat, the bricks are from Turkhman Gate, the sand that was used to make this floor came from Bihar, the design is from Dubai, and the artisans who made it are my neighbors.
- An immense palace of glass was collapsing. Those who were given the task of pulling it down wept as they did so. As it collapsed, everyone rushed forward and took from it what they could. In the foundations of this house is a shard of glass from that palace.



## IN PRAISE OF INCOHERENCE

In urban studies, in the name of "writing local histories," "asserting identity and social existence," "getting rights and entitlements," "mobilizing resistances," and more generally "mapping," there seems to be an increasing obsession to voyeuristically engage with practices that exist in the crevices of formality and legality. The nature of this engagement is extremely dangerous to the practices in question as, firstly, it exposes them and, secondly, it makes their mechanics legible to all kinds of scrutiny, thereby putting them further at risk of erasure.

For example, studies that engage with street-food enterprises typically record spaces, actors, and transactions that form the enterprises and establish clear and coherent relationships between them. Through exposing the mechanics of making and vending food on the street, they also make arguments about exploitation of labor, harassment by authorities, etc. Unintentionally, such records do another thing: they reveal many aspects that characterize the enterprises as "informal/illegal," such as the manner of sourcing and storing water, disposing waste, cooking and storing cooked food, mobilizing gas cylinders for cooking, cleaning vessels and cutlery, etc. These recordings could easily be read as a compromise in cleanliness, safety, and health issues. The readings would then force an intervention that would either promote the removal of the enterprises or formalizing them. If formality is sought, then cleanliness and safety standards would need to be followed and new infrastructures would have to be created. The

I met Raghav after several years. He showed me his old photo albums. This was one of the things he would do to start talking about old times. The conversation that followed was biographical. He spoke about how he came to Mumbai as a runaway kid and worked in a restaurant, how he got beaten up by a group of bus drivers, how he saved a rich man from ten goons trying to kill him, how he chopped off the leg of a man who had killed his friend. While all his stories were engrossing, two left me intrigued.

The first was about his dead friends. While showing me the albums, he kept pointing at his friends who had been killed. Some were stabbed, some strangled, some shot, either by the police or by other gangs. He spoke about them casually, with his wife and children around. For me, conditioned into the morals and ethics of another world, this conversation was awkward. But for him, and probably for the people he knew, it was routine.

Raghav came to Mumbai as a child in the late 1970s and worked at his uncle's restaurant at Ganga Building near Mazgaon. At night, he would sleep on the tables in the restaurant. His uncle had come to Mumbai in the mid-'60s and had managed to establish a restaurant in the industrial area of Mumbai. While some migrants got into blue- or white-collar jobs, most started working in the city's massive unorganized industries and enterprises, largely as laborers, but also sometimes as

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enterprises would then become unviable for the vendors there, as the cost of production would increase and they would be forced to close. A harmless work of urban study (which must have sought to uplift the lives of people), would end up facilitating their removal.

The contention here is that the problem comes into existence specifically because the language of urban studies either directly coincides with the languages used for scrutiny or could be easily appropriated by the systems of scrutiny—and this is the language of coherence. Often, this language is based on technolegal frameworks that establish clear relationships through empirical evidence, statistical reasoning, scientific rationality, and legal logic. Most urban studies discussions today are moderated by the judiciary, which is considered to be an ombudsman for universal justice. And so, most works end up emulating the techno-legal language for satisfying some unknown desire for legal validity. Many works have ended up becoming annexures to public interest litigations, affidavits, policy notes, and other techno-legal documents. It is as if legal or juridical acceptance has become the sole validity for these works.

On the other hand, urban studies works that do not necessarily conform to techno-legal frameworks—documentary films, blogs, websites, social-art projects, etc.—seem to deny direct appropriation by the systems of scrutiny. Still, voyeuristic obsession continues and the language of coherence remains operative; perhaps even at a higher intensity. These works are driven by the urge to appear in the public realm. Hence, the act of making records persists: records that will

owners and managers. The migrants who found place to work and sleep assisted their relatives and friends to come to Mumbai. The desperation of finding work and a place to sleep shaped them. It did not matter to them if they had to bribe a policeman or a municipal official to occupy a pavement to set up their business and earn a living. As his business required making and maintaining networks, Raghav's uncle would oblige several important people from the police, municipality, and even from the underworld. The underworld then largely smuggled gold, electronics, and cocaine. The uncle's restaurant was often used to store (hide) the smuggled goods. Because of this network, the uncle had also developed a significant social status, one that reflected in his image and mannerisms. He had become a sort of a local leader, a Robin Hood-like character who commanded respect not only owing to his dadagiri (bullish attitude), but also his generous organizational capacities. He would organize local festivals, give free food during festival days, sort out neighborhood problems with his contacts in the government department, manage chitfunds (a kind of local microfinance), provide money for people in his native village to build houses and organize elaborate ritualistic ceremonies, etc. The uncle was not only a hero for Raghav, but also for the entire community from which they hailed.

The uncle died in the early '80s, and the restaurant shut down. Raghav started working in an automobile workshop that belonged to another relative, but wasn't happy repairing cars. The image of his

uncover the hidden, expose the truth, be archived and circulated, and be put together to make arguments.

There seems to be some fascination to create such records using "real" material from the "ground." The desire and the act of seeking "legibility," in the language of these works, propel their language towards coherence.

Being coherent is not only a problem; it is also difficult—almost impossible.

I recently reviewed an edited volume on mapping urban violence in Latin-American cities. Most authors included in the book exposed actors, networks, spaces, and interactions to sketch an environment of violence. They established links between forces of globalization, migration, informalization, illegality, and slum-creation that result in a context of violence and "exclusion" in these cities. And as if almost by default, what got highlighted was the fragility of governance. This will probably be taken by a policy maker as a clear direction to focus on tightening the systems of regulation.

But another thing also happened in the book. To a person not familiar with the Latin-American context, its cities came across as dark, disturbed, and anarchic; its people without morals and ethics—clearly a limited and problematic understanding. While the language of coherence was able to build a clear story about the failure of governance, it built up an extremely problematic story too. A story that does not want to be true even though it is championed as one.

Urban contexts get shaped in complex ways. They are influenced by multiple and complicated things that sometimes seem absurd, and therefore interesting, to an urban uncle was powerful in his mind and Raghav aspired to be like him. He had made friends with petty workers of the underworld while working at the restaurant and decided to get in touch with them for better prospects. Things worked out and soon Raghav was transporting illegallymanufactured alcohol to several restaurants in the city. He slowly climbed up the ladder to become a key member in one of the gangs. He had not only managed to attain a status similar to that of his uncle, but went much beyond. People from his community would call him to resolve disputes of various kinds, especially ones that required muscle power. Younger people from the community aspired to be like Raghav and came to Mumbai. The morals and ethics of this community, like several others, were shaped differently. They were influenced by the desperation for work and the search for a place to sleep, as well as by the image of the achievers.

Now, after all those years, Raghav spoke about each of his friends from the underworld with fondness. He told many of their stories with ease, including those of their murders, as one speaks about a wedding or the birth of a child.

The second story that made me uneasy was when Raghav discussed how he found his family's naga (snake god). Raghav hailed from the Tulu Nadu region in the south of India. Native communities of Tulu Nadu worshiped ghosts, devils, and snakes with elaborate rituals. People in Tulu Nadu believe that every family has a unique naga. After a series of sudden deaths in Raghav's family, his elders advised him that maybe the family's

studies researcher. The authors of the volume seemed enamored of scenes of crime, which may otherwise be commonplace. Once enamored, they sought to find reasons and solutions for them, and in doing so sketched a clear and transparent story, completely missing out the intriguing opacity of living. Languages of coherence seem incapable of conceptualizing cities. How can it be possible to be coherent and claim to see things clearly, except by being blind to them?

Once engagement moves beyond the obsession to uncover the hidden, make clear the connections, and tell the truth, innumerable possibilities to talk about the urban realm open up and provide for a different engagement. In their inability to devise interventions, different engagements can become far more generous; become part of the very material of urban life itself. Crucially, such engagements do not allow for appropriation, as their languages are too mature for the systems of scrutiny. At this point, incoherence does not remain simply a manner of engagement; it becomes a politic.

This piece is an excerpt from "Chronicling Urban Violence—Need for Nuances," my review of the book Megacities: The Politics of Urban Exclusion and Violence in the Global South, eds. Kees Koonings and Dirk Kruijt (London: Zed Books, 2009). The review was written in September 2010 but never published as the editors of the urban studies journal that commissioned the review found it difficult to make a connection between the review and the book.

naga was not happy. Raghav's family was fairly urban and lived in the small town of Mangalore. Raghav had lived in Mumbai most of his life. Though he was familiar with the concept, he didn't know about his family's naga. After the elders' advice, he asked his relatives if any of them knew about the family naga. Nobody did. He approached many god-men and tantriks (priests performing occult rituals). One of them gave him a convincing explanation. He said that Raghav's family had split some hundred years ago and his part of the family had migrated to Mangalore. It was around this time that his family had stopped worshipping the naga. The tantrik also gave him the exact location of his family house in the northeastern part of the region. By this time Raghav had mobilized the entire industry that worked with gods, devils, and snakes. He lost no time in finding the remote location of his ancestral house and the stone image of the *naga* there. As the image was in ruins, it had to be restored. Raghav decided to build a small shrine for the naga. He spent generously on elaborate rituals. This generosity was spoken about by everyone in the community. His family, relatives, and friends believed that this was truly the best thing that he could have done for society. They knew he was a gangster, but this did not matter to them. His maternal uncle was a policeman. For members of the community, Raghav had risen higher than his uncle in social status. He had managed to find their god and make him happy.

Amitabh Kumar

ये ब्रह्मांड कर्ड असंख्य पर्ती से बना है। अ...प्याज की तश्ह

HE COLLISION

पुरा ही एक ध्रव हमारे आयाम में भी है। इतना तो तम समझ गए होने कि में दूसरे आयाम से आया हूं।

वह पर्त जिस पर हमारा ब्रह्मांड २चा होता है। इनको हम आयाम

This three-part comic series from Rai Comics is set in the vague future. Some scientists try to bring the ears abandoned Large Hadron Collider projectato life. The an state hadron reactor can control molecular frequency, which in turn controls the shape of objects. Through complexed experiments, the scientists discover that the reactor doesn't just produce energy but also opens the door to different dimensions and realms.

भंकप से यह द्वीप The present is coded within a specific molecular frequency; because of which, we cognize time and space as we do. But the present moment has been arrived at through choices for one real, from millions of possible choices. The "discarded" choices, too, come to life and exist in different dimensions and realms.

ऐसा ही एक ध्रुव हमारे आयाम में भी है। इतना तो तुम समझ So, infinite "realities" exist in their own dimensions से आया है। and realms, created by a palette of discarded choices, narratives, and paths. The reactor could potentially manipulate molecular frequencies to collide all these realities together and produce a chaotic and combustive real इनको हम आयाम

The scene is set in a mysterious island that has emerged out of nowhere Nagraj 1 goes to linspect में उसका असर Strango monatora जिल्ला हो हो है। जा का आप के बार परिवर्ग कि कि कि हो है। जा कि बार के Strange monsters appear, attack him and disappearin इस बार यह As he is about to destroy the island Nagraj 2 attacks परानी नगरी him. Then they agree to talk things out.

> २हश्य जानने के लिए ही तो हम एडी चोटी का जो२ लगा २हे हैं।

एक भीषण भूंकप से यह द्वीप समृद्र के बाहर आ गया। इसके पहले तो हम इसके बारे

## A CONVERSATION OVERHEARD

We overhear all kinds of conversations in our daily journeys. On buses, at bus stands, on trains and metros, in teashops, clubs and beauty parlors, on street corners, in libraries and markets, at our neighbors', among friends, and inside our heads. This text is from one of the fragments of conversations that we are scripting.

Voice one:

The hubbub quietens, matching step with the hour.

Voice two:

Time does not stop; it fashions new encirclements.

Voice one:

Night is calm; it lies outside boundaries.

Voice two:

It is engrossed in making and concealing many kinds of masks.

Voice three:

He has come into this world to lose himself.

Voice one:

Fireworks spew out radiance. The sparkles come out together, and yet each sparkle varies from the other. They differ in the force with which they propel themselves outward and how they fall on the ground.

Voice two:

Every player is lost in marking out his own exclusive costume.

Voice three:

What do you call a stranger you recognize in a crowd?

Voice two:

Life is a crowd of shadows that I have seen and met,

but do not recognize. The time of this crowd is not included in the measure of a day. It doesn't become my memory.

Voice three:

Can the disguises in a crowd be counted?

Voice two:

It's difficult to pose the question, "Who am I?" Through weaving, something is made; tearing keeps imaginations open. Appreciation of one's body grows with the waning and waxing of disguises.

Voice three:

Every person is a crowd of guises.

Voice two:

A perforated surface invites from either side of itself.

Voice one:

Light travels miles to illumine a wall that is frail with time, and collides with a long forgotten door.

Voice three:

Invitation—for light to fall into time.

Voice two:

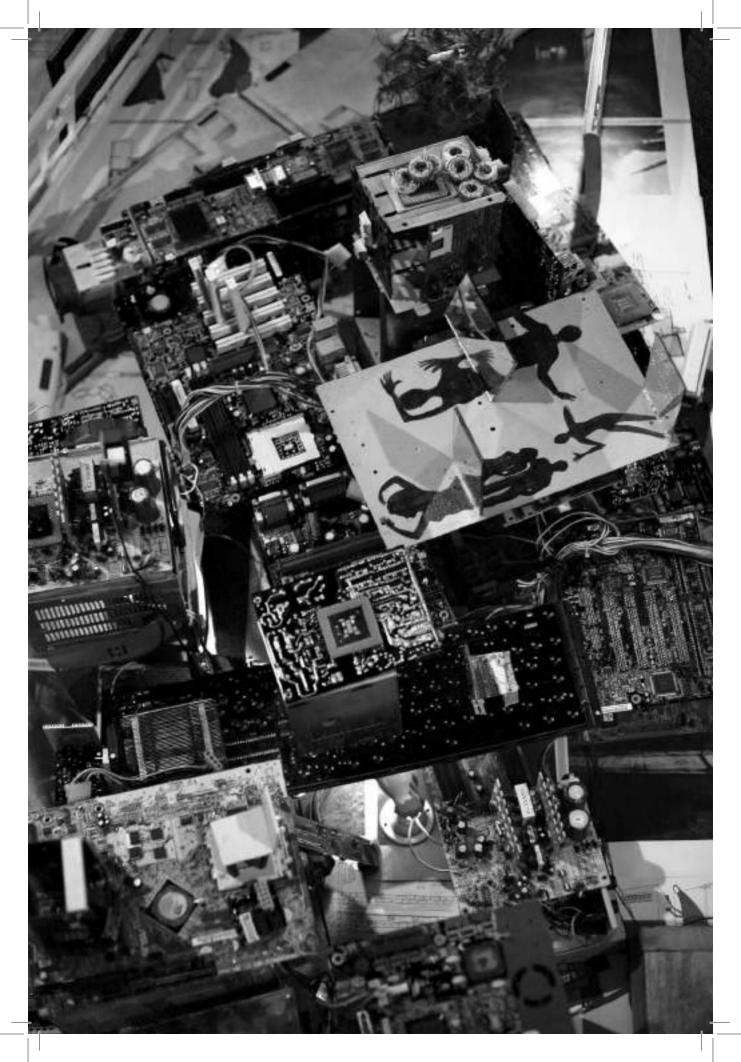
Wait—for a shadow to be formed.

Voice one:

Imagination—to go into other worlds.

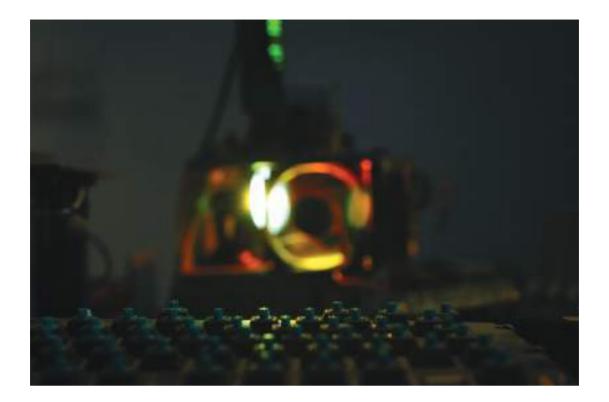
Voice one:

Dreams do not follow reality. They are enigmas, like the person who believes the future is neither freedom nor profit.











So That Affection for The City Endures (Ver 1.2), Cybermohalla Ensemble, installation views of "City as Studio 10.2," Sarai-CSDS, Delhi, 2010 (photos: Cybermohalla Ensemble)

## THAT WHICH IS NOT ONE



All that could be tamed was given a designation and assigned a work. What remained was labeled a mystery. Many forms of life are in conflict in our midst. Those conflicts that cannot be fathomed are quietly dismissed.

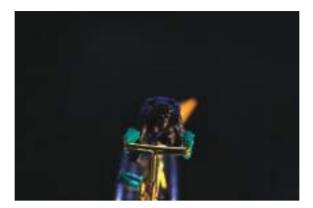
It is when we shut out voices that subdue in the name of culture—when we are guided by our desire to seek out relationships whose very possibility we have been trained to reject—that we begin to think of life in its multiple richness. At that moment, we find ourselves guided by an impulse to morph and find ourselves at the verge of trespassing accepted partitions.

"Everyone is forgetting everything. If you were to see the world from this perspective, what would you see?" Someone answered this question: "Then all of us will become animals." Can a simple thought be so strong that it exiles you from your own condition? Is to let go of one's emotions the same as becoming animal?

At what moments does the image of an animal dominate over us, and what are the images of animals through which we find joy and freedom in our lives? The coexistence of these two facets in thought is not paradoxical, for we nurture ourselves through both versions of the animal.

