

Culture@WSF

From the moment when a subordinate class becomes really independent and dominant, calling into being a new type of state, the need arises concretely of building a new intellectual and moral order, i.e. a new type of society, and hence the need to elaborate the most universal concepts, the most refined and decisive ideological weapons.

From Gramsci's Prison notebooks

In order to 'build that new intellectual and moral order' which would facilitate 'another world', it is extremely important a political task to ensure adequate representation of cultural practices and discourses within the World Social Forum. The 20th century trend of treating culture as an appendix or a mere service provider to real politics have alienated many potential movements/initiatives from the people. Also the inability to recognise the political possibility and discourses hidden within the community/region based cultural productions and the resistance to consider cultural works as political interventions have reduced many rich theories into possible hypothesis only. Besides, in recent years most of the imperialist agenda were played and contested through the devices of culture. In this context it was decided to scheme the cultural events at WSF 2004 as a composite spectrum of cultural and artistic forms which express themselves outside the corporatised mainstream and oppose enculturation processes of globalisation. We hoped that the nature of the congregation and the designed panorama would enhance the political potential of the diverse cultural practices.

In accordance with the charter of WSF the work plan was drawn as:

a) Create an ambience conducive to value culture as a political statement, to see art works as an intervention in the current discourses and to recognise cultural practices as a serious mode of political mobilisation. Towards these goals we decided to ensure adequate representation and visibility within the WSF process. Nine stages, three exhibition halls, two cinema halls, spectacular opening and closing ceremonies and thousands of informal programmes, all meticulously planned and designed, were final result of months of hard negotiating and our commitment towards the visibility of culture.

b) Extend the binaries of political art. This meant not only collating the vast reservoir of protest art but also evolve an ethos where the political potential of the art works can be realised beyond the theoretical rhetoric.

c) Create a physical space and infrastructure where various forms of cultural expressions can co-exist without losing their specificity, dignity, vigour and autonomy. This meant, other than massive mobilisation, evolving a complex scheme and creatively working on designing the spaces and programming. Two

architects, Neera Adarkar and Pankaj Joshi exclusively worked to design the spaces for culture.

d) Reduce the gap between people's art and professionals' art in order to evolve a genre of political art with popular possibility. This meant initiating and monitoring large number of collaborative projects between unlikely people and groups.

e) We also aimed to send a signal of challenge to the market forces of culture the same way WSF has been sending signals to the WTO and its allied forces. This meant the volume, scope and quality of some of the programme needed to be spectacular, popular and dense.

In terms of spectacle and multiplicity, mass mobilisation and political representations, integrated design and conducive ambience, innovative programme and challenging discourses, **Culture@WSF** had definitely reached a new height, which would be the benchmark for similar fora in future.

Opening / Closing programme:

Co-ordinated by Majlis

The opening and closing programme were designed to be a major statement on the relationship between politics and culture. Special efforts were made to follow the general pattern of WSF India in choosing artists from other countries.. The huge energy and high expectation generated on both days, by the artists, their performances and political convictions and the overwhelming spectacles cannot be measured in words.

Finally, in the opening programme there were Junoon, a band from Pakistan; Siwela Sonke Dance Theatre from South Africa and Instituto, a slum youth band from Brazil. On the closing evening there were Shubha Mudgal and her group Koshish, Indian vocal; Gilberto Gill, the legendary singer and Minister of culture, Brazil; music performances by artists from Mali, Africa and Indian Ocean, folk-rock band. The opening stage was adorned by huge scrolls painted by the artists of Baroda on both side of the stage and the backdrop was made of a peter projection of the world map. (Peter's projection is a size accurate version of the world as opposed to the shape accurate Mercator's projection.) The closing stage was made of 40 ft high three stylized human figures designed in the style of Ravana effigy of Ramlila. This was an attempt to recognise the subversive culture as oppose to the hegemonic Bramhanical tradition.

PERFORMING ART

Stage Faiz (opening stage) and stage Brecht (amphitheatre)

Co-ordinated by Majlis and Point of view respectively

These two stages were the plenaries of the culture programme. While stage Faiz hosted programmes on various people's movements in India, stage Brecht explored multiple contemporary issues, which were being debated at WSF both from India and other countries.

In stage Faiz performed *Shaheers* of the textile industry of Mumbai; Praja Natya Mandali, Andhra Pradesh; Women in Black, India and international chapter; Janotsava, Bangalore; Jana Natya Manch, Delhi; Abhiyan, Jharkhand and Pratidhwani, Delhi.

