

Shaina Anand. www.chitrakarkhana.net. Notes on [KhirkeeYaan](#).

My recent projects have been informed by a continued interest in media and information politics but also importantly, by the critique of and experimentation with video as a documentary medium. Freed to an extent, by low-cost access to consumer video and audio technology, these projects try to lay open the process of documentary filmmaking (and attempt a kind of deliverance from it) by allowing a collision between the creation, reception and consumption of media. For a brief period of time, the site (and its notion of community) are staked out as one belonging to the public, in various ways. Open loops in real time and over the course of the project result in essential transformations; subject is performer, voyeur is subject, performer is auteur, audiences are witnesses and so on.

Televisions and cable form micro and small terrestrial networks.– existing or built and enabled on-site. The TV box, a ubiquitous, cheap, technically versatile piece of hardware, is the delivery system for the media. Negotiations are at each step unpredictable and participatory, made possible by person-to-person consent and immediate ‘micro- contracts’. The intervention is self-organized, unplanned, grey, at all times collaborative and easily do-able.

KhirkeeYaan was an exploration of an ‘open-circuit TV system’ as a local area network communication, autonomous micro-media generation and feedback device. Cheap CCTV (security) and CATV (cable TV) equipment were laid out to form temporary communication systems for the 'use' of the community-at-large. TVs and electricity, consent and participation were found on-site(s) often drawing from a multitude of sources. Four sets of cameras, TVs and mics were planted within a 200- metre range of each other. The cameras sat on top of the TVs, The quadrant comprising of sound and image from all four locations was fed back to the TVs, allowing instant 4-way communication .

While [ChitraKarKhana's](#) prior projects have employed cheap and accessible DIY video and editing software, hardware and skills to produce on-site 'televised' media, [KhirkeeYaan](#) pushed that envelope of site, community media and technology further. Here the 'filmmaking' was automatic; made possible through a local network of mirror views, eye-level communication, and the absence of 'cameraman' and editor. Through a visible process, video becomes the site and the space becomes media, complicating or temporarily shifting the micro-politics of the sites on which they occur. The 7 'episodes' below were generated through 7 sets of installations in different neighbourhoods in and around Khirkee Extension, New Delhi in April 2006 while on an associate residency at [Khoj](#) International Artist Residency.

Episodes.

1. [Streets](#).

From the time the TVs flickered to life till we pulled the plug on them an hour later, the device was claimed by kids and teens from the four lanes, who had transformed it into an ‘Indian Idol’ special, singing songs, and exchanging poetry. They competed, joked and rated each other. The mics exchanged hands; there were layered conversations across the 4 zones. A bit like web cam, a bit like video conferencing, Khirkeeyaan’s salience (to my eyes at least) lay in the feedback happening in local time; “Right here, Right now”, as one of kids sang. The TV image, while looking like some global news channel, was transformed from the idiot box of passive viewing, to an immediate self-reflecting device which could be looked into and looked out of.

2. [Home.](#)

Episode 2 connected the two wives of the Nepali caretakers who work at Khoj, and who rarely leave the premises alone, with three Nepali women living in housing tenements across the road. They conversed in Nepali, for almost two hours, and got to know each other a little bit; one of them had arrived in Khirkee Extn. only a fortnight ago, while another had been in Delhi for over a decade. While viewing the conversation later, with simultaneous translation by Arun and his wife, I noted that the voyeurism in the image had a curious effect; the four corners of the frame that 'contains' an image and directs our gaze was dissolved, instead the boundary was the cross hair grid, adding an impartial centrality to the entire surface: upfront, full frontal and distributed.

3. [One Lane.](#)

Two hair cutting saloons on either side or two grocery stores. There was banter, performance, drunken foolery and a lot of grown male 'chichorapana'. Soon, the conversation veered towards 'news': communal riots in Aligarh and close home, the MCD demolition and sealing drive that had just begun. The show got hostile: A migrant working class prepared to fight and hunt for precarious 'prosperity', wherever it may be found, even as pessimism and doom clouded the future of small business owners and their acquired property. Their speculation on changes the constructed malls would bring: new spaces for commerce which would not be accessible to them and the subsequent rise in real estate value that Khirkee Extn. would soon witness, meant that most of the shops would have to locate elsewhere or deace. "This is a question of leaving Delhi", said one wage earner, "with a kick up our asses." "It's finished here in Delhi. Dead" said a shop owner.