Animals come into our mind all the time. What is the nature of this interference?

A bird flying in the sky gives a context to the thought of being in flight.

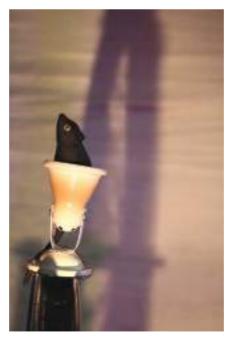


The meekness of a herd as it follows the wishes of a herdsman produces a crisis in our surety of independent thinking.

A still image of the tiger holds within it the vastness of the forest in which it prowls.

When a human is thought of as having done more than was expected of him, he is glorified as God, as angel, as messiah. When he is thought of as having fallen short, he is scorned and called an insect or animal. And when he makes a mistake, he is pardoned — for he is human after all.

When we allow into our mind the thought of stepping out of our bodies, where does our thought travel to? What shape do we then take? Or do we become formless?



So That Affection for The City Endures (Ver 1.3), Cybermohalla Ensemble, installation views of "City as Studio 10.3," Sarai-CSDS, Delhi, 2010 (photos: Cybermohalla Ensemble)

# THE ELEVENTH CITY: PRACTICE AS POLITICS

One has to be prepared to receive brilliance in one's life. [A day of] special connection with the world.

— Cybermohalla Ensemble, "The Eleventh Question," see p. 5.

In an age of heavy planning, grand narratives, and the promise of emancipatory zeal in a homogenized market, the first ten questions come easy. But, taking a cue from the Cybermohalla Ensemble, can we think about the eleventh city?

Would the eleventh city be constituted on multiple planes, some opposing and contesting, others operating in parallel to each other? Would there be a dynamic within which these positions could be fluid? Would this recognition of multiple narratives open the city as an unsettled and open-ended political field? As Prasad Shetty points out, it would be a world that desires an engagement beyond coherence.

A closer look at local histories points to unstable terrains. These terrains remain fearful to policy makers, activist NGOs, and globally-connected financial institutions. Their fear and discomfort stem from a politics of the poor that cannot be conceptualized within the easy frames of policy, programs, and academic categories mobilized to describe "poverty." The politics of policy seeks to make legible and transparent the inherent opacity of the city, and desires political closures. Bangalore, the IT powerhouse and the city in which I have been residing for some time now, has seen numerous efforts to map its complex and illegible terrains of economy, slums, and traffic. These are framed within the rationality of "unplanned development," "exploitative informal economy," "slums and encroachments," and "congestion." From this emphasis on policy follows the rationality of a "civil society" in partnership with "organized" party politics that seeks electoral reform to control corruption. Following Jacques Rancière, we can argue that both politics and policy act as police.

Let me outline three planes that disrupt and unsettle the axis of policy-politics-police in many cities.

The first: an economy constituted by small firms embedded in the very fabric of the localities in which they emerge and that house them, and in which artifacts are reengineered. The improvised and self-taught practices of reengineering thwart hegemonic patent control and the hold of authorship. These economies are ubiquitous, embedded, and networked within cities of the South. They are not one-off symbolic "experiments" in an alternative economy led by "people with vision."

The second: land, whose diverse forms of tenure have evolved over decades to redistribute real estate surpluses and blur the line between

landlord and tenant. This blurring builds the possibility of joining the first plane, that of economy, with this plane, of land. It lays the foundation for an interconnection between small firms through economic and political ties. And here another blurring occurs, that of owner/management and worker.

The third plane relates to a politics that contests the terms staged by the democratic events of hyper-visible and disempowering party politics. This political plane, when interlinked with the first two, namely economy and land, plays out a fluidity that refuses easy categorization.

The elite and policy makers seek contiguous territorial boundaries, which are a must for mega projects such as Special Economic Zones (SEZ), grand housing projects, gigantic airports, etc. They confront an impossible situation in the re-conveyance and reassembly of land built on by occupants in stealth-like operations and through maneuvering local administrative procedures. Most importantly, perhaps, this contest comes in forms that refuse the categories set up by the authorities. Take for example north Goa's localities, which, when faced with their land being notified for acquisition for SEZs and Coastal Regulatory Zones (CRZ) in favor of big business, mobilized the Portuguese land group tenures known as comunidades to unsettle the rationality of law set in place via the colonial land acquisition act. Moreover, they extend their history of claims to an even earlier local Konkani tenure system known as gaunkary. In Bangalore's periphery, the Thigalas (Tamil gardeners who settled here during the colonial administration) have reworked administrative procedures around nurseries to counter the moves for acquisition of their land for the IT-BT corridor. Much of this manner of politics operates through fractures, and in hydra-like forms. It is such histories that shape unexpected spaces.

Power prepares its eyes in such a way that it will recognize us and approve of us only when we don certain costumes. [...] But if we were to appear before power dancing, how would it locate us or speak to us?

— Cybermohalla Ensemble, from No Apologies for the Interruption, see p. 100.

Can the disguises in a crowd be counted?

— Cybermohalla Ensemble, "A Conversation Overheard," see p. 107.

Let us return to Cybermohalla Ensemble to think a politics that emerges from the shadows. We need to take concealment and opacity seriously. Opacity is deeply material: getting land serviced by mobilizing local bureaucrats to "creatively" implement procedures to allow for water and electricity lines which will facilitate street lighting and heavier loads for manufacturing. As they say in their book *No Apologies for the Interruption*:

This was the atmosphere in which people built their houses at that time, when this place was just beginning to be made. While they made their homes, it was as if the foundations for the shape the entire neighborhood would take over time were being laid through words, scenes, and gatherings in each heart.

Such is a politics of stealth, of movement, of roaming, in which:

to be a drifter [...] to be a wanderer [...] to be lost [...] to find paths away. [...] The heart is always in search of something else, something apart, something more.

And like Manan repairing radios, it is the drifting streams of technologies that intermix progress and speed, where small means the possibility to share one's curiosity.

One waits and watches for new things to come. About things which you feel are beyond you, you ask people who know more than you. In this way, you create a relationship with them in which they share what they know with you, and this is important for us. [...] No one knows everything. Everyone has to take someone's help at some point of time. Everyone—from the small apprentice to the big master.

Such embedded materiality can be explored in parts of Delhi: Bhogal, Jungpura Extension, Mayur Vihar, and Shashi Garden. These are complex spaces in a constant dynamic of construction, the flurry of the weekly markets and memories of being migrants, of settling in, of evictions being subverted and negotiated. It is this intensity of "city building" that creates histories of significance. A casual walk through a city can disrupt ideas and rationales. A passing conversation with a property dealer can unravel the complex fluidity of land titles. This complexity disrupts narratives motivated by anxiety and the intent to "projectify" under the regime of policy and police. It also disrupts received categories of the "perfect" city through vocabularies of central and outer, planned and non-planned—all of which disconnect the city from its history and generative force, and hint at spaces being instantly vaporized and evicted.

Where, then, are the boundaries of the city, and why do we accept a disciplining through the search for perfection? Or can we—taking from the provocative article by Hito Steyerl excerpted below—think of the "Imperfect City" whose countless transfers create another kind of value? Can we explore territorialization as being usefully constituted out of such collisions and seepages?

Altogether, poor images present a snapshot of the affective condition of the crowd, its neurosis, paranoia, and fear, as well as its craving for intensity, fun, and distraction. [...] [It] speaks also of the countless transfers and reformatting, but also of the countless people who cared enough about them to convert them over and over again, to add subtitles, reedit, or upload them. [...] Apart from resolution and exchange value, one might imagine another kind of value defined by velocity, intensity, and spread.

<sup>—</sup> Hito Steyerl, "In Defense of the Poor Image," e-flux journal 10 (November 2009).

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## QUESTIONS TO ASK A CITY

10. HOW DO THINGS ENTER AND LEAVE; HOW ARE THEY BUILT AND HOW DO THEY DECAY?

WHAT IS MODIFIABLE?

HOW CAN THINGS BE ATTACHED ON TO ONE ANOTHER?

AT WHAT POINT DOES IDEA BECOME INFRASTRUCTURE?

WHAT ARRANGES SPEEDS?

HOW DOES THE CITY FEEL TO A RAT, A HUMAN, A BANK?

WHAT IS INSIDE AND WHAT IS OUTSIDE?

HOW MANY GRADATIONS OF WASTE ARE THERE?

DOES SWEAT TASTE DIFFERENT ACCORDING TO THE WORK THAT PRODUCED IT?

9. WHAT HAS AN ADDRESS?

ARE THERE ANY CERTIFIED
MEANS TO BRING ABOUT WHAT
IS LONGED FOR BUT UNSPOKEN?

IF FROM THE TOP OF THE TALLEST TOWER CAN BE SEEN JUST A LITTLE FURTHER OVER THE HORI-ZON, HOW MUCH MORE SUNSET?

HOW PERFECT ARE THE CORNERS OF ROOMS?

WHERE IS THE DEEPEST, MOST PROFOUND INSOMNIA TO BE HAD?

HOW IS IT POSSIBLE TO EVAPORATE?

WHICH CAME FIRST, SEWAGE OR DRINKING WATER?

WHAT IS THE MOST THOUGHTFUL SPECIES TO EAT?

WHAT MUST BE SMUGGLED?

IF THE RATIO OF COCKROACHES TO BUTTERFLIES IS TO BE IMPROVED, MUST SLUGS WORK HARDER?

8. TO THOSE IN THE CITY WHO ARE NUMB WITH EXHAUSTION BEYOND BEARING, HAVE YOU TRIED SPECIAL TABLETS?

DO YOU, AS A CITY, OBJECTIFY
THE MOST SOPHISTICATED
KNOWLEDGE IN A PHYSICAL
LANDSCAPE OF EXTRAORDINARY
COMPLEXITY, POWER, AND
SPLENDOR AT THE SAME TIME
AS YOU BRING TOGETHER SOCIAL
FORCES CAPABLE OF THE MOST
AMAZING SOCIO-TECHNICAL
AND POLITICAL INNOVATION?

OF THE NAMES OF THE CITY, WHICH ARE CURSES?

ARE THERE ANY OBSERVANCES TO BE MADE WHEN MOVING IN OR OUT OF A PLACE? Matthew Fuller 117

WHICH WORDS, WITHOUT AN INTERMEDIARY, CAN BE DIRECTLY EXCHANGED FOR FOOD?

WHO COMPOSITES DISINTEREST?

WHAT IS AFTER ALL THE INTERSECTIONS?

WHO EATS WHAT IS LEFT?

7. WHAT IS A GIVEN FOR WHAT?

IS THERE A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE MARKERS OF STRANGENESS AND THOSE OF FAMILIARITY?

HOW MANY DOORS DO YOU NEED TO MAKE A FLOOR?

IF A PHOTOGRAPH IS TAKEN, HOW MUCH DARKNESS CAN IT REVEAL?

WHICH BUILDINGS DESIGN THEMSELVES?

IS THERE ONE CODE TO TRANSLATE ALL OTHERS WITHOUT ITSELF BEING BREAKABLE?

6. WHO IS SAFE?

WHEN DOES A PALACE BECOME A CUPBOARD?

WHO ARE THE CONNOISSEURS OF CHAOS?

HOW MANY ROOMS ARE INHAB-ITED ONLY BY INVESTMENTS?

IS WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE THE SAME AS WHAT IT DOES?

WHICH EDGES ARE CONDUITS?

WHO RESPECTS THE DELICACY OF LETTERBOXES?

5. WHERE IS THE TONGUE AT HOME?

IS THERE AN OFFICE FOR THE AIR BETWEEN WALLS?

WHAT GROWS?

WHAT SONGS ARE SUNG BY THOSE WHO CANNOT WITHSTAND THEIR WORK?

WHAT IS FIRST TO COLLAPSE?

4. DOES THE ARCHITECTURE OF SLEEP HAVE A SCHOOL?

WHAT SHRIEK OF JOY IS THAT?

IS IT REASONABLE TO ASSUME THAT ALL DOCUMENTS ARE FORGED?

WHAT BUILDS UP?

3. WHAT IS FOUND BY ACCIDENT?

WHAT JUMPS SCALES?

DOES THE IDEA OF HOME REQUIRE MEDICINE?

2. WHO FILES THE COMPLAINTS?

CAN YOU WASH YOUR FACE WITH A BUILDING?

1. AT WHAT DEGREE OF HETERO-GENEITY DOES THE IDEA OF A WHOLE COME ABOUT? 118 Ravi Sundaram

## DREAM TEXTS, REVERIE, AND FEAR

I have encountered a dream text. This is not an invitation into a dream, or a projection of many, like the early magic lanterns or phantasmagorias, a parade of word-ghosts and shadows in a landscape of the present. This is more a kind of out-folding of the dream, where there is no fantastic journey into the self, or a reverie of secular souls.

The charge is life itself, for if "everything else is ordinary," then what is the everyday or ordinary? What is critical about the text is the way in which it works around these foci. The everyday is not to be overturned, exposed, or made visible. A series of encounters (and these are *encounters*) are obtained dramatically: sometimes a mask is torn, only to reveal another one behind, and so on.

Take the notation on the official neighborhood survey conducted by the municipal body (see "On Writing," pp. 14–20). It produces an encounter:

a (brutal) face-off with oneself and raises the question, "How do I/we narrate this moment/place to others in the world?" Do we re-present, destabilize, or produce

a series of disjunctions through writing about the present? This is a crucial question for anyone writing in the current urban landscape, which knows of no other language than alterity, counter-memory, and resistance. The survey produces all these reactions, as well as a scholarship of counter-survey and counter-knowledge, and a yearning to enact or render critical the objects of official knowledge. This is the great radical archive of counter-knowledge of the city over most part of the last one hundred years; official knowledge matched by the non-official, mainstream versus radical, spectacle and counter-spectacle.

If we depart from this mode of writing, that is, writing about and writing in aid of, we make a significant detour. Thus, "to write by dislodging yourself does not mean to write in opposition to something or someone. It is to cross the borders of your thought and be faced by your own self" ("On Writing," p. 19). Then the critical question: what does facing oneself mean? Perhaps there is no "one," but a place without an outside, without a "return ticket." Here, the tasks of writing for and writing about do not exist. Instead, words emerge out of a series of confrontations, and from looking, seeing, and touching.

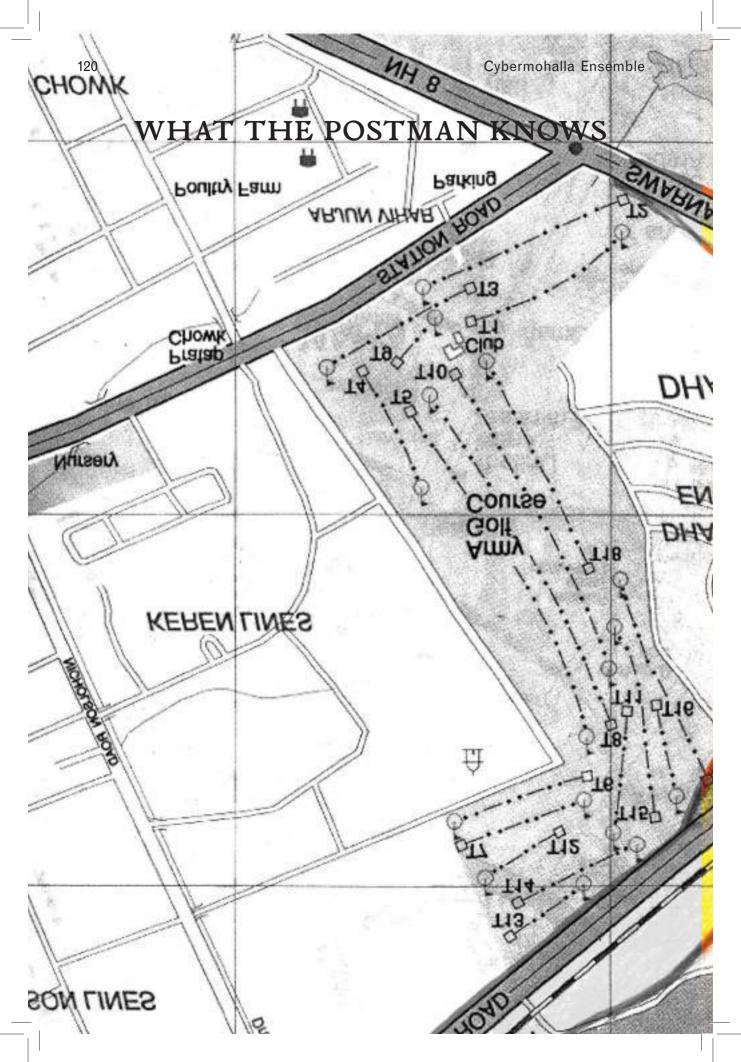
The conventions of writing for and writing about are the only ways in which life in cities has been narrated in much of our time, and the imagistic catalogue is long: slums, sewers, pollution, congestion, death, disease, darkness. Against which emancipation, redemption, planning, the fresh air, parks, and cities of light are arraigned. The latter infuses the law of the city, which

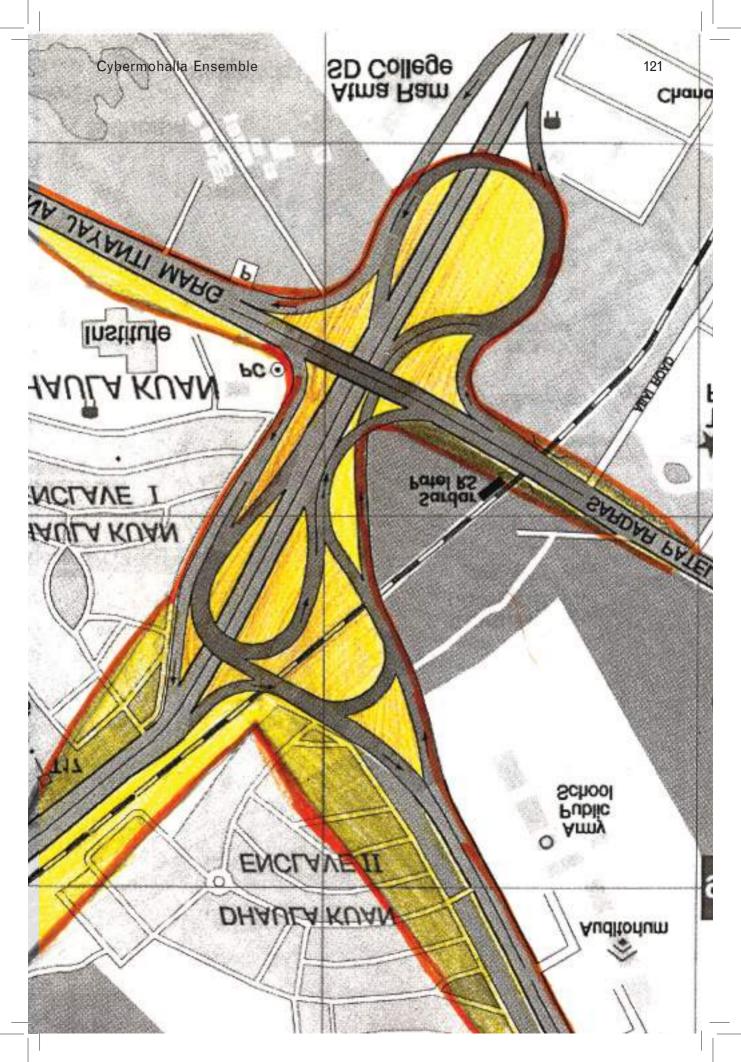
Ravi Sundaram 119

has positioned itself as both the language of urban power and the visions of its opponents. Colonial reformers, social movements, and powerful critics of urban planning have positioned themselves within this language of reform and transformations, for what could be more radical than a city of light?