Stage Brecht was a platform for world culture and represented various sectoral and regional programmes. Over four evenings it hosted cultural performances involving different art forms - theatre, dance, drag, music - from India, Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The performances included plays by Habib Tanvir and Kalakshetra Manipur from India; Endless Trails' collaborative music performance from Brazil, France, Italy and India; Prima Donna's performance of drag from Malaysia; *Sakala brothers*, an African percussion group, and Aki Nawaz, a musician from the Asian underground music scene in England.

Two artists from Sweden and one each from Pakistan and India volunteered to work throughout the week of the forum to paint the flanks of the amphitheatre. For the audiences, stage Brecht was a real treat. The colourful amphitheatre designed for the audience of 2000 was spread out in a fan shaped tiered seating. The scale of the performance area and the audience space was designed to inspire meaningful audience participation and dialogue. Though highly appreciated the space turned out to be grossly inadequate for the purpose. We had packed audiences and a stampede on every night and even had to stage emergency extra shows on aggressive public demand.

Nukkad/self organised performances

There were six stages to host all the self-organised performances ranging from conventional street plays to experimental performances to adaptation of classical forms to literary readings to community-oriented cultures.

Stage Kabir (after the 14th century poet Kabir), Lal Ded (after the bhakti poet of Kashmir), Amar Sheikh (after the trade unionist, poet and *Shaheer of Maharashtra*), Safdar (after the cultural activist and martyr Safdar Hashmi), Jangarh (after the martyred tribal artist)

Co-ordinated by Kabir Kala Manch, Pune

This programme one way was the easiest to conceive and in another way was the most difficult one to execute.

There were five stages functioning in two shifts of 2pm-6pm and 8pm-10pm everyday of the forum. By December 25th we had received 250 proposals. Finally, there were 125 groups from India and 23 groups from outside India performed at the Nukkad stages.

**Stage Neruda (Literary corner, named after the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda)
Co-ordinated by Majlis**

This stage was conceived to break the notion of literature being an elite form of culture. Hence we took care of extending the concept of literature through the programming itself. Various expressions of protest, expressions related to social mode of productions, even community cultural expressions were brought under the umbrella of literature. The days were divided into women's literature, urban literature, Dalit literature and literature of indigenous people.

CINEMA

**Film Festival: Hall Ghatak (after filmmaker Ritwik Ghatak
and Hall Eisenstein (after Russian filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein)**

Co-ordinated by Magic Lantern Foundation, Delhi and Meenakshi Shedde

Called "***Other Worlds Are Breathing***" the festival presented 84 contemporary documentaries from 40 countries (including 22 Indian entries) and 8 classic fictions on related themes. Hall **Ghatak** showed films under the sections: *The Global Market; A World of Work and Survival; Life, Politics and Survival; The World Abused I* and *Other Worlds are Breathing*. Hall **Eisenstein** showed films under the sections: *A World at War; The Women's World; Identities; Culture/Resistance* and *The World Abused II*. Every evening, after 8 p.m. when the section on documentary and short films closed, fiction films were screened.

Everyday there were 3 panel discussions. The themes of the panels were:

The Global Market

A World of Work and Survival

Life, Politics, Struggle

The World Abused, I

Other Worlds are Breathing

A World at War

The Woman's World

Identities

Culture / Resistance

The World Abused, II

Late Night Classics of World Cinema

In the feature film section eight films were shown.

D.W. Griffith's *Intolerance* (US, 1916, b/w, silent) on intolerance & war and M.S. Sathyu's *Garam Hawa* (India, 1973) on communalism & partition, shown, Roberto Rossellini's *Germany Year Zero* (Italy, 1947) on war and Majid Majidi's *Baran* (Iran, 2001) on patriarchy & refugees shown, Leo McCarey's *Duck Soup* (US, 1933) on satire on dictatorship by the Marx Brothers and Raj Kapoor's *Shree 420* (India, 1955) on poverty, unemployment and real estate crime shown, Jiri Menzel's *Closely Watched Trains* (Czech Republic, 1996) on satire on Czech occupation by Nazi Germany and Walter Salles' *Central Station* (Brazil, 1998) on exploitation of street children shown.

Travelling Film Festival

This programme was conceived as a pre-cursor to the main festival at the venue and also as part of the mobilisation process. The films were curated thematically, based on the five main themes of the WSF: 6 films on *Imperialist globalisation*, 6 films on *Militarism and peace*, 5 films on *Communalism*, 6 films on *Casteism and Racism* and 7 films on *patriarchy*.

VISUAL ART

Travelling Photo/Poster exhibition

Under this scheme photo exhibitions on various issues related to WSF were developed in consultation with activists groups and the exhibitions travelled extensively for six months and finally culminated at WSF Mumbai in January.