4. [Factories.](#)

Episode 4 was in the basements of one T-shaped lane. Two hand embroidery units, a leather goods unit and a tailoring unit were wired for an entire day. All owners or supervisors agreed to let us place the cameras and TVs, and did not seem to have a problem in letting their employees' converse with others and listen in as they worked their long shifts. The act of hooking up surveillance cameras in sweatshops to create a new network for communication between labour under different employers was ironic, yet the day went by with no interference by the supervisors or unit owners. Zakir Bhai, owner of the unit where we had also hosted the patch bay, piped Bengali songs in the afternoon to ease the drudgery (and increase productivity). Ansar-ul a young tailor gave regular updates on cricket from his radio. Through the work-day, there was passive play. Many languages and dialects were spoken, common bars and districts were discovered, friendships were forged across the quad, goods and services bartered and poetic justice delivered. Towards the end of the day, we requested Zakir Bhai, who had sat on the edge of his frame like a benevolent censor to leave his (and therefore all) the workers alone for a bit. He obliged and went off for a haircut, tea and chat in the neighbouring saloon, leaving his 9-year old son behind.

5. [Doctors advice](#)

A doctor-cum-social-worker, whose business card said 'eradicate poverty through health and education' gave free advice to the mohalla one Sunday afternoon. People gathered outside 2 STD booths and inside a dhabha as the good doctor answered their questions from his house. This was TV with a value addition, and closest to community TV endeavors such as "medical advice for your benefit". Completely different from the 4:4 interface, this heirarchical arrangement is a telling document of authority with little knowledge, and the top-down flow of information. It is also hilarious and darkly disturbing.

6. [Village Women.](#)

In Khirkee Extension you do not see too many women in public. In Khirkee Village though, we met Indu, who ran her husband's STD booth. The owner of Shyama beauty parlour also agreed to host a TV in her parlour. Our search for a feudal Chauhan family was difficult as in most cloistered homes the sari-veiled women told us to seek permission from the patriarch, who was away at work. Then we met Seema, and her four sisters-in-law who instantly agreed, saying they've been meaning to talk with the women of the village, to come together to form a women's support group. Sudha, who worked as a maid in several houses, let us put one in her makan malkin's house. Our idea was to 'stage' an event. To bring into this cloistered community, an element from the outside. Next morning, we were set up by 11:30. And into the parlour walked artist Anita Dube for a much-needed wax.

At all times all 4 TVs saw the same image, a mirror of the 4 sites, or rather the site itself. The street map of this location could be traced by the coloured cables circumscribed within 200 m. or so. In the larger context of site and performance these images and conversations presented themselves as 'true'; live, happening here. It seemed appropriate to push this notion by scripting a part of the space. Anita's appearance in episode 6 was one such intervention.

7. [The Lane again.](#)

The underlying caste violence which Episode 3 mirrored and projected to the fore had rattled me, both as participant and later as viewer. A lot of 'current issues' had been discussed and openly debated. Even though the quadrant allowed equal opportunity for all to be heard and be counted for, the insults and innuendo that surpassed play, foolery and neighborhood mockery had to a great extent flown from one young source. RajuBhai aka BabyUncle. Belligerent. Brat. Brahmin. Others debated with civility or 'kept their place' despite the open-ended structure of the interface...they had years of reasons for doing so. If someone had to temporarily challenge and rock this status quo, this everyday anger and discrimination and violence against the lower caste, against minority religions and against the migrant, it would have to be someone from 'outside'. A newcomer on the block, who could stake his claim to the street, hijack its intrinsic hierarchies for a bit and disappear when the TVs turned off. In our last episode, Tanmoy Sarkar, an actor from NSD appeared in the lane as a Bengali daily wage labourer in search of a job.

Afterword.

In each episode, the 'installation' terminated on site at the end of the episode. What you saw was what you got. The audience interacted and participated, and the "set" was dismantled soon after. New networks were enabled during the course of the intervention. The media generated was later returned to source locations on CDs with requests that they be disseminated by lending and copying. Subsequent movement has not been tracked.

Still, a thought for the day.

"On the horizon, then at the furthest edge of the possible, it is a matter of producing the space of the human species-the collective (generic) work of the species-on the model of what used to be called "art"; indeed, it is still so called, but art no longer has any meaning at the level of an "object" isolated by and for the individual."

-Henri Lefebvre, "openings and conclusions." (The Production of Space)

These notes were presented along with a video installation of the episodes at **Sensor-Census-Censor: Investigating Regimes of Information, Registering Changes of State.**

A three day International Colloquium on Information, Society, History and Politics, at Sarai-CSDS (29 Rajpur Road, Delhi 110054) on 30th November, 1 & 2 December.