The city of light now lies in ruins, but the voice of urban writing has yet to find itself a place in the new metropolis. The remarkable thing about the enterprise initiated by Cybermohalla Ensemble is the new kind of writing it has engendered, one unburdened by the project of writing for and writing about, as I call it. It mixes an ambiguity of words and a sharpness of insight that provoke a series of speculations about the everyday. It is like a form of life that has no necessary language, but is, rather, a series of endless possibilities. Writing is not simply the assembly and reassembly of thought, rather the pushing of thought in directions beyond the usual ways of thinking about many things: love, death, violence, terror. What is more, this does not relate to text alone: space and form (see the discussion about Cybermohalla Hub on pp. 125–7) can fold out and in, contract and expand, and challenge the model of a stable building.

"Fear, that he will lose his thoughts amid the changes in place" (see "I Am in Time," p. 81). This mixture of reverie and melancholia is the haunting of contemporary time. Thus powerfully, and movingly, the ensemble's writing is the anti-manifesto for the present.

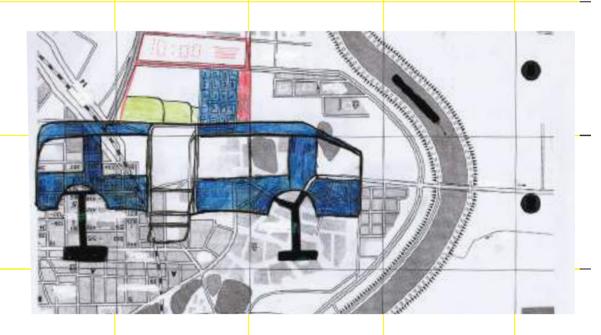


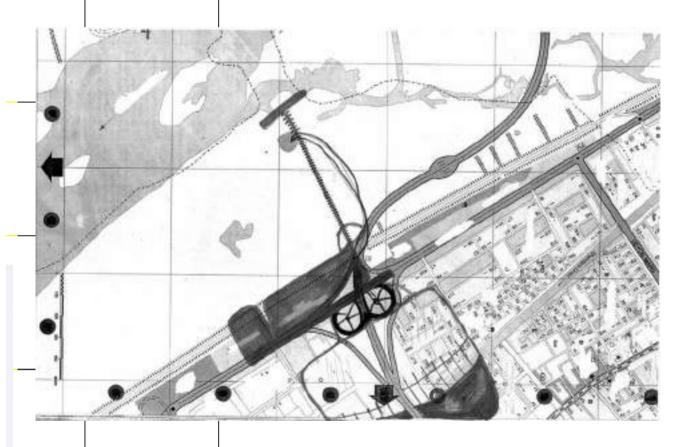




## Cybermohalla Ensemble



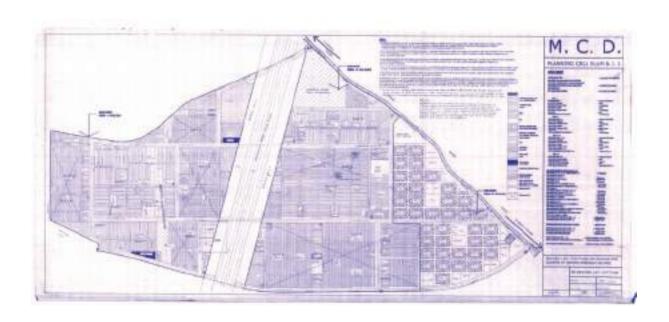




No Apologies for the Interruption, Cybermohalla Ensemble, 2011



Making of the grid, Sawda-Ghevra, 2008 (photo: Cybermohalla Ensemble)



Masterplan for Sawda-Ghevra by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), accessed 2007 (courtesy Ankur: Society for Alternatives in Education)

#### CONVERSATION ABOUT THE HUB

A conversation between Nikolaus Hirsch, Michel Müller, and the Cybermohalla Ensemble about presenting the Hub as a temporary pavilion in Delhi, July 2010.

NIKOLAUS HIRSCH—How can we continue our work on the Cybermohalla Hub? After years of collaborative workshops, discussions, and writing, we have recently built a number of prototypes in museums and biennials around the world. In trying to construct a permanent version of the hub on a three-by-six-meter parcel in the northwestern periphery of Delhi, we are still negotiating with the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD). Should we give up the aim of a consolidated structure and expand the temporary condition? Can we think of the temporary and the permanent as non-oppositional, but as one thing in different conditions? Can we work out a movement between the two?

AZRA TABASSUM — We could do something that keeps a doubt between the real and the imagined. So that when one sees the hub and what is in it, one is in doubt about whether it really exists somewhere or is an imaginary place.

NH — To produce a sense of speculation, which is also what the hub is: a proposal, a speculation.

LOVE ANAND — Our practices are often "incomplete." They are not self-concluding. For instance, even when we make a print publication like a broadsheet, in it we leave an invitation to write, or to converse further about something. It's the same with the texts we write—they are not conclusions of a thought or decisive texts about events. Rather, they give a sense of something ongoing. Similarly, versions of the hub can become hosts for others. Not conclusions of a process of making something, but rather spaces for thinking and investigating over a long duration. So that when one encounters any version of the hub, she or he thinks of the "how" question, not "what" or "where."

NH — The hub could be continuously changing and evolving. Even after its construction, it could extend upwards and sideways and continue to be in making.

LA — We could incorporate the traveling of the building—from one location to the next and from one version to another—into the space of the building. A weaving-together of "living" and "moving." When something expands, it expands into something else.

MICHEL MÜLLER — Also, we have been thinking that we would like all of us to make the building with the artisans who will build it.

NH—There are ideas from the beginning of our work that are coming back. Initially, we had wanted the building to become part of the ensemble's practice itself, so that it could slowly grow over time with all of you making it according to how you want to. Then we realized a certain distribution of labor. Certain types of work, such as foundation work, structural parts, and infrastructure, require professionals, while other parts allow for collaborative production.

AT—When space is built together, and with the conception that it will expand in all directions, it also implies that content will not come into it to become stilled. Instead, it will always remain in movement.

NH—How would we keep things moving? It seems as if we do not want the project to be finished—so how can we continue? By constantly constructing, changing, and expanding?

AT — Expansion always comes with contradictions. There is a saying in my neighborhood: "Expansion is always expansion into something else." So when something expands, it eats into something else, and there is a continuous tension. But there is also another saying: "Break the wall and take in the space." This is the double tension in expansion. It will be interesting if the hub creates a different ambience where, on seeing this expandable building, people would instead say, "Yes, expand! Expand into my space." Expansion then becomes an invitation into something, a movement.

NH—The idea of expansion and of its necessary contradictions and conflicts seem to imply the temporariness of a pavilion.

LA — In this way, our sense of the building will be similar to how we sense our body: where we can put weight, how much weight we can take, how much we can stretch, which part is strong, which is weak, etc.

LAKHMI KOHLI—This building is neither a home nor a shop. It is neither selling anything nor is it a place to reside in. The way this place builds will be important: from it, people will draw possibilities for the spaces they build. The hub can produce thoughts about incorporating elements of how space is built into our lives. This experimentation in a present-continuous tense—that is, always being in making—in which we all contribute, also allows for thinking about how we build. The hub gives clarity and an image to this thinking and how it can be brought into a building. Connectivity

between the different stages of the hub's construction can become more possible in this way. When I was making the first floor of my house, I wanted a structure like the Stockholm version of the hub on one of my walls. When I told the mason this, he replied, "Oh, so you want a cupboard." I clarified that no, the different shelves are of different sizes. He said, "But it will look cluttered then. It will crowd the room, feel too close to you." But that was exactly my argument: that I don't want a wall, I don't want a separation from the outside; rather, I want an extension into the world. I also wanted different things on this wall to be connected with each other, which this kind of a structure makes possible.

NH — The structure is actually a masonry technique that allows for a geometrically-flexible model. It functions like a 3-D wallpaper.

MM — If the size of the material changes, the structure, too, changes.

NH—It can adapt to changing geometries and materials; adapting and exposing the conflict between structure, use, and display.

LA—I am also thinking of the idea of adoption/adaption. Supposing the hub, after it is made, is given to three older women who are homemakers, will they make a home out of it, or something else? That is, if they adopt it for a week, how will they adapt it?

BABLI RAI—If the hub is made like it is being proposed, it will break the idea of how a building is made and also get incorporated into the daily act of making and building. There is no separation here between making and inhabiting.

LA — The non-recognizability of the hub is a crucial thing. Because it is non-recognizable, the questions one considers are no longer based on the opposition of the building as outside and content as inside.

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## HUB AS THE CITY

We would like to suggest transposing Cybermohalla Hub with the city of Delhi. What if it were Delhi that was confined to three-by-six meters somewhere in the Cybermohalla matrix, which would eventually cover what is now known as Delhi? It would be a gigantic hub that would produce fiction, conversations, and blogs, and that would have outgrown its material—the city—but somehow would still long for, and depend upon, what is left in the three-by-six meters to fuel thinking and writing. In a practical and architectural sense, what would such a mini-city look like, and how could we ensure that we construct it in a way that does not obstruct the irregularities and vitality that were part of what was once known as Delhi?

# THE REALITY OF THE UNREALIZED

HANS ULRICH OBRIST — In a lecture about our "Indian Highway" exhibition (for which you also collaborated with M. F. Husain), I addressed the situation of Indian architecture. Obviously, there is B. V. Doshi and Charles Correa. There is a great tradition of modern architecture including Le Corbusier in Chandigarh and Kahn in Ahmedabad. Today one talks a lot about Indian art, but not so much about new Indian architecture. There is the practice of Studio Mumbai, which finds a local language and puts it into a global context in a very integrated way. Several Indian artists pointed out to me, "But there is Cybermohalla Hub by Nikolaus Hirsch, Michel Müller, and the Cybermohalla Ensemble." I am interested in how this became a German-Indian project.

NIKOLAUS HIRSCH—This Indo-German constellation raises the question of how I can contribute to a situation that by definition is local. Mohalla means neighborhood, and I am neither a neighbor nor do I understand Hindi. We could think of it in the rather simplistic categories of German/Indian or in a broader sense of the local and the global, yet I think that it is necessary to go beyond this unproductive dichotomy. Local versus global is limiting, whereas all those spaces are intertwined and multidimensional.

HUO — You say that we should go beyond the dichotomy to address things in a holistic way. This morning just before I met you, I was re-reading Édouard Glissant's La cohée du lamentin. He said that you shouldn't use the terminology "local" and "global," but instead the term mondialité. Glissant has been in my toolbox for many years now. I really do believe that his idea of mondialité is relevant here, that the whole world is very much an idea of a place where we can actually enter a global dialogue that does not annihilate difference but produces difference. I think this idea of producing a reality, which enhances difference, is very much at the core of your Cybermohalla Hub vision.

NH—For me, Glissant's texts are less tools or answers, but rather questions that go beyond the cliches of foreign, exotic, local, global. Cybermohalla Hub is more a question of how one can find or make a place in the world, under the conditions of mondialité. The question might start with a detail in the neighborhood, but it's not limited to it. The question is also a spatial question: what is this space in the world if one starts with the name mohalla, i.e., neighborhood? It's quite clear to me that in such a project one should not be limited to

the neighborhood, which itself is a totally ideological concept. So to think about a space for a small institution in Delhi also implied, from the very beginning, components of this space that were somewhere else in the world. This is what happened, for instance, as an installation at the large-scale exhibition, Manifesta 7, in Bolzano.

HUO—I saw that installation. It was a kind of springboard engendering a proliferation of sites and projects. For Glissant, La cohée du lamentin is a small patch of land from which one thinks of the world. One could also say that there is a small patch of land in Delhi from which one thinks of the world. Maybe it's interesting to talk a little bit more about this. Where is this patch of land? Your site seemed to be under Oulipian constraints. Oulipo developed a whole literature movement out of constraints: a novel without ever using the letter "e" or poems written between one metro station and the next. Another example is Brian Aldiss, the English science fiction writer who wrote mini novellas where the rule of the game was for each to contain only fifty words.

NH — Yes, there is a connection to parameters and small entities. It's very much about these small units, patches of land, even of words. The size and proportions are developed from the size of the plot. All starts from there. The trajectory of the past four years was that at one point we had a piece of land in Delhi. The basic element derived from an urban grid for 500,000 people. Three-by-six meters. Nothing has ever happened on this piece of land but, nevertheless, Cybermohalla was there as a group of practitioners and a project that became a trigger for many other things.

HUO—Is Cybermohalla Hub the Fun Palace of the twenty-first century? It's interesting that the Fun Palace has produced a reality without ever having been built. The hub follows me wherever I am, yet the patch of land is still empty. It's almost like building around an empty center.

NH — Cybermohalla Hub is like an exploded Fun Palace: it comprises constantly moving fragments and components around an empty building. Although being an architect who is interested in physicality and sometimes even inertia, I think more and more that the hub should not be built as a permanent building on a piece of land, exactly for the reasons you mentioned. Built or unbuilt, the hub is in Delhi and many other places in the world, such as Copenhagen, Vienna, and New York.

HUO—I was wondering, why Delhi?

NH — First of all, it was an invitation by the Cybermohalla Ensemble.

Delhi is a place where architecture has never really made sense to me. It became more of a knowledge system, a city that is made more of thoughts, pieces of texts and fragments of physical structures. With such dynamic transformation, urban planning is always a bit too late. And the spatial dimension of Delhi is probably negotiated more through intellect than building.

HUO—Cedric Price always told me, "We need neologies." Words make things travel, and Price was obsessed with the idea of coining neologisms. Obviously, Cybermohalla is also a neologism because it uses the traditional notion of the neighborhood, the mohalla, in the context of our cyber age.

NH—The neologism is crucial here. Cybermohalla is an ambivalent name, and therefore explanations are often a bit vague. So the name is sometimes more present than the practice. It is a device for a concept, a trigger to begin something, and as a name it dealt and still deals with the difference between the cyber world and maybe something that is physical about a place—the neighborhood—but I think these are not oppositions. As we said earlier, this is not ... one cannot say that the cyber world is the global world and the mohalla world is the small neighborhood, because I think they are totally intertwined, and the neologism here is a generator, but also, at some point, the neologism becomes a proper name that includes all sorts of projects that actually escape the original concept. I think that it is also interesting how a project or a name changes its meaning and becomes more speculation, and within Cybermohalla there's actually the attempt to almost escape some of the original assumptions about the project.

HUO — The Cybermohalla Hub trope raises this issue of how an unrealized project can actually produce reality. That is why I think the connection to the Fun Palace is so interesting. I think there is barely any museum project that in one way or another does not have a sort of a Fun Palace connection, either by embracing or rejecting it: the non-Fun Palace or the anti-Fun Palace.

NH — But is the Pompidou more interesting than the Fun Palace? Is the real museum more relevant than the unrealized project? Probably not: the history of architecture is unthinkable without unbuilt projects.

Huo—There are many different aspects to this notion of the unbuilt. Projects that are too big, projects that are too small, projects that are censored. There is this whole notion of self-censorship, as Dorris Lessing has said. Self-censorship includes, obviously, all the projects we didn't dare to do—which is not to forget the projects that are competition entries that have been forgotten, the locker projects. Projects

that are partially realized projects, or completely unrealized. There are also unrealizable projects. There is such a vast range of possibilities—of dimensions—to the unbuilt. It is a very rich category. In the world of architecture, the unrealized project is a recurring theme, and often in architecture reality is first produced by being published. In literature, film, music, art, science, we don't really know much about the unrealized projects. Hence, my endeavor to systematically map out these categories of the unbuilt and make an archive of these unrealized projects. And the Cybermohalla Hub question leads us also to my own unrealized projects. With the question of the unrealized project—the question I always ask when interviewing people—it's very often reciprocated back to me, about my own unrealized projects. After the 1851 Crystal Palace and 1960/61 Fun Palace, the thing to do now is a palace of unbuilt roads. A palace or a building for all these unrealized projects. Nikolaus, what is your unrealized project? Is the Cybermohalla Hub possibly your big unrealized project?