The exhibitions were

Poverty, hunger and food security: travelling from Orissa-Jharkhand-Bihar-Uttar Pradesh-Madhya Pradesh-Andhra Pradesh-Maharashtra. Organised by ODAF

Women and patriarchy: Tamil Nadu-Kerala-Karnataka-Andhra Pradesh-Maharashtra. Organised by Tamilnadu women's collective

Dalits—exclusion, dignity, rights: Rajasthan-Punjab-Haryana-Jharkhand-Madhya Pradesh-Maharashtra. Organised by NCDHR

Train Painting

Co-ordinated by Open circle

Eminent artists of India as a curtain raiser painted 2 suburban trains, one on the central line and the other on the western line. 46 artists from Bombay and Baroda along with 170 art students from the 7 art schools in Mumbai, Nasik, Poona and Baroda participated in this event, a month prior to WSF. Eminent artists like Nalini Malani, Sudhir Patwardhan, Navjot, Nilima Sheikh, Gulammohammed

Sheikh, Atul Dodiya, Meera Devidayal, and Rekha Rodwitta painted in solidarity with the young students. We regard this event as path breaking and beginning of a new phase for cultural movement in the country.

The trains with WSF paintings ran for a month on the tracks of Mumbai.

Exhibitions at the Venue

The exhibition spaces were spread over three halls named after the progressive artists of India, Germany and Cuba.

Joseph Beuys Corridor

who believed that Art was a genuinely human medium for revolutionary change for completing the transformation to a better world.

Ana Mendieta Fabrick/Factory (1948-1985)

who was the pioneer of performance art, land art and body art. Ana Mendieta worked with issues of migration and crime and violence on the body as a woman.

Nasreen Mohamedi Lobby (1937-1990)

who captured the evanescent, while distilling the monumental, using a line.

Home With No Walls

Co-ordinated by Open Circle and Sahmat

100 artists were invited to collaborate to build the Home with no walls. There were 50 artists from India and 50 from other countries. They were requested to send copy left images (either moving or stills) as messages to WSF. We received 60 responses from Netherlands, Austria, Japan, Malaysia, Germany, Australia, Pakistan, US, England, Brazil, Argentina, Sweden, Zambia, U.K and India.

One of the highlights of this section was an installation *The Great Indian Bazaar* by Vivan Sundaram.

Bombay/ Bumbai / Mumbai

Co-ordinated by Paromita Vohra and Tushar Joag with the Industrial Design Centre, IIT

This project was conceived to put together the city's socio-political history from the port city to industrial hub to the centre of violent globalisation. This collaborative exhibition in four sections comprised of installations, films, photographs, and urban planning data, was a commentary on how the lives of the residents of Bombay have been changed by privatisation and globalisation. The exhibition was centred on a chimney, symbol of the textile industry and the most important landmark of the city's history.

BAGHDAD! BAGHDAD! – Anti War-on-Iraq memorabilia exhibition

Co-ordinated by Mamta Murthy and Kamla Raheja college of Architecture

In 2003, protests against the war on Iraq were in the air, in the streets, on the net – this mass movement HAD to be commemorated at the WSF 2004. The idea was to honour the tradition of mass protests in general as well as to record the contemporary twist to the protest art in the Iraq context.

The Anti War Coalitions of Africa and Thailand, World March of Women, Stop the War, Greece and UK, Marcha Mundial de Mulheres, Brazil and Becker Foundation, Canada were some of the organisations who enthusiastically participated. Independent news sources like Indy media were also helped in the research process. Many individual artists too had organised shows in galleries and even streets and squares in protest against the American invasion of Iraq. The Khaled Ramadan-Meteor show in Europe and Frank Shifreen show in New York were some of the large shows in the exhibition at WSF. Works of Pakistani artists like Asim Bhatt and Ayesha Khan, African artist Kristin Pallitza, Japanese photographer Naomi Toyoda, Preeti Kaur's Love Poem and Theresa Wolfwood's collage were some of the more intimate entries.

To Dear World Social Forum Co-ordinated by Majlis

100,000 people gathered in Mumbai to be a part of the WSF. There were an even larger number of people who could not make it but wanted to be a part of WSF in spirit. Keeping this in mind we conceptualised the Video letters to WSF: *Another world is possible, lets build it!* project. An open call to filmmakers, video artists, media professionals, computer bugs, camera buffs and amateurs was sent out en masse. In order to allow maximum access to the messages we requested everybody to send in silent pieces of approximately 3-5 minutes in length.