NH — Yes, but it also shows that an unrealized project should not be realized in a traditional way. Maybe the hub's realization is just to continue talking about it, to continue making small gestures, to endlessly continue the installations, constructing prototypes. Never going further than the prototype. Always remaining in the "proto" condition, always "before" the almost too real. In this sense, the reality of this structure is always questioned. And that keeps a project more alive than actually realizing, i.e., finishing it in a traditional way.

### ARE YOU REAL?

NIKOLAUS HIRSCH — The new version of the Cybermohalla Hub at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art includes a workshop installation that we developed together. It addresses the relevance of writing and publishing within the practice of the Cybermohalla project. We exhibit books by the Cybermohalla Ensemble and their peers at the Cybermohalla labs, like Trickster City and Galiyon Se/by lanes, broadsheets, booklets, magazines, and wallpapers. Yet this instance of the hub is not only a space of presentation but also a site of production: the production of a new book. What is your approach to the relation between the space of the museum and the space of publishing?



Preview of this book displayed at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Copenhagen, 2011

ZAK KYES — Before trying to address this relationship, I should mention how this situation came about and describe the spaces themselves. As part of the exhibition, "Living," at the Louisiana Museum a new prototype of the Cybermohalla Hub was commissioned, which you designed with Michel Müller. In turn, I was invited, as a graphic designer, to imagine a site-specific installation connected to the hub that could display the production of, in this case, a book.

The idea of the Print Studio as a site for activities combining writing, editing, designing, and displaying, is something that we collectively speculated about in Delhi with members of the Cybermohalla Ensemble, but it was first realized here, in Denmark. This has been an opportunity to bring together the ensemble and Shveta Sarda, Grégory Ambos, Michel Müller, and yourself to activate the Print Studio through a public workshop.

This is a topic I have addressed in previous exhibition projects such as "Cosey Complex" at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, or "On-Site" at the Architectural Association, both of which are in London, which dealt with the real-time production of texts, printing, and publishing. This is all happening within a large subterranean gallery at the Louisiana Museum that contains the hub and, annexed to it, the Print Studio. This space is composed of a few simple elements: a workshop space consisting of four tables with chairs and benches, two laser printers, a storage unit, and a display surface on which current work is pinned.

The museum space and the publication are both sites in which the exhibition unfolds. Despite the physicality of an exhibition, installed within the built structure of a museum, the ephemerality and lightness of the book is ironically more durable and of greater influence. It provides access to more people who could never enter the exhibition.



Discussion between Nikolaus Hirsch, Michel Müller, Zak Kyes, Grégory Ambos, Cybermohalla Ensemble, and Shveta Sarda about the design of this book at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Copenhagen, 2011

NH — What does it mean to exhibit the production of a book? Our concept defies the traditional assumptions about book production in the museum. The work does not follow the logic of a sequential time concept but a reiterative process. We questioned the role models that are involved in publishing. To quote Bruno Latour, this is about "making things public."

ZK—Exhibiting this process in a gallery places it within a public arena, materializing an otherwise invisible process. Publishing, like writing, editing, and graphic design, is usually carried out individually, in private spaces such as offices and studios, and is only

made public when the criticism has already been offered and the decisions have already been taken. One of the assumptions that the book could challenge is the model of exhibition publications as a means to document or claim reality. Instead of reiterating the content of the exhibition, our work is an attempt to create a new space for debate and exchange.

But publishing is not just about offering something to a public, it is also about articulating a nexus of contributions, views, responses, and positions that exist beyond what is exhibited. This working method shifts the role of a graphic designer from providing a "straight" service to a hybrid practice somewhere between exhibiting, publishing, and designing—encompassing editing, coordinating, planning, and facilitating.

NH — Your hybrid practice as graphic designer, editor, art director, and curator seems to imply a shift from "service" to "authorship." Do you locate your work beyond the limitations of the applied world?

ZK — That's an interesting question. Within recent graphic design history, this could be interpreted as pointing towards a keystone debate about what it means for a graphic designer to be an "author" (and this has been very well articulated by Michael Rock in the article "Graphic Authorship"). However, in relationship to my practice the terms "service" and "authorship" are not particularly helpful as I do not consider the two conditions as being mutually exclusive, but always existing in a hybrid form.

I would not locate my practice beyond the applied world, in an autonomous realm that is independent of external impetuses. My practice is firmly based on the realities of exchange and collaboration with an understanding that graphic design is always embedded within specific contexts. What the question suggests is that the conditions surrounding graphic design can be negotiated, challenged, or invented. This has presented an urgency to both work collaboratively and in different capacities, taking on the roles of an editor, art director, or curator because design alone is not always the answer.

The strength of graphic design lies in its applied potential and ability to make connections with allied disciplines. This enables design to actively and energetically take part in representing, processing, and critically reflecting the world around it. Attempts at autonomy close down this dialogue. This approach constantly shifts back and forth between "service," communicating a message in response to an external request, and "authorship," the act of originating a message.

NH — The Print Studio installation refers to the production of a book on Cybermohalla Hub, so the book process reacts to the condition of exhibition and vice versa.

ZK — The publication of the book and the presentation of the exhibition are not conceived as separate conditions where one exists to document the other. There is no single reading of a book, and in this way the publication can take the exhibition somewhere it could not go in the gallery.

Two of the many elements of this book include texts by the ensemble and invited responses. At the beginning of the exhibition, the first pages of the book were designed, printed, and sent to international contributors. This document contained a letter of invitation and a selection of texts and conversations to which the contributors could respond freely. The responses, as they were received, fed back into the exhibition during a workshop and series of public discussions in which the structure, design, and rhythm of the texts were discussed intensely. This book is the result of both the production of an exhibition and a reflection upon the production of an exhibition.

Delhi, May 2011

Dear friends,

We are a group that has been working together for ten years now. We write, make images, and imagine structures in which many may connect with each other through their thinking. Life, its multiple expressions and forms—the ever-expanding city and the world that knocks and winks at, that withdraws from and envelops us—are the realm of our exploration and questioning. For many years now, we have pursued our questions and sought to bring our ways of thinking into a conversation and collision with the world.

The materials we are sending to you are both a preview of our coming work and a preview to a book we are currently producing. Please find enclosed details about the book at the beginning of the preview materials.

We would like to invite you to argue and play with, critique, ask questions of, speculate, think with all of, or fragments from, this material. Your responses could be texts of a thousand words, images, speculations, drawings, or any form that the material evokes in you.

We would request you to think of responses that we can share further with the world, but can also take with us on our journeys. Your responses will be part of the book.

We would be delighted if you could send your responses by June 15, 2011. We know this is short notice, but the date of publication is near, and we would like to have time to have your responses translated into Hindi so we can read them. We expect the book to be ready by September 2011.

We hope you will read this and respond to us.

With warmth and regards, Cybermohalla Ensemble

Invitation sent by Cybermohalla Ensemble for responses to texts, images, and conversations, all of which are part of this book

NH — The first workshop session took place during the opening days of "Living," curated by Kjeld Kjeldsen. We all worked in the installation. How would you describe your experience? How did the visitors react to you being part of the installation?

ZK — There were many responses, but one that is most clear in my mind happened on the first day of the exhibition. A visitor approached me while I was working in the Print Studio. She leaned in closely, almost touching me, and asked under her breath, "Are you real?"

NH — That is a great question. It raises the question of how real are exhibition projects that try to trigger and initiate new realities, ultimately defining the museum as a space of production. What is the reality of an exhibition? How real are you in the exhibition context? Is it about production or exhibitionism? The question "Are you real?" suggests that you are real and unreal at the same time; this is the uncanny realism of exhibitions.

ZK—Exactly. Such exhibition projects could either be viewed as actual or symbolic production. The question "Are you real?" became more interesting and the answer more ambiguous. The visitor understood the "work" in "workshop," but anticipated the representation of work as opposed to actual work. Our effort to think about the relationship of a book to an exhibition is to create an encounter between two entities that produces a new reality—partly real and partly fictional.

NH — What is crucial is the ambivalence of the situation, which is somewhere between production and display—constantly shifting back and forth between those conditions. This inherent contradiction turns book production into a critical part of the exhibition.

ZK—For these reasons, I find the book to be the perfect cultural product.

# TOWARDS THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

How can the partition between who narrates experience and who brings thought into the world be breached? How can equality be incorporated in one's journey into thinking with others? In sending a set of our writings, reflections, questions, and images to some forty people with whom we have been in dialogue over the years, we were propelled by the desire to stretch the idea of "our," and to make the word hold more. While waiting for responses, we wrote further and continued to write as the text and image responses to our texts and images began arriving in our inboxes. Translated into Hindi, we read them collectively. This June, Delhi seemed fevered by more than the heat of summer.

The responses struck us in different ways: some collided with our thoughts, some created newer thresholds for thinking, some produced difficulties to think with, some brought momentum, and some posed challenging questions to what we had been thinking. We understood that these images, arguments, questions, and reflections that were slowly coming back to us had been produced with a desire for making something common between us. The texts could be read with and against each other. By mid-July, we started creating the weave of this book as spiraling thoughts that extend, challenge, appear suddenly in front of one another, surprise, and enrich each other.

This step was paramount to the image of thought that we could maintain, and wanted to grow with. We also knew that it was the best way to tell the story of the Cybermohalla Hub—not only the making of the hub and its growth over the years, but also its extension in the coming time.

In late July, we traveled to the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art with the structure of the book, to begin discussing its design.

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## SETTING AND REMAKING

#### SETTING A SETTING

Setting a setting involves the conception and actualization of spaces that instigate, host, and stage a certain production. This "production" usually involves a collaboration: some form of working together that transforms the "work" of all the collaborators. In certain settings, the "production" can take more mental forms of encounter and thought. In both cases, the setting acts only when the people and things within the setting act. This act, or action, is most often discursive. It provides the means to rethink, reflect, and exercise a public condition. Especially in relation to art, settings ask whether it is still possible to consider spaces of art as public spaces. They ask, once more, whether a work of art can constitute a public space, a space for encounter, conflict, and critical reflection: a space of civic presence. Furthermore (or better yet), they ask whether a work of art (or, here, the setting) can make a contribution to or an intervention into an existing public space. This so-called existing public space (or context) could belong to the sphere of art and/or to urban, social, political, and economic conditions. It would mean thinking of the setting as a contribution/intervention, which refers to being both a contribution and an intervention, instead of an either/or situation.

Taking inhabitation as a fundamental question of existence (since there is always a wider system, structure, context to inhabit), the fundamental question for settings becomes: how do settings inhabit, and how do they themselves ask (or offer) to be inhabited?

For some years now, I have been developing and testing this body of work (as well as a theory of sorts, since it also involves interpreting the works of others, including Nikolaus Hirsch's), which I broadly label as "setting a setting." Setting a setting emerged while thinking about a practice that could generate spaces of reflection, relation, and function while questioning given contexts, or advocating a certain letting go of control and provoking a collective production (of meaning and activity). The organization of public space, and its (hopefully) endless reconfiguration has also been a key interest throughout these years. The best reflection on this phrase came from Kathrin Böhm and Andreas Lang of Public Works, who wrote: "The combination of the verb setting and the noun setting describes the conceptual and formal processes behind those projects, which bring together a programmatic intention (verb) and a physical form (noun) to facilitate a public development." I would like to add the mechanical and the theatrical connotations of the word "setting" into this equation as well.

The early settings that I had developed reflected upon performative and architectural means of production, primarily within spaces of art (i.e., the context of an art institution), while later settings—such as the "Church Can Altay 141

Street Partners' Gazette," "PARK:probably," and "COHAB: an assembly of spare parts"—began in the realm of art too, as exhibitions and collective projects, but ventured into direct social and urban interventions/contributions in a realm that is, de facto, public and involves less mediated, more confrontational, wider publics. It is a situation, or condition, that also shifts the centrality of the setting, since it is now located in a more severe, factual, and crowded network of things and operations—away from the centrality and self-reflexivity that settings within the spaces of art enjoy. Therefore, the questions that arise from this new inhabitation are: in what ways can the settings continue their discursive production (that rethinking, reflecting, and exercising of a public condition)? To what degree can they maintain their critical content, i.e., their reason? And finally, to what degree do they offer themselves to be inhabited (or performed) while still holding on to that transformative act in which all collaborator/inhabitants' work is reconfigured along with the setting itself, and (of course) the wider context that the setting itself has come to inhabit?

#### CYBERMOHALLA HUB: A SETTING IN THE REMAKING

Nikolaus Hirsch and Michel Müller's ongoing project, Cybermohalla Hub, appears to be founded on a post-programmatic basis. They create it as a setting that sets itself initially to recapture an activity, followed by its staging, and finally a promise to host that activity. Since Cybermohalla Hub fits itself into an existing space, the programmatic intention and the act—the collaboration, that transformative work—was therefore already set socially: an inhabitation without necessarily having any formal setting that was set to reflect, host, or stage the act. Simply put, one of the Cybermohalla labs was set up inside a building in a precarious zone destined for demolition—like many other subjects of forceful urban policies that are the result of a common global toxic cocktail of neoliberal developments and urban-cleansing discourses. The building was demolished, and, for Hirsch and Müller, the setting of the Cybermohalla Hub emerged as a result. The staging of the hub is not only related to the demonstration of a promise and possibility, or the representation of a thoroughly thought-out contribution/intervention in an existing realm. It also concerns the staging of the setting of a setting, in various incarnations and contexts, and of performing the possibility of the Cybermohalla Hub without neccessarily actualizing the final setting in the location where it is destined to take place. Cybermohalla Hub is setting a setting in each and every prototype, each and every time its different incarnations are produced, installed, and performed, albeit partially. The hub has transformed from a promise a setting in the making—to a setting in constant remaking. Each setting involves a production that allows a rethinking, a recollection, and a critical reflection on the hub itself, as well as the various contexts that allow and

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do not allow its actualization. It therefore repeatedly rethinks, reflects, and exercises a public condition. What is more, it has done so while enjoying the self-reflexivity that is allowed and nurtured by the spaces of art, and at the same time discussing the tangled and fractured wider urban scheme that the hub had once desired (or still desires) to inhabit. That three-by-six-meter plot in Sawda-Ghevra, New Delhi, where residents of the demolished neighborhood were forced to locate by the powers that be, namely the abovementioned urban policies, and from which the initial response to the idea of the hub emerged for its two architects.

It's hard to know or judge whether the hub will ever inhabit that plot. If so, a different set of questions will no doubt emerge; the setting (as it becomes the building—this time a building in the making) will allow even further discussion and production. However, the hub as it is now, as that setting in the remaking, still poses and adresses some key questions on the organization of public space, both through its presentation and its decided form. I would never have imagined myself to resort to organic analogies and formal analyses, but one cannot help but notice that the hub resembles a beehive: the building elements allow accumulation and growth along with expansion and explosion, and it has the ability to fit and re-form. As a hive, the hub can also be cultured to fit into a limited rectangular frame, attach to an existing structure, propose a loosely-formed growth, allow further inhabitation while itself inhabiting its frame or support, and, finally, both host and stage a collective production through its built form and context. It seems that its likeness to a beehive also has to do with Hirsch and Müller's evocation of the memory of a demolition that has already taken place once, thereby making it formally critical of the forces that impose their will upon residents of Delhi. Therefore, the form of the hub, while maintaining a promise of growth, also proposes expansion and explosion as the two qualities that could possibly resist, or at least survive, further demolition attempts.

# INSIDE THE HUB: THE LOUISIANA EXHIBITION

A conversation within the prototype of the hub at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Copenhagen, July 2011.

NIKOLAUS HIRSCH—Cybermohalla Hub is part of the exhibition "Living," at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, in Denmark. In fact, it is a very specific installation within this show. This is not because it is the largest piece in the exhibition, but because it includes a workshop: it is not only a site of presentation but also a space of production. It's a particular situation that combines an installation and a speculation on a building in the periphery of Delhi.

We are sitting in the installation, around a table, and on chairs that are components of the hub. What is around us? The centerpiece is the hub, which is a structure in a three-by-six-meter area that refers to a larger settlement plan in the Sawda-Ghevra area of Delhi. On the floor you see the grid of a plan for a city of 500,000 people, many of them resettled. On the left, you see drawings from our first workshop in 2007, when we came together to work and speculate on programs on things that should happen in and with this hub. So far, the hub hasn't been built in Delhi. It's a project that has been traveling both as an idea in discussions in Delhi, and in many biennials and exhibitions. The Louisiana Museum is showing the largest and most ambitious version of it. Then we have two large videos projections: one on destruction, the other on a new beginning. On the right, we see reference to the destruction of the Nangla Manchi settlement, where the third Cybermohalla lab was founded. Behind the hub you see the beginning of a new settlement, from scratch, called Sawda-Ghevra, showing municipal functionaries measuring a three-by-six-meter plot before settlers can begin constructing their houses on it. And then we have this workshop situation here, with elements like the invitation of other people on an international scale to contribute to the book project, which is also part of the exhibition. So these are more or less the elements of the exhibition environment in which we are having this conversation. Starting the conversation, I would like to begin at the beginning. How and when did the Cybermohalla project start? And what is it now? How has the concept of mohalla, i.e., neighborhood, developed and eventually changed?

SHAMSHER ALI — We have been together for ten years now. Thinking, meeting, debating, and being in conversation. In this journey, many

people joined and left. Close to 500 people over the last ten years have been in intense debate and dialogue. In talking about Cybermohalla along with the hub today, we would like to share with you the idea of cyber as a caravan, in which many people can become part of something, and *mohalla*, or neighborhood, as a gathering or a crowd. Cyber is a dimension of travel, through which we create routes to move towards a crowd. Not one, but many routes through which we may begin to create a world—plunge into the world.

AZRA TABASSUM — Cyber is connection. To be connected. This is an idea of a mohalla as a joint: a joining which is not only a place in which people settle or live, but extends to the idea of a city or being in a world. It seeks both a density of a crowd and an unpredictability of strangers.

NH — One question has been constantly discussed in the years that I have been collaborating with you: where is Cybermohalla? What is the site of this project? It's a practice in Delhi, but it's also a practice that is happening here in the mode of an exhibition, in the environment of a museum. What do you think about the relation between a site-specific practice and the mode of the exhibition? When I talk in conferences, like the recent "Morality" conference at Witte de With, and I mention the word "neighborhood," I am immediately put into a box, and feel limited by the ideology of context. I think this is rather a question of practice than of moral categories. Yet, Cybermohalla is not contained within the limits of a neighborhood; it coexists in exhibitions.

LOVE ANAND — Our journey as Cybermohalla definitely began with specific locations, that is, the labs in our neighborhoods. But the question of "where" that Nikolaus is talking about, and also what Shamsher and Azra have been saying, gestures to the question of what it is to be with someone. How is thought and thinking inhabited? Is it by sharing thoughts with someone, or is it by being near and around someone? Over these ten years, we have had intense encounters with so many places and people that it is almost impossible to exclude anything to constitute our location. So, we say we live in Delhi, but Cybermohalla extends way beyond it. This meeting here in Louisiana is a good example of how far it extends. To us, you are also Cybermohalla. Encounters and meetings happen in many places. There are places where you meet, and while those places remain, meetings and encounters continue in and travel to many other places.

NH — What happens if you move it from a locality like Delhi into an exhibition space? The exhibition raises a question of public. It starts another kind of communication with the public. In that sense this installation here at the museum is also an attempt to think about the

process of knowledge and book production as something that could be made and shown in an exhibition. We have developed this situation in collaboration with graphic designer Zak Kyes. Zak, what do you think about the question of site? What is the site of production here: a body of knowledge, of texts transformed into a book, a workshop, an exhibition, the museum as a public institution?

ZAK KYES — What we have developed at the Louisiana Museum is a situation located somewhere between publishing and exhibiting. Within the exhibition, publishing and exhibiting is deeply integrated into the practice of graphic design. What both activities are united by is the idea of public—in the original Latin sense of the word publicare, "to make public." But publishing also extends beyond simply making public through presentation, as it includes a series of invitations to external contributors who articulate another set of relationships and practices. In a sense, both the gallery and the publication become a site for these activities that combine writing, editing, designing, and displaying. The idea of a site as a space for knowledge production runs contrary to a static presentation to be, for instance, documented in an exhibition catalogue. Together we are doing something very different, which is to use the exhibition and the book as a site for further production.

NH — Writing is a practice in a rather intimate situation, whether in a group or individually. But then there is the moment of reaching out to the public. In the past few years you have published a number of books, among them *Trickster City*. So you have a number of experiences regarding public presentations, but what do you think about the condition of an exhibition in which the moment of display becomes much stronger? The attempt here is to somehow bring together the hub, as an installation with the practice of writing and publishing.

AT — We think of the hub as a gift we can give to many people, to an entire city. A specific kind of gift which invites transformation. The idea of the gift is important to us: we have made temporary structures for gathering in Delhi, as contexts in which many people may meet and listen to each other. Each time the hub is made somewhere, like it has been in this exhibition, it sustains our idea of the hub as a gift to others. It creates new gatherings and new publics around it.

NH—How would you describe your own process of writing, in which writing becomes a text and then it somehow reaches the point of publication and you encounter an audience? What is your idea of the public there? Extending this question, could this be displayed, i.e., transferred to the mode of exhibition?

LA—Making and display have always moved together in our practice. For us, making a book doesn't come after something finishes, after which it will then find its moment of publicness. While writing, a thought reaches a threshold and finds places where it can be shared. For instance, a preview of the book we are still in the process of making is displayed here. The book is in a moment of publicness here, even as it is in the process of being made.

NH — How would you describe the practice in the Cybermohalla labs and also your more intimate situations of writing? What are the dynamics between the single author situation and the collective work? In the context of these questions, the labs are particularly interesting spaces: they are small and intimate, and, on a spatial level, they put a certain limit on the number of people who can join in. At the same time, the labs seem to be unique combinations of the quality of an intimate space and the speculation of a larger public space.

AT — To us, writing is not about writing the world as it is, but about making a world through writing. When one writes, her imagination, that which she has lived, and what she has seen and felt, all collide with one another, and through this collision she creates a world. When something is written, it comes into our group as a proposal. If I have proposed something and, let's say, Love is not able to think about it, then I think of ways in which I can build it with him. If Shamsher and I think or make something together, we search for someone we can direct it to, someone who will challenge us, present us with a difficulty in thought.

BABLI RAI—Challenge in thought gets produced through encounter with others. Encounters in thought bring forth the question, "I would like to think with you; are you willing to be in thought with me?"

AT — With everything there is an imagination of a public and that imagination changes and shifts its contours. When we are making something—writing, for instance—there is an idea of a reader. There is an expectation of a return glance from the reader. This return glance is what friendships are built through: friendships that are neither about praising you, nor about walking away from what has been written and encountered through reading. It becomes part of someone else's journey, and through the return glance it keeps us in the act of making further. In thinking together, there is a demand for equality. It is an invitation to be in thought together, as equals.

NH — Invitation seems to be a crucial notion in your work. Jacques Rancière came to Delhi, gave a number of talks, presented a book, and he also came to visit you. You invited him to visit the Cybermohalla

Ensemble, and now he is also contributing to our book. Could you elaborate on what invitation means in Rancière's case? I think this is something very important for every collaboration: the mode of invitation, of reaching out to others. Who are those others? Are they collaborators, are they guests, are they respondents? Could you elaborate on the concept of invitation?

SA — When we are in practice, we are in an unknown search. We do not know where we might go. This is what takes us to creation. Through conversation—with someone who is with you, or someone you go to, to ask, to talk to—layers, within which something is wrapped, keep unfolding. There is interruption, extension, and elaboration. Sometimes there are cuts, and sometimes there is a deep and intense opposition in thought. Invitation is creation of a context in which we may be able to think together and along with, and a search for how many lines can flow from it and cut through it.

When Rancière was in Delhi, our discussion with him was long, and many difficult questions emerged. Everyone in that dialogue was in practice: Lakhmi was creating a world through writing, and Babli was struggling with writing what she was thinking. We talked about the worlds difficult to bring into writing, about tussling with writing to bring it close to the image one has in one's mind. It was an electric conversation in which Rancière discussed our questions with us, and also his own process of writing Nights of Labor. He gave us our first copy of the Hindi translation of the book. We have been engaging with the book in the last two years. The expectation, intensity, and desire for conversation that were evoked with Rancière in our studio were the same as when we extended an invitation for conversation to Aunt Noorjehan, who is our neighbor, or to Lalu Baba, a Sufi in our neighborhood. The confidence and the desire with which a thought is shared brings with it a charge that anyone may hold, touch, be with, and respond to.

NH — What you explained about the mode of invitation reminds me of May 2007, when Michel and I came to Delhi. It started as an invitation and since then there have been many conversations but also cuts, when the project, every now and then, encountered delays because of the difficulty of getting municipal permissions. Michel, how would you describe that invitation, which at the same time became a collaboration?

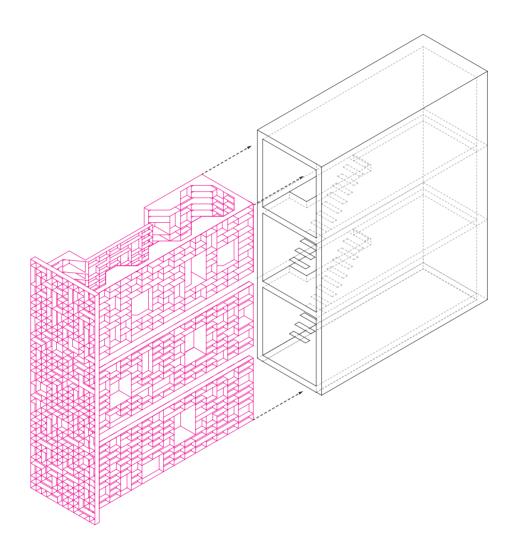
MICHEL MÜLLER — For me, the situation in 2007 was in a way similar to what we have here, because we are thinking about the structure of the book now, and in our first meeting we were thinking about the structure of a building, and the meaning of the invitation for me was to work together, to collaborate with Cybermohalla Ensemble. It was an invitation to think about a structure that is not a definitive

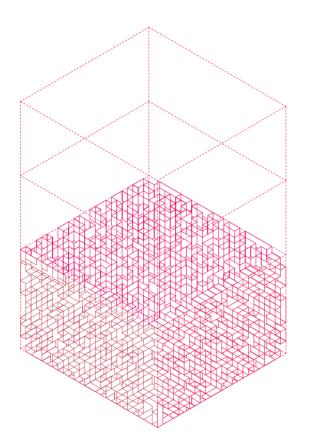
thing or a claim to definitive thinking about architectural design. It has more to do with an evolving and constantly changing idea of a building. The question was how to imagine a building, which, in a way, is the same question as how to use a book. The answer is page by page, or in our case floor by floor, in a built structure that would grow over time.

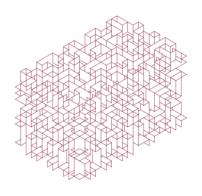
NH—It is quite interesting to make a link between building the hub and producing the book about the hub. There is an intriguing irony: we have developed prototypes and components of the hub for exhibitions, but the building in Delhi hasn't been built so far. It will take some time, yet we are already in the middle of producing a book—a publication that was originally planned almost as a retrospective view and now seems to have transformed into an integral part of making the hub. We play with the rhythm of the hub, switching different time spans on and off, inverting temporal logics between book, exhibition, and building. The book, presumably a more ephemeral medium, gets a form, is printed, is finished. In the end, it becomes more like a piece of architecture, while the architecture of the hub remains ephemeral and precarious; an open thought despite its material weight.



 $Cyber mohalla\ Hub\ as\ an\ intervention\ in\ an\ existing\ structure,\ a\ new\ building,\ and\ a\ mobile\ exhibition\ unit,\ Nikolaus\ Hirsch\/\ Michel\ M\"uller,\ 2007$ 

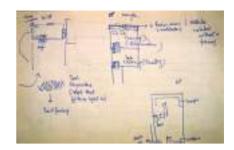






Sketch of Cybermohalla labs, Shveta Sarda, 2007

Bamboo scaffolding, Sawda-Ghevra, Delhi, 2007 (photo: Cybermohalla Ensemble)

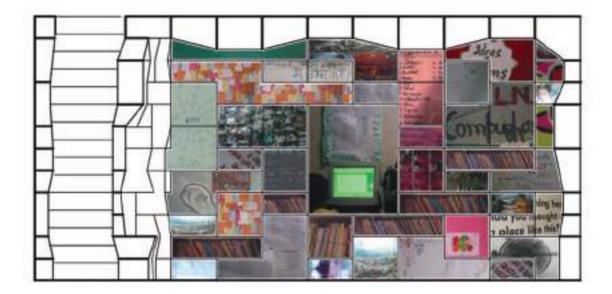






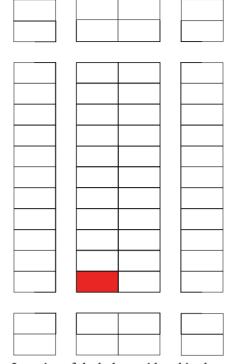
Measuring a plot, Sawda-Ghevra, Delhi, 2008 (photo: Cybermohalla Ensemble)

Photomontage for a wall segment of the hub for the Swedish Museum of Architecture, Stockholm, Nikolaus Hirsch / Michel Müller, 2008





Sawda-Ghevra, Delhi, 2009 (photo: Cybermohalla Ensemble)

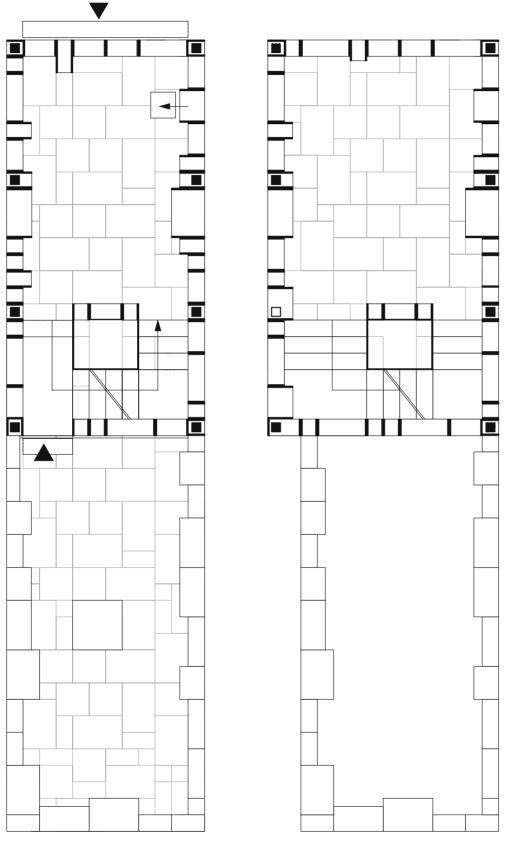


Location of the hub considered in the block structure of Sawda-Ghevra, Delhi, Nikolaus Hirsch/Michel Müller, 2008

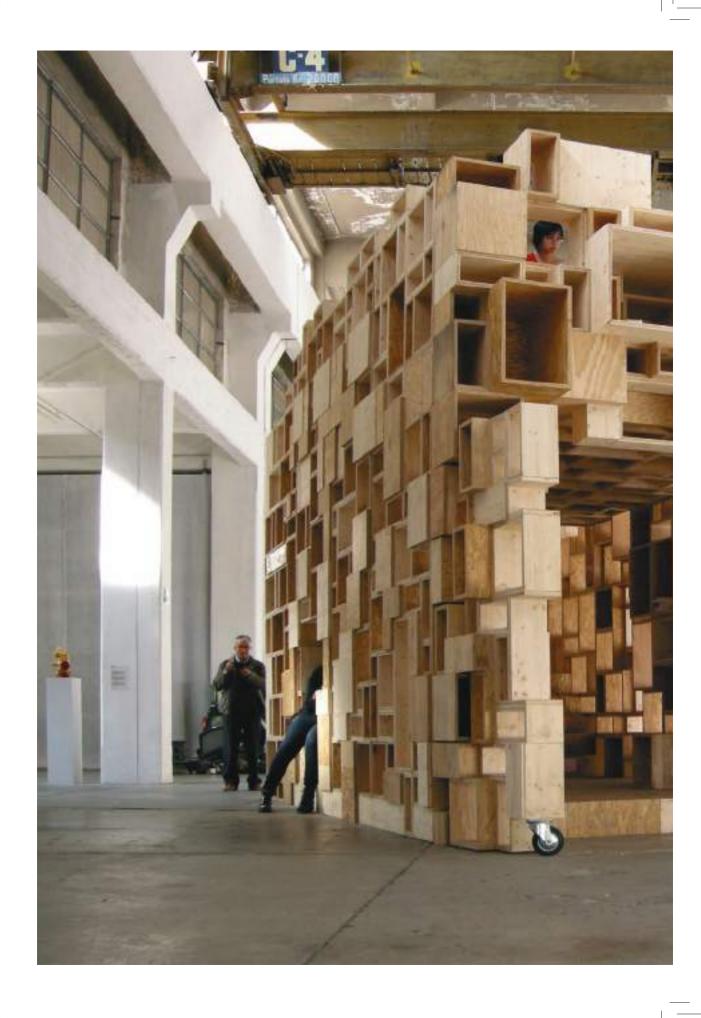


Brick house, plot base, and bamboo house, Sawda-Ghevra, Delhi, Nikolaus Hirsch / Michel Müller, 2008

Floor plans for the Cybermohalla Hub in Sawda-Ghevra, Delhi, Nikolaus Hirsch/Michel Müller, 2009

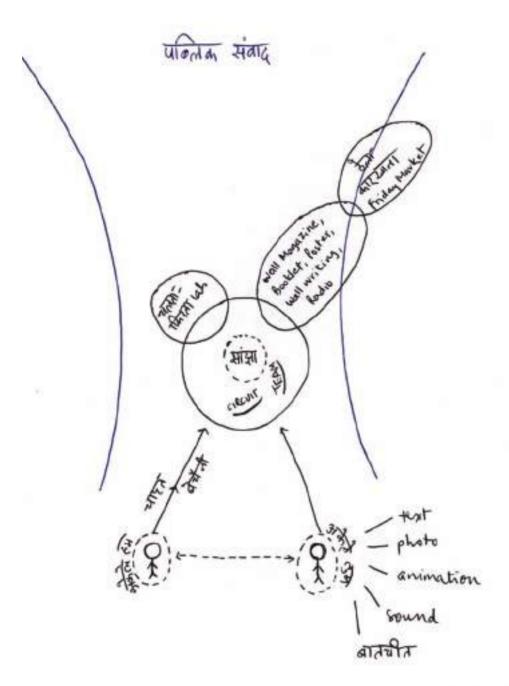


Ground Floor First Floor





Prototype of Cybermohalla Hub in Manifesta 7, Bolzano, Nikolaus Hirsch / Michel Müller, 2008

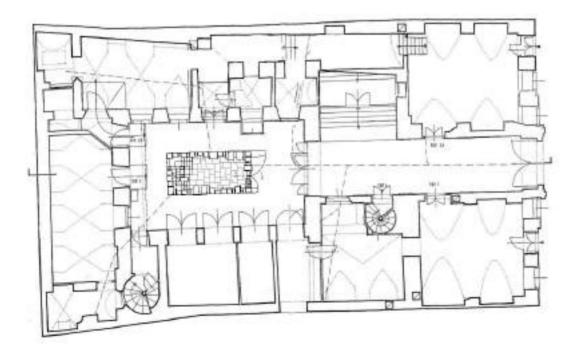


24th December 2005





Cybermohalla Hub, T-B A21, Vienna, Cybermohalla Ensemble and Nikolaus Hirsch/Michel Müller, 2008



Cybermohalla Hub in the baroque courtyard of T-B A21, Vienna, ground floor plan, Nikolaus Hirsch/Michel Müller, 2008–09



Cybermohalla Hub at T-B A21, Vienna, 2008



Cybermohalla Hub in the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Copenhagen, 2011 (photo: Michel Müller)



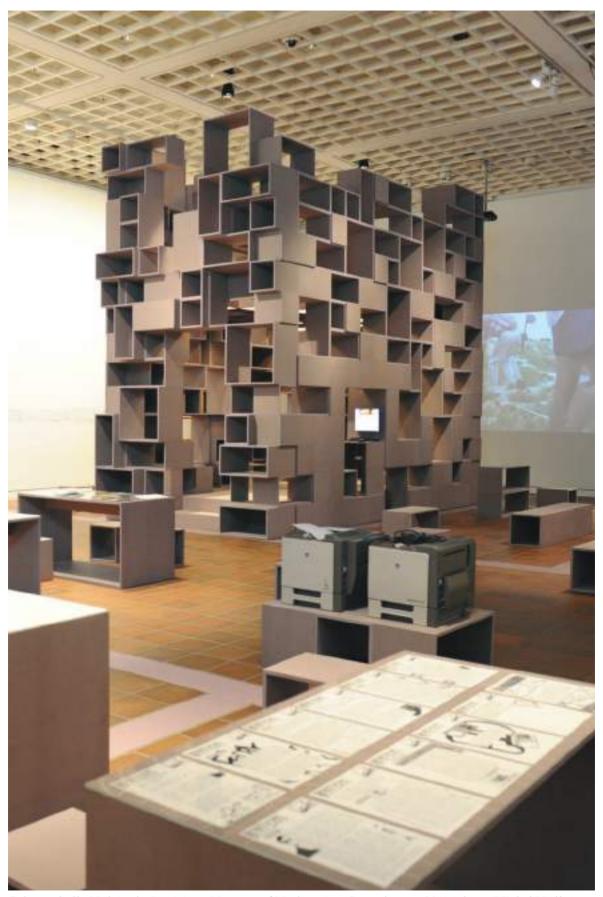
Sawda-Ghevra, Delhi, 2009 (photo: Cybermohalla Ensemble)



Sawda-Ghevra, Delhi, 2010 (photo: Cybermohalla Ensemble)



Segment of Cybermohalla Hub at the Graham Foundation, Chicago, Nikolaus Hirsch / Michel Müller, 2012 (photo: Jim Prinz)



Cybermohalla Hub in the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Copenhagen, 2011 (photo: Michel Müller)

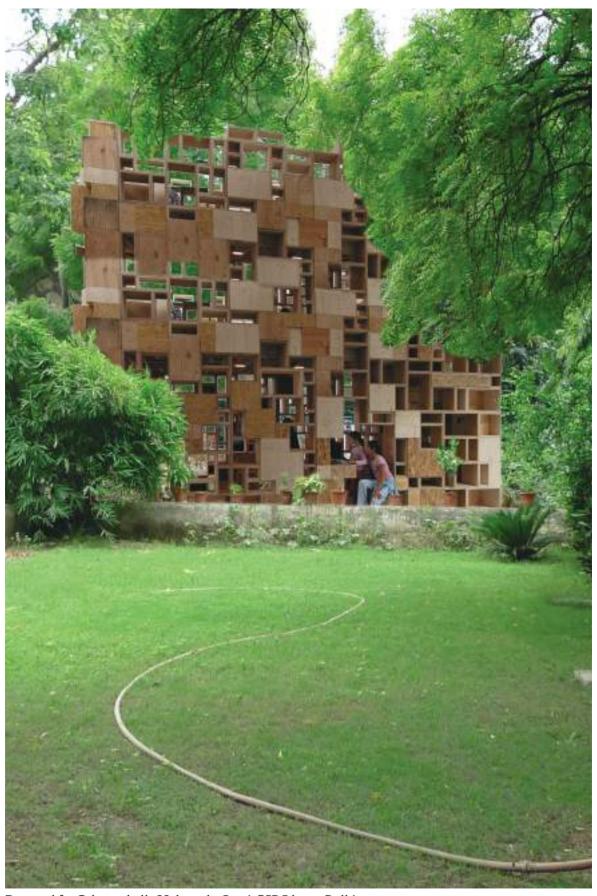


Cybermohalla Hub in Manifesta 7, Bolzano, 2008 (photo: Michel Müller)

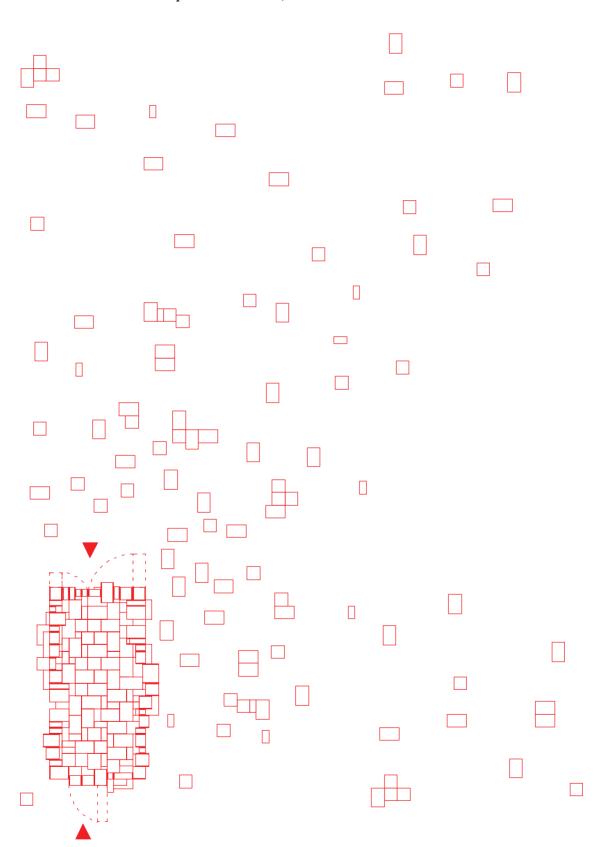


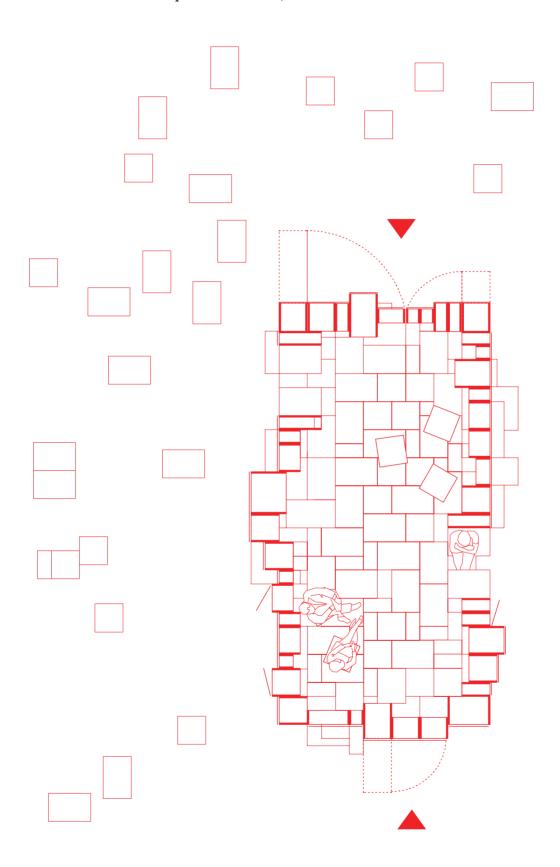


Publication workshop with Grégory Ambos, Cybermohalla Ensemble, Nikolaus Hirsch, Zak Kyes, Michel Müller, and Shveta Sarda at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Copenhagen, 2011 (photo: Michel Müller)



Proposal for Cybermohalla Hub on the Sarai-CSDS lawn, Delhi, Nikolaus Hirsch / Michel Müller, 2010





## ARISH AND I

We search for someone, and sometimes we become someone's search. Between these two is a search for the extraordinary in the ordinariness of the self, of that which will test my sense of being in the world. It is a pursuit of something that will challenge my conception of who I am and what I am making.

What might we glimpse when we find it? Who will we see? An adviser? A listener? Someone who will argue with us? A critic? A dear friend? Someone to praise us? Or something entirely unexpected? Perhaps what we crave is for "I" to dream "him," and "him" to keep colliding with "me." Something akin to thinking together with someone. In this search, we find the possibility of a conversation that goes beyond who is being spoken about and how something is being said.

A collision with an expression of yourself—that which you are facing, the questions you are wrestling with—outside yourself. To experience another as your double, with capacities that match yours, and intensity as luminous as yours and with which you create. Between you and your double, the question remains tantalizingly open: on what basis will we relate?

The Arish that I know is such an expression. Each time we meet, our companionship begins from an equality of thinking. Each time we part ways, it is with a promise to think something afresh together again.

It isn't possible to foretell—at least it remains unknown to both of us—what will grow between us when we meet. These meetings are always unplanned, although we do usually see each other once a week, or at least once a fortnight. We begin by talking about what we are thinking about, share with each other the pleasures of that which we are thinking, and ask each other what we are writing.

When two people ask each other to think, the question of invitation and acceptance is meaningless. An image appears out of two forms seeping into each other, and moving through each other. This unintended image does not emerge suddenly. It takes time; it is made when thoughts, imaginations, and resources are put together and cooked—sometimes on a furious flame, at other times on one that is mellow, and sometimes without fire.

How can that which you are thinking be expressed? Every text begins with this dilemma. Time passes and becomes past; the time about to come will also pass. That's how time has been thought of in Vinod Kumar Shukla's novel Naukar ki Kameez (The Servant's Shirt). I gave a copy of this book to Arish to read. He had it for a long while, and when he returned it, he hadn't finished it. He said he can't read for more than twenty minutes—he falls asleep.

Arish writes what he lives. He writes about moments in his day that have command over him. One day he showed me his notebook. He writes with precision and in such detail that it feels as though he is sitting next to you and telling you a story. It's as if time has stopped, and he is there with you, writing, trying to draw you into his time.

Arish writes in the first person singular; he likes using "I." He can write about anything in this way. I, on the other hand, have difficulty each time I have to use "I." I said to him, "But why is there no one else's voice in your text? No one else speaks. One hears your voice when you speak, but when someone else speaks, it is always through your voice. How is it that you are all seeing? How can everything be determined by you and through you? Do you ever think about writing by becoming somebody else?" He said, "I try but I get stuck." Arish likes to write about two people having a conversation, but the moment a third person enters the scene, he gets confounded about how to write it. Then he spends a long period thinking about how to write so that there can be three players in a situation.

These days Arish can't find time to write. He is burdened by work, and taking time out to write has been difficult. Also, a complaint has been filed with the municipality about a large crack that has appeared in his building. In response, all the residents have been given one month's notice to vacate the building. One can't say what will happen: whether the building will break or be repaired. It will take Arish some time to return to writing.

# WHAT WE CONCEAL, WHAT WE DISPLAY

Cleaning is like stepping into the inner folds of a place. When we cleaned her room and that beautiful glass bowl broke, it brought each step of cleaning before that under scrutiny. All the words that would shape a conversation turned away their faces.

#### CUT

The more a thing or a place keeps its distance—the more it disallows entry—the greater our attraction towards it. If we were to clean a building that opened after years of being closed, to what extent would we clean it? Would we clean till it shines, or would we take a direction that would alter it? Would we take it back to a state to which someone was accustomed, or would we make it into something that would surprise an unsuspecting passerby? These decisions are as much about one's intimate romance with oneself as they are about the play of gazes amidst where we dwell.

#### CUT

What was I, what am I today, what might I become? Cleaning contains a sprawl, but it also keeps extending its power to prevail over everything. You can neither replace nor erase. If these were the terms, how would you then think about cleaning?

#### CUT

In the garage, even dust on the floor becomes tainted with engine oil. And yet, one can always tell if the place has been cleaned. Grime that covers everything in a garage betrays the time that each thing has been there. It narrates the time, the skill, and the experience of work. If they were to be cleaned away, these layers, which without prompting disclose skill and experience, would be gone.

#### CUT

A place is crafted over years through many folds of time—day after day, week after week, month after month. A question remains: how will these creations of time be reordered? Mounds of newspapers of past events and accumulations of old materials from the city gather in the

godown. The godown holds within it all the elements that the city discards, sees value in them, and sorts them. Having found their separations, things will filter back into the city. What is of value and what is without value? This is a question that is asked, without hesitation, relentlessly.

#### CUT

It's impossible. Today her body is no longer hers. It has been laid on a wooden bench; she is being given her last bath. Everyone knows that this bath is her last, that she is being prepared for her journey, and that she is being cleaned and will be sent on her way wrapped in a radiant white cloth.

#### CUT

We thought of asking some people to let us clean their houses. We wanted to begin a dialogue, to think about the invisibility of cleaning. Cleaning becomes invisible when cleaning has been done. How much someone will clean—how far one will go while cleaning—is controlled by this invisibility. The more cleaning nears its completion in a place, the more it disappears from the place. Cleaning is ordinary. That's why it is difficult to talk about it outside transactions.

#### CUT

The city is cleaned; it is routinely cleansed of places. Entire places are taken from where they are and deposited elsewhere. One can glimpse the passage of time in the colossal shapes created by the dumps of dust and refuse of the city.

#### CUT

How should a room be cleaned? Till the room no longer remains yours? Till it doesn't remain a room? Till it starts to squeak? Till it goes into hiding? Till it becomes an image of you? There was once a room. It was being cleaned and everything inside it was removed. It is said that once the room was empty those cleaning it became frightened by it. When this room is filled again, will the things it is filled up with find their relation with one another?

#### CUT

Cleaning is like standing at a threshold of many layers, in argument with being changed and remaining the same.

## REMEMBERING BHOORI

Encounters, meetings, and environments challenge and provoke; they can produce in us a crisis of thought. But is that not what one searches in thought anyway? Otherwise, one would get ensnared in one's own web of words. How can what we have thought be tested in life?

Knocking: it means being called.

Knocking: being drawn away from that which you are in.

Knocking: an invitation to be surprised.

Do words have a knock-like velocity?

Damdaar: courageous, honorable. When we brought this word into our midst, it highlighted lives that were around us, but which had until then eluded our conversations; lives that collide with the entanglements of daily life, and engender movement and momentum. Lives that don't allow themselves to be cast in fixed molds.

These lives are not part of the count, that is, the count through which you consolidate your ways of thinking.

These lives cannot be written through the use of "I," or be formulated through the language of experience. Their gravitas will be made light if we merely speak of them as people on a journey. They cannot be narrated like stories from our past, and to speak of them as wanderers would be like sentencing them to fixity. And what if we were to write them as if we were writing our own experience? Then we would not have really been able to think through their city—the city they make.

They percolate through lives and fill them, without any event having caused or occasioned them to do so. Their "I" is invisible, but it is not a private "I" either. When one writes, one wrestles and flows with those figures that are formed by the "I" of many others.

That's how it was when we tried to write about Bhoori Maiyya. We could see our efforts were ending up congealing this "I" in order to make it appear before us and speak to us. Trying to write about Bhoori Maiyya was a big struggle.

We say "something is changing" and think we have understood, and have been able to explain what we have understood to others. But in thinking and staying with our conversations with Bhoori, we realized she has signs through which she can mark every change in her life.

But how to write or think this "being able to say" was, and remains, a struggle for us.

In our conversations with Bhoori, we registered a fluidity of time.

Time—the duration for which she is speaking.

Time—the duration over which the conversation is written.

Time—which she inhabits when she speaks.

Time—which she conjures as she speaks; which is without limit.

Time—a creative tension of the interval between speaking and listening.

Bhoori Maiyya is no more. She died of a stroke, her blood pressure shooting up to levels that could not be registered by any instrument. We gathered at the threshold of her house to remember her, exchanging our notebooks filled with the many conversations we had had with her there. Would it be possible to sense in them the flow of time as we experienced it when we were with her? Could we perhaps recreate it through our collective reading? We tried to understand and collide the different senses of time we shared. What is the flow of time? It does not speak in one voice. It does not belong to one person. The text that can emerge from such a reading will always be in the making.

These muddy lanes, now that it is raining, are filled with the scent of wet earth, but what a spectacle they make of those who pass through them. Be stuck with an umbrella in a narrow lane, and while you struggle to break free, the water dripping down the roofs will leave you drenched! Strong, unceasing waves of conversation; they sting me all over like bees and I toss and turn in my bed—what more can I do? That I should go near and listen, this thought never crossed my mind. The sounds of conversation would rise, then dip, and sometimes from amidst the voices I would hear clearly my name, Bhoora ... "This decision we have taken for Bhoora is the right one." My mind is straining to tune in to these sounds from far away. Women have stepped out in the rain; their dupattas are their umbrellas. and they walk briskly—ah, these pictures of perfection! balancing all their purchases in one hand and hitching up their salwars with the other. The conversation resumed after dinner, by 11:00, perhaps 11:30, after our excited, mischief-filled cheering, hooting, and howling quietened down; in that place where there were neither men nor women, in that neighborhood of about 250 houses, in which groups of ten to fifteen people lived in each house, and where we had gone to live within a cluster of twelve houses. Here, you could see the doors of all the houses all at once, wherever you stood. Looking in the direction of the hostess, I edged closer to the radio and touched it because I felt protected by the compassion on her face, a face unlike anyone else's there—when suddenly the set crackled to life. That day Kangana, Jhoomar, Nanda, Hema, and I had

bathed and dressed as soon as we woke up. That morning we heard the news that a little prince had been born in the thakur's home: that we had to make haste, get ready. "Do you know, guruji, that at home right now ammi will be making sweet sewayin, Ashad and Abdullah will be getting ready to go to the idgah to offer prayers, my sister will be smiling, though abbu jaan and uncle will be screaming and demanding to know if their pants have been readied, why their shirts haven't been ironed, where their prayer caps are, why the children aren't ready yet. 'Ready them at once! We should leave now, it's getting late." Today, once again, my day began with a dream. For many nights now I have been dreaming about a lake: many of my friends are with me in my dream, and the only way out of where we are and to get to where we can pray is through the lake. We have to walk over rocks. I have managed somehow, but two of my friends are stuck in the middle and the helplessness I feel when they fall into the lake causes me to wake up. Do you get the import of this dream, this dream that I have seen a few times now? Across the lane from me, a few steps from my house, live a husband and wife who, though they have come from a village, are utterly shameless! I get restless when the girl goes about her chores without her veil—inside, but also outside her house—and I mutter under my breath. But when she stands at the threshold of her house looking unblinkingly over at the clock on my wall, I think I understand how removed she feels, how distances stretch out in front of her. Like that day when people were looking more at me than at the bride and groom even though they were the ones dressed up and I was in a simple kurta-pajama. And yet, everyone's gaze slowly settled upon me and when I went up on the stage to bless the newly married couple, everyone asked to have a photo taken with me. Not like that "I" that everyone accepts, but perhaps like that word that if it is joined with the "I" of others, then the very way in which "I" is understood in their milieu may change. "I want to wear these clothes today." "Guruji, please give me that pair of earrings." "I can't do without your jewelry right now." When I lived up there, in the place on the hill, though it had rooms and walls, within those walls the way clothes and all other things used to be scattered about and mingled without fear or hesitation, it used to feel like there was no concept of "I," "me," or "mine." Beautiful. Beautiful, like she used to say it in English, the lady whose words we didn't follow. We only understood "beautiful." But even then, the smiling faces—hers and ours—told us of the pleasures and the joy we could, regardless, always share.

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## A PLACE YOU'VE NEVER BEEN

I once read a story about a physicist who lived on a moon called Anarres that revolved around an earth called Urras—a planet much like ours. In this story by Ursula K. Le Guin, the character of a physicist who grew up in anarchist syndicates across Anarres had devoted his life to thinking about time, temporality, and a place called home.

"You can never go home again," he mused, only to correct himself: "You can go home again [...] so long as you understand that home is a place where you have never been."

"But if you can never return," the space-traveling scientist reasoned, "then you can't go on a journey, because the possibility of return is implicit in the idea of the journey. Without return, it isn't a journey—it is an expedition, an adventure, an exile."

I once knew a man who tired of a city and decided to return to a satellite after twenty years. "C— isn't my home," he said, "but it's a place I used to maintain relations with. I used to work there; uncle still works there, people used to know me."

Aman Sethi

As we walked the streets of C— together, I asked him why he just didn't go home. "You can never go home again," he said, only to correct himself: "You can go home again [...] so long as people understand that you are no longer the person you once were."

"The curse of the runaway," he explained, "is that he can only return in materially-superior circumstances. If you must return as you were, then why leave at all?"

These days, when I think of home, I put these two ideas together: a place you've never been, filled with people you've never known. Inexplicably, this thought delights me.

## **INHERITANCE? GIFT?**

#### THAT WHICH IS NOT BOUND

To you I leave all my meaningless books of poetry, which enchanted you as a child. I read you stories from them at night. You never questioned me if the poems changed when I told them as stories, when I made them so much longer than they were on their page. Sometimes I would weave together as many as four poems to make one story. I want you to have them all now. They may not help you remember my stories, and maybe you will never be able to tell those stories to someone again, but they may lead you into those moments of my life in which I was more than the one who would tell you stories at night and lull you to sleep.

#### A RIGHT TO WHAT?

Countless generations and unfathomable time have passed between giving and receiving things. Who will receive things as rightfully theirs? What will they become for the ones receiving them? In what ways will they exercise their rights over them? Will they have received? Will they have chanced upon them? Or will these things have been forced onto them?

#### MAKE IT YOUR OWN

This bundle has never been opened. It has been passed from generation to generation. It is yours now. Don't ever undo its knot.

Towards the north, a hundred kilometers from here, there is a night shelter. It has a door at its entrance. Let the door remain there.

At the border is a room measuring ten by twenty meters. It has many holes. That room is the sole witness of time that has passed there. In it you will see all those nights of the world that have been spent without sleep.

Everything—the sky, the ocean, paths, distances, caravans of strangers—make everything your own.

#### WHEN I AM GONE

I do not know if the script of my life will be relived by someone when I am gone, if it will be cursed, or if it will be remade entirely. Every pore of the world is immersed in contemplating this.

## SONGLINES FOR OUR TIME

For the ancient pathfinders, whether traveling by sea or in caravans, knowledge of the stars and their location in the sky was vital in determining where they were. It is said that stargazers could name and follow at least 220 stars in the night sky, distinguishing not just major celestial bodies, such as Orion and the North Star, but also lesser-known ones, as they were about to rise or set. The specific position of a star remains the same throughout the year, but the time at which it emerges changes by four minutes every night. Stargazers developed nuanced ways of remembering the position of the stars and measuring the distance between them. While some saw the stars as spheres of crystal, others preferred to think of them as a shining concentration of spirit breath. In some cases, the stars transformed themselves into the countless eyes of Vishnu and sometimes they were just stars. The void between the stars bodied forth stories and myths.

Hidden behind clouds, stars sometimes borrow from their more adept shape-shifting neighbors the ability to transform themselves into drums and binoculars. But this skill of using stories and thought as a unit of measurement is not restricted to the domain of stargazers alone. The aboriginals in Australia saw their land as an intricate network of invisible pathways, which they described as songlines: the totemic lines that sung the world into existence. For them, a song was both map and pathfinder, and the distance between a rock and a tree could be measured out in units of songs so that the entire landscape could be read as a musical score or, as British writer-Bruce Chatwin says, "a spaghetti of Iliads and Odysseys." They understood that a tree or a rock is also the reservoir of forces whose vitality could be energized narratively, much like the bursting forth of a song in Hindi cinema. Canadian writer Robert Bringhurst describes this memorably as "everywhere being is dancing." Perhaps they knew that to be alive is "to live with a recurring obsession for qualities beyond the ordinary measure" ("The Diarist," p. 68).

There is now not a single leaf on the cherry tree: except when the jay plummets in, lights, and, in pure clarity, squalls: then every branch quivers and breaks out in blue leaves.

—A. R. Ammons, "Winter Scene," in A. R. Ammons: The Collected Poems, 1951–1971 (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001).

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In Montaigne's essay "Sur des vers de Virgile" (1580), lines of verse and lines of travel, turns of phrase and turns of the road are indistinguishable. Ronald Johnson's *A Line of Poetry, A Row of Trees* (1964) pays tribute to this aspect when he says "Here— / both lines of poetry, rows / of trees, / shall spring all / seasons." Just as travelers create a pathway in forests through their walking, so the making of a place entails the laying out of a path littered with overheard questions, and fragments of a diary. Sometimes we pack a set of questions, while at other times just an eleventh one suffices. "If you can read the ocean," Mau once told Nainoa, "if you can see the island in your mind, you will never get lost."

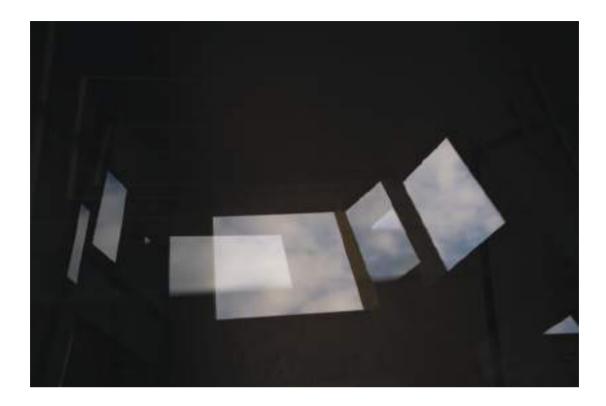
"Erotic attention to detail." What would it mean to cultivate this as a specific form of being in the world? "Everything else is ordinary." The philosopher Donald Davidson once said that the curse upon the modern world is that we cannot think of one thing without thinking of everything else. Perhaps this curse can be warded off through poetic charms that allow us to see that the eye of the fish sees the forests for us? In a story by Kafka, a philosopher attempts to grab tops as they spin, for he knows that the understanding of any detail—that of a spinning top—is sufficient for the understanding of all things. The spinning top is a form that harnesses the energy of movement at a singular point. Is that the aim of "writing from within this web of glances"?

Is that what the warrior of the modern world sees when he stares out defiant in the face of time, refusing to be captive to it, knowing that above him lie the songlines that guide him through the thresholds that he has to cross?

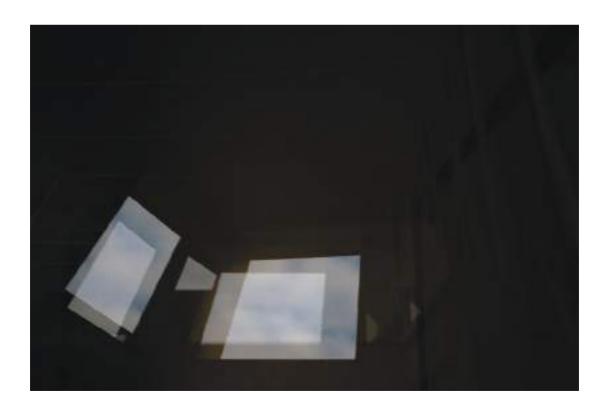
The elegance of the image of the philosopher struggling to grab a top calls to mind another kind of elegance: that of knowledge. The Chinese word *Shih* refers to an insightful or elegant form of knowledge. It is a concept that self-consciously rejects *Hsueh*, which is a bookish knowledge that anyone can gain with time and effort. *Shih*, on the other hand, evokes a sensibility of the world in which so much depends on a spinning top, whether glazed with rainwater or not. This is the world of the generalist, where there is adequate respect for a critical intelligence, and everything else—theory, qualification, citation—is ordinary. The emperors of Chou were fond of saying that their dynasty came into being, because of a great sensibility. A dynasty is not built by those who live in towers, but those willing to accept, as Alexander the Great once did, an invitation from Poros to speak as equals. While we may never be assured an absolute equality of where we come from, imagine the empires that could be built if we assumed an equality of where we speak from.

Philosophy has always been preoccupied with the relationship between place, experience, identity, and thought, and many believe that a life of the mind is given form in the place and spaces that we dwell. And yet, it is curious that there still persists a division of labor in which some places are either brought into thought by others or if a place thinks itself into being it is seen as evidence only of experience, identity, and location. Perhaps this has to do with the nomadic nature of thought, whose restlessness moves through songlines better than permanent addresses. But thought—as with missing objects—can only be found with an erotic attention to detail, and philosophy begins in the only place it can: in the midst of things. The *jahan* of where we are is the *jahan* of the world.

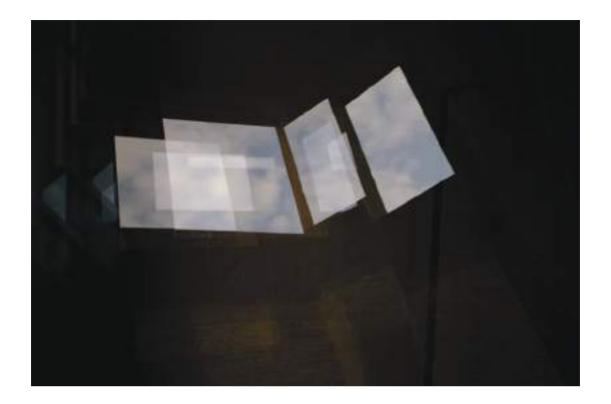
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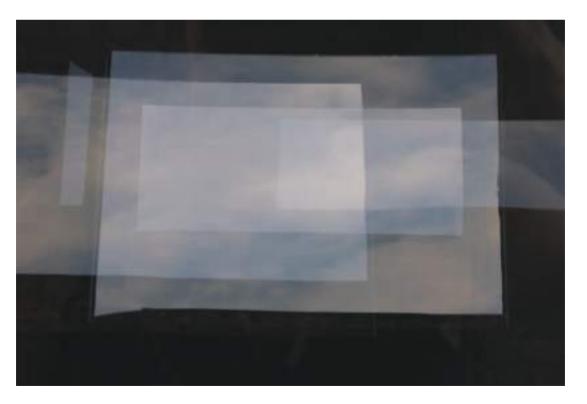


WALK ACROSS TIME



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Multiple Skies, 2009, acrylic, glass, steel, installation, Grey Sheep, Berlin, 2009 (photo: Maria del Pilar Garcia Ayensa)

## ON READING

There are as many ways of reading a book as there are readers. And when one thinks of how many books there are in the world, it is astounding to think how many ways of reading there must be. Countless expressions collide each time a book is opened. Some are registered, others carried from place to place, and some get lost and become inaccessible even in memory.

She said, "The more I read from her biography, the more I realize how much of my own life I have forgotten."

In reading, there is hunger: a hunger to become part of something. This hunger to participate does not quibble about seeking satiation or having been left unfulfilled.

What hunger is this?

Is it a secret? Does it wait for an event to make itself known?

There are countless doors, and an entirely new world may explode into your life through them any moment.

It is a creation without an author; a rally moving simultaneously in multiple directions, constantly on the move, drawing lives into polyphony, refusing to let anything remain settled or snug in its certainty.

It is a hunger that has simmered for millions of years. It is in argument with the signs that are drawn from what we read, and there are traces that we leave behind for those who will come after us. It is an attempt to grasp a world that is still in the making. It is a longing to tune in to that which is outside me,

but which had also, somewhere, begun to take shape within me. It is an urgency to bring close those layers that are not imbricated in one's own biography. It is an extension of those connections that do not otherwise emerge clearly in view.

We contain within us a thousand versions of reading. We remain in search of images that will emerge when we bring these into conversation.

Page after page, new lines of argument are drawn, and travel routes thicken. There is no final destination to reach. Whenever you reach somewhere you find others, and where you are becomes yet another point of departure.

#### ABOUT CYBERMOHALLA ENSEMBLE

Cybermohalla Ensemble is a collective of ten practitioners and writers: Shamsher Ali, Love Anand, Rakesh Khairalia, Lakhmi Kohli, Jaanu Nagar, Nasreen, Neelofar, Rabiya Quraishy, Babli Rai, Azra Tabassum. The ensemble emerged from the project Cybermohalla, which comprised a network of dispersed labs for experimentation and exploration among young people in different neighborhoods in Delhi. The project was initiated by Sarai-CSDS and Ankur: Society for Alternatives in Education in 2001.

Over the years, the collective has produced a broad range of material, practices, works, and structures. Their work has appeared in online journals, radio broadcasts, printed publications, neighborhood gatherings, and exhibitions of contemporary and new media art. They have published a number of books, the most notable of which are Bahurupiya Shehr (2007) and Trickster City (2010).

#### SELECTED WORKS

#### Neighborhood Projects

A series of broadsheets and wall-mounted magazines (2001–ongoing); A Wall and a Sofa, a wall-painting project, Dakshinpuri, Delhi (2004); The Enchanted Roof, imaginary objects, furniture and structures placed on roofs of houses, LNJP Colony, Delhi (2007); Temporary Structures for Gathering, a month-long event in specially-designed temporary structures along the lanes of Dakshinpuri, Delhi (2008).

#### Blogs

Nangla's Delhi, which chronicles the turbulent period of demolition of one of the neighborhoods, Nangla Maanchi, where a Cybermohalla lab was located.

#### Books

Galiyon Se/By Lanes (Sarai/Ankur, 2002); Book Box (Sarai/Ankur, 2003); Bahurupiya Shehr (Rajkamal Prakashan, 2007); Trickster City: Writings from the Belly of the Metropolis (Penguin India, 2010); No Apologies for the Interruption (Sarai-CSDS, 2011).

#### Essays/Texts

"Cybermohalla Diaries," in Sarai Reader 02: The Cities of Everyday Life (Sarai, 2002); "Devices," in Sarai Reader 03: Shaping Technologies (Sarai, 2003); "Log 001, 20 October, 2003," in Sarai Reader 04: Crisis/Media (Sarai, 2004); "Logs/Acts/Texts," in Sarai Reader 05: Bare Acts (Sarai, 2005); "Notes from Besieged Neighborhoods," in Sarai Reader 06: Turbulence (Sarai, 2006), "Ghevra Diaries," in Sarai Reader

07: Frontiers (Sarai, 2007); "Three Pieces," in Almost Island (2007); "A Lifetime," in Manifesta 7: Companion (Silvana Editoriale, 2008); "Paper Waits," in A Question of Evidence (Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2009); "Inauguration," in City Improbable: Writings on Delhi (Penguin India, 2010); "Fearless Speech/Fearless Listening," in Sarai Reader 08: Fear (Sarai, 2010).

#### Performances

What is it that flows between us?, Young International Performers' Festival, Play Mas, Hamburg (2004).

#### Videos

Mobile Sketches: Memory Card 01, Pocket Films Festival, Paris (2008).

#### **Exhibitions**

"Coolpolitics," Rotterdam (2003); "Next 5 Minutes 4," Festival of Tactical Media, Amsterdam (2004); "Bifocal Vision: The Near and the Far in Contemporary Indian Art," Culturgest Museum (in cooperation with O Museu Temporario), Lisbon (2004); "Leading from the Edge," Museums and Galleries NSW, Wagga Wagga (2005); "On Difference #2: Grenzwertig," Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart (2006); "Insiders," CAPC, Musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux (2010); "City as Studio," Sarai-CSDS, Delhi (2010); "Other Possible Worlds," Neue Gesellschaft für bildende Kunst, Berlin (2011); "Living as Form," Creative Time, New York (2011).

#### Cybermohalla Hub

Version 01, a wall of the planned Cybermohalla Hub was presented in "On Cities," Swedish Museum of Architecture, Stockholm (March 4–May 4, 2008). This was conceived by Nikolaus Hirsch/Michel Müller in collaboration with Cybermohalla Ensemble, with support from Ankur: Society for Alternatives in Education and Sarai-CSDS, Delhi.

The prototype of Cybermohalla Hub, designed by Hirsch / Müller in collaboration with the Staatliche Akademie der Bildenden Künste Stuttgart, Stephan Engelsmann, Daniel Dolder, and the Cybermohalla Ensemble was included in the exhibition "The Rest of Now," Manifesta 7, Bolzano (2008), and "A Question of Evidence," T-B A21, Vienna (2008–09).

New versions of the hub were developed by Hirsch/Müller and the Cybermohalla Ensemble for the exhibition "Living," Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Copenhagen (2011) and the exhibition "Sarai Reader 09," Devi Art Foundation, Gurgaon, India (2012).

#### ABOUT THE ARCHITECTS

NIKOLAUS HIRSCH is a Frankfurt-based architect, and since 2010, director of the Staatliche Hochschule für Bildende Künste and Portikus in Frankfurt am Main. Before that, he was a professor at the Architectural Association School of Architecture, London, and visiting professor at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, and the Institute for Applied Theater Studies at Gießen University. His work includes the Dresden Synagogue, Hinzert Document Center, Bockenheimer Depot Theater (with William Forsythe), unitednationsplaza (with Anton Vidokle), European Kunsthalle (Cologne), and numerous exhibitions structures such as Bruno Latour's "Making Things Public" (ZKM | Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie Karlsruhe) and collaborations with M. F. Husain and Rags Media Collective in "Indian Highway" (Serpentine Gallery). Current projects are a studio structure for Rirkrit Tiravanija's The Land and the Cybermohalla Hub in Delhi. Hirsch has curated "ErsatzStadt: Representations of the Urban" at Volksbühne Berlin (2005); "Cultural Agencies" in Istanbul (2009/10); and "Globe" (2011), "The Frankfurt Conversation" (with Hans Ulrich Obrist, 2011), and "Time/Bank" at Portikus (2011). He is the author of On Boundaries (Sternberg Press, 2007) and editor of Institution Building: Artists, Curators, Architects in the Struggle for Institutional Space (Sternberg Press, 2009).

MICHEL MÜLLER is a professor at the Cologne Institute for Architecture and Design and has held academic positions at the Staatliche Akademie der Bildenden Künste Stuttgart (2005–10) and the Hochschule für Gestaltung Karlsruhe (2004). His work includes the Power Station in Darmstadt, the Machine Hall Darmstadt, and numerous exhibition architectures such as "Making Things Public" at the ZKM | Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie Karlsruhe (2005), "Frequencies-Hz" at Schirn Kunsthalle (2002), and "Indian Highway" at the Serpentine Gallery (2008). In 2004 he earned his doctorate with a dissertation on planning methods of adaptable architecture from the University of Darmstadt. Müller's ongoing research on institutional models has resulted in projects such as the Bockenheimer Depot Theater with William Forsythe, unitednationsplaza in Berlin with Anton Vidokle, Cybermohalla Hub in Delhi, and currently a studio structure for Rirkrit Tiravanija's The Land and a temporary living structure for homeless people in Frankfurt am Main.

#### NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

CAN ALTAY is an artist living in Istanbul. He investigates the functions, meanings, organization, and reconfigurations of public spaces. Altay's "settings" provide critical reflection on urban phenomena and artistic activity. His work has been exhibited in such large-scale exhibitions as the Istanbul, Havana, and Gwangju biennials; and in such venues as the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven; and MoMA PS1, New York.

SOLOMON BENJAMIN is an urbanist based in Bengaluru who holds a PhD from MIT's Department of Urban Studies and Planning. His earlier work looked at the politics of East Delhi's urban formations, and his later interests included the politics of land titling. His recent research focuses on his concept of "Occupancy Urbanism," which examines the reengineering and appropriation of objects and artifacts in India and China.

VAHNI CAPILDEO is a contributing editor at the Caribbean Review of Books. Her third book is titled Dark and Unaccustomed Words (Egg Box Publishing, 2011). Working for the Oxford English Dictionary inspired her fourth book, Utter (forthcoming). Capildeo is also collaborating with the Trinidadian artist and writer Andre Bagoo on an urban space/absence text/image project.

RANA DASGUPTA is a British writer who has been based in Delhi since 2000. He is the author of *Tokyo Cancelled* (Fourth Estate, 2005) and *Solo* (Fourth Estate, 2009). He is currently at work on a book about his adopted city.

#### NICO DOCKX AND HELENA

SIDIROPOULOS are visual artists based in Antwerp. Since 2009, they have been developing interdisciplinary collaborations, which often involve other artists. The duo have participated in numerous international exhibitions, including "Utopia Station," 50th Venice Biennale (2003), Haus der Kunst, Munich (2004), Musée des Beaux Arts de Nantes (2005); "Floating Territories," Istanbul, Athens, and Venice biennials (2007), Manifesta 7, Bolzano (2008); "Stickiness," MAMbo, Bologna, galleria neon, Bologna (2008); "New York Conversations," e-flux storefront (2008), Palais des Beaux Arts, Brussels (2009); and "Dada Merz," Cabaret Voltaire, Zurich (2011). For their contribution to this book they have involved the graphic designer Michel Van Beirendonck as a collaborator.

IVANA FRANKE is an artist living in Zagreb and Berlin. Her work concerns the experiences and conceptions of the expansion of space, both as neurobiological processes and in the built environment that we inhabit. She has worked with flicker-induced visual hallucinations (Seeing With Eyes Closed, Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice; in collaboration with the Association of Neuroesthetics); created a largescale structure involving invisible architecture (Room for Running Ghosts, Hotel Lone, Rovinj); and explored the geometry of infinity models (Years Away, Cirko, Helsinki). She represented Croatia at the 9th Venice Biennale of Architecture (in collaboration with the architects Petar Mišković, Lea Pelivan, and Toma Plejić) and the 52nd Venice Biennale (2007).

MATTHEW FULLER is an author whose books include Behind the Blip: Essays on the Culture of Software (Autonomedia, 2003), Media Ecologies: Materialist Energies in Art and Technoculture (MIT Press, 2005), and Elephant & Castle (Autonomedia, 2011). He works at the Centre for Cultural Studies, Goldsmiths, University of London.

MATTHIAS GÖRLICH is a Darmstadt- and Zurich-based communication designer, teacher, and researcher. In 2000, he set up his design studio and has worked on numerous projects and consultancies, including a commission by the United Nations in Amman, a spatial study for the European Kunsthalle, and a study on cultural spaces in India. Görlich also initiated White Spots Black Holes, a research project on the role of mapping in urban processes, and co-directed the postgraduate program Civic City, which is based at the Institute Design-2Context, Zürcher Hochschule der Künste. He is coeditor of the Civic City Cahier series.

RUPALI GUPTE is an architect and urbanist who practices and teaches in Mumbai. She is an assistant professor at the Kamla Raheja Vidyanidhi Institute of Architecture; a founding member of the Collective Research Initiatives Trust (CRIT), an organization that works on research and practice in urbanism; and partner at the design practice RRarchitecture101. Her projects include studies of postindustrial landscapes and housing types in Mumbai, a multimedia novel about a semi-fictional history of Mumbai's urbanism, a story-map installation on the mill lands of Mumbai, and other community design projects in the city.

GRAHAM HARWOOD has lived and worked with Matsuko Yokokoji as YoHa (or "aftermath") since 1994. YoHa's graphic vision and technical tinkering has powered several collaborations,

including the first online commission from the Tate Gallery, London; and work in the permanent collections of the Centre Pompidou, Paris; ZKM | Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie Karlsruhe; and the municipality of Bolzano. YoHa cofounded the artist group Mongrel (1996–2007). In 2005, they established Mediashed, a free media lab in Southend-on-Sea, England. In 2011, YoHa produced *Invisible Airs*, Database Expenditure, Power with the Bristol City Council and the Pervasive Media Centre, exploring the emerging field of open data.

HU FANG lives and works in Guangzhou and Beijing. He is a fiction writer and the cofounder of Vitamin Creative Space, as well as the Pavilion, Beijing. His recent novel Garden of Mirrored Flowers (2010) was co-published by Sternberg Press and Vitamin Creative Space.

MARTAND KHOSLA is an architect based in New Delhi. A graduate of the Architectural Association, London, his work spans institutional, residential, and public spaces. Recently, he has been exploring representations of the urban domain through visual art and writing.

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NAEEM MOHAIEMEN is a writer and artist working in Dhaka and New York. Since 2006, he has been working on a long-term project on the ultra-left of the 1970s, parts of which have shown at Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, the Finnish Museum of Photography, the Sharjah Biennial, Experimenter, and Frieze Art Fair. Mohaiemen is editor of Chittagong Hill Tracts in the Blind Spot of Bangladesh Nationalism (Drishtipat Writers' Collective, 2010); and author of, among others, "Fear of a Muslim Planet: Hip-Hop's Hidden History" in Sound Unbound (MIT Press, 2008) and "Flying Blind: Waiting for a Real Reckoning on 1971" in Economic & Political Weekly (2011).

SHARMISTHA MOHANTY has published the novels Book One and New Life (RST Indialnk Publishing, 2005); her third novel is forthcoming. She is the founding editor of the online literature journal Almost Island, and the initiator of the annual literary international conference, Almost Island Dialogues. Mohanty is on the international faculty of the creative writing program at the City University of Hong Kong. She lives in Mumbai.

NINA MÖNTMANN is a curator and a professor at the Royal Institute of Art, Stockholm, where she heads the department of Art Theory and the History of Ideas. In 2010, she was a research fellow at the Museo de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid. Recent publications include the edited volumes New Communities (Public Books/The Power Plant, 2009) and Art and Its Institutions (Black Dog Publishing, 2006).

VIVEK NARAYANAN is an author whose first novel is titled *Universal Beach* (Harbour Line, 2006). A second, *Mr. Subramanian*, is forthcoming. His poems have appeared widely online and in print. Narayanan is coeditor of the online literary journal *Almost Island*. He was a coordinator for Sarai's Independent Fellowship program and is a mentor for the City Studio Fellowship (2010–11 and 2011–12). He lives in Delhi.

HANS ULRICH OBRIST is co-director of the Serpentine Gallery in London. Prior to this he was curator of the Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris from 2000 to 2006, as well as curator of Museum in Progress, Vienna, from 1993 to 2000. Obrist has co-curated over 250 exhibitions since his first exhibition, the "Kitchen Show (World Soup)" in 1991. Accompanying his curatorial projects, Obrist has contributed to over 200 book projects. His recent publications include A Brief History of Curating (JRP|Ringier, 2009), The Conversation Series (Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2007–ongoing), and Ai Weiwei Speaks (Penguin, 2011).

JACQUES RANCIÈRE is professor emeritus of philosophy at the University of Paris (St. Denis). He has written numerous books that have influenced the trajectory of contemporary thought, including The Nights of Labor: The Workers' Dream in Nineteenth-Century France (Temple University Press, 1989 [1981]), The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation (Stanford University Press, 1991 [1987]), and The Emancipated Spectator (Verso, 2009 [2008]), among others. He lives in Paris.

RAQS MEDIA COLLECTIVE (Jeebesh Bagchi, Monica Narula, and Shuddhabrata Sengupta) have been variously described as artists, curators, editors, and catalysts of cultural processes. Their work, which has been exhibited widely, locates them at the intersection of contemporary art, historical inquiry, philosophical speculation, research, and theory. They live and work in Delhi and are based partly at Sarai, an initiative they cofounded in 2000. They are members of the editorial collective of the Sarai Reader series, curated "The Rest of Now," and co-curated "Scenarios," for Manifesta 7 (2008).

CHRISTOPH SCHÄFER writes, draws, and makes conceptual installations based on observations of everyday urban life. In his new book, Die Stadt ist unsere Fabrik / The City is Our Factory (Spector Books, 2010), he tells an unusual story of Hamburg, from the primeval sludge to the 2010 "Right to the City" movement in the city. His work in the Park Fiction collective in St. Pauli was marked by theoretical urbanist ideas, as were his film installations Revolution Non Stop and Hoang's Bistro. Schäfer's works have been shown in such exhibitions as documenta 11. His public installation Topography of the Commons has been realized as part of raumsichten (2012), in a forest near Bad Bentheim.

AMAN SETHI is a journalist and author of A Free Man (Random House India, 2011).

PRASAD SHETTY is an urbanist based in Mumbai who works with the Collective Research Initiatives Trust (CRIT). He also teaches at the Academy of Architecture, Mumbai. His work involves researching and teaching contemporary Indian urbanism, which includes architectural practices, archiving post-liberalization developments and entrepreneurial practices, and investigations into mapping processes.

BHRIGUPATI SINGH grew up in New Delhi and studied in Delhi, London, and Baltimore. He is currently a postdoctoral scholar at Harvard University. He has published a number of articles on the anthropology of the media, religion, and philosophy/critical theory. Singh is currently completing a book set in rural Rajasthan, titled Gods and Grains: On the Political Theologies of Popular Hinduism, and co-editing Anthropology and Philosophy: Affinities and Antagonisms.

RAVI SUNDARAM is a senior fellow at the Center for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), Delhi, and one of the founders of Sarai. His recent published works include Pirate Modernity: Media Urbanism in Delhi (Routledge, 2009) and No Limits, Media Studies of India (Oxford University Press, 2012).

SUPERFLEX is a Copenhagen-based artist collaborative founded in 1993 whose projects engage economic forces, explorations of the democratic production of materials, and self-organization. They describe their projects as tools for spectators to actively participate in the development of experimental models that alter the prevailing model of economic production. They have had numerous important solo shows at institutions such as Kunsthalle Basel; Kiasma, Helsinki; and the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven.

DANIELA ZYMAN is chief curator at Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary, Vienna— a foundation established in 2002 by Francesca von Habsburg in perpetuation of the Thyssen's family collection. She was previously chief curator at MAK — Austrian Museum of Applied Arts / Contemporary Art in Vienna (1995—2001), and was fundamental in the creation of the MAK Center for Art and Architecture at the Schindler House in Los Angeles, of which she was the director for some years. Zyman earned a MA in art history from the University of Vienna and a MFA from Columbia University.

# ABOUT THE EDITORIAL COLLECTIVE, EDITORS, AND DESIGNERS

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PRABHAT K. JHA is senior project coordinator with Ankur: Society for Alternatives in Education, and has been working in the field of experimental pedagogy in Delhi's settlements for over two decades.

KJELD KJELDSEN (editorial adviser) has been a curator at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art since 1974. He has curated numerous exhibitions, including the exhibition series Frontiers of Architecture I–IV and is editor and co-author of innumerable books. He was editor of Louisiana Revy series (1991–2000), and is the recipient of the N L Høyen Medal (2001), and the Henning Larsen Foundation Grant (2010).

MICHEL MÜLLER is a Darmstadt-based architect and, since 2010, professor at the Cologne Institute for Architecture and Design.

SHVETA SARDA is a writer, translator, and editor based at Sarai-CSDS since 2001, where she also works with Cybermohalla Ensemble. She is the translator of *Trickster City* (Penguin India, 2010), an anthology of writings on the city of Delhi, where she also lives.

AZRA TABASSUM is a writer and practitioner with Cybermohalla Ensemble. She has been associated with the Cybermohalla lab at LNJP Colony in Delhi—where she lives—since its inception in 2001.

ZAK GROUP is a London-based design office founded in 2005 by Zak Kyes; in 2012 Grégory Ambos joined as partner. The studio's work has been included in the 22nd International Biennale of Graphic Design (Brno, 2009), "Graphic Design for and Against Cities" (Corner College, Zurich, 2009), "The Malady of Writing" (MACBA, Barcelona, 2009), "Wide White Space" (CCA Wattis, San Francisco, 2011), and "Graphic Design Worlds" (Triennale Design Museum, Milan, 2011).

#### INSTITUTIONAL COLLABORATORS

SARAI is a program of the Center for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS, Delhi) and a coalition of researchers and practitioners who share a commitment towards developing a public and creative model of research and practice in which multiple voices are rendered in a variety of forms. Initiated in 2001—with practices that range from contemporary art, publishing, and academic research; to the organization of discursive events, setting up of media labs in different neighborhoods in the city; to reflecting upon the culture of freedom in speech and in software—Sarai has sought to participate in, and cultivate, a public domain that can find a new language of engagement for the contemporary world.

ANKUR: SOCIETY FOR ALTERNATIVES IN EDUCATION is a Delhi-based NGO working in the area of critical pedagogy and alternatives in education in working-class neighborhoods. Ankur works with children, young people, and women, and brings together the energies of community-based social intervention, while remaining alert to the imperatives of social and cultural specificity and autonomy.

LOUISIANA MUSEUM OF MODERN ART is an international museum in Copenhagen. The museum's permanent collection includes more than 3,000 works, and is one of the largest in Scandinavia. It takes the period after 1945 as its point of departure, featuring major European and American artists.

#### CYBERMOHALLA HUB

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Nikolaus Hirsch/Michel Müller in collaboration with the Cybermohalla Ensemble, Sarai-CSDS, and Ankur: Society for Alternatives in Education; with Engelsmann Peters Engineers, Akademie der Bildenden Künste Stuttgart, Daniel Dolder, Ana Farfan, Snehal Gada, Sayantan Maitra "Boka," Steffen Sendelbach, and Omar Siddiqui Different installations of Cybermohalla Hub have been supported by Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary, Vienna, 2008-2012; Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Copenhagen, 2011; and Manifesta 7, Bolzano, 2008.

The prototype of Cybermohalla Hub at the Devi Art Foundation, Gurgaon, was realized as part of the exhibition, "Sarai Reader 09," curated by Raqs Media Collective (August 2012—April 2013).

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Institutional Collaborators
Sarai, Centre for the Study of Developing
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