Finally there were 76 entries: 42 from India and 34 entries Albania, Algeria, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Estonia, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Ireland, Kosovo, Krgyzstan, Latvia, Netherlands, Pakistan, Slovenia, Sweden and US. The topics of the video letters ranged from anti war to women's rights to issues of identity to communalism.

Soof Patchwork Tapestry Co-ordinated by Comet media project

The word *soof* recalls the robes of the medieval *sufis*, who made patchwork garments from discarded clothing given to them by householders. There too it had a symbolic meaning of fusion, of bringing many elements into one, connected by love. The idea also resonated with contemporary ecological thinking, of recycling, making good things out of discarded materials. Mails were sent all over the world requesting people to bring two textile squares of 31 cm or 1 foot, with patchwork in the form of a message for WSF. The collected pieces of textiles were then to be stitched together as a patch work spread.

On the evening of the closing event, the patches were hung as four panels on both sides on the stage, beautifully lit up. The varied nature of the squares reflected the diversity of the WSF. Each square told its own story, but also blended with the rest. From India, patches were made by people from Assam, Bihar, Chattisgarh, Goa, Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, New Delhi, Rajasthan, West Bengal and Tamilnadu. International contributors included people from Argentina, Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Indonesia, Iran, Italy, Japan, Korea, Norway, Pakistan, Spain, Sudan, Sweden, UK and USA.

Self Organised Exhibitions

Window to Gujarat

Organised by Gujarat Social Forum

A comprehensive Exhibition on the happenings in Gujarat since the past few years from the earthquake to the carnage. The exhibition was designed as a narrow by-lane of old style houses which are common sights in older parts of cities in Gujarat.

Cabin Baggage

Organiser: RAIN Network (international and Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten (Amsterdam))

Partner initiatives of the RAIN Network were invited to make an artwork that would be or fit form, size and shape of a cabin baggage and thereby address the issue of global movement in terms of immigrants/ refugees/ exiles/ multinationals/ armies. The responses came from 14 individuals and 8 collectives, which included films, sculpture/s, prints, installations, actions, prop/s for performance, etc.

Other exhibitions included Movement Moves Itself- Germany, Local Beach, Global Garbage – Brazil, Apilleras – Berlin, Cukoo's Nest , Positive Lives, Images of Afghanistan, Images of Oppression and Assertion - Action aid, India.

Above we have listed only the exhibitions, which have been registered with the culture committee in advance. There have been many more exhibitions strewn all over the campus. Those exhibitions ranged from paintings by children to posters from women's movements to impromptu exhibitions of Dalit expressions to college students' exhibition on Gujarat carnage to collections of posters against World Bank etc. One of the major axioms the exhibits endorsed was that contemporaneity has different meanings and manifestations in terms of the politics and aesthetics in different parts of the globe. As opposed to a central notion of 'Modernity/ Post-modernity' under the homogenising hand of globalisation.

Exhibition Space

Designing the space for these exhibits was a major task, both politically and in terms of infrastructure. The space had to be fluid for the essence of WSF, it must do justice to the labour and commitment put in making them, it should not get reduced to an exotic display, it must be protected from the chaos which arises from such an assimilation of humanity that was WSF, it must be displayed in the proper political context, it should not alienate people, it should not alienate the artists either and so on.

The saving grace was the venue: tall and wide industrial shades, a reminiscence of a factory shed in the post-industrialised mega-metropolis Mumbai. Our first task was to preserve the ethos and look of the industrial space. Next, we decided to physically break the barriers and the hierarchy between various art expressions. Hence, Renate from Amsterdam would sit whole day next to charred houses in Gujarat exhibition and make her migrant's home with paper straws or in the *home with no walls* there would be television sets showing letters to WSF or the chimney of the closed mill in the textile industry would be adorned by the poem *Mumbai* by Narayan Surve; a cut out of Amitabh Bachchan as a working class icon in Bollywood would pop out of the chawl window in the Bombay exhibition; artists from India, Pakistan and Sweden would collectively paint for peace at stage Brecht while Habib Tanvir's tribal artists rehearsed and so on. We also made provisions for putting up exhibitions in the five plenary halls, in order to break boundaries and overlap culture with theory, art with politics and expressions with strategies.

OTHERS

Theme Tune and Video

Vocalist Shubha Mudgal and musician Aneesh Pradhan and filmmaker Mahesh Mathai

Hearing about WSF and especially of this project Shubha Mudgal's group made an offer to record a musical rendering of the famous poem *Hum dekhenge hum dekhenge... jab taaj uchhale jayenge/sab takht giraye jayenge...* (**We shall see/It is certain that we shall see/That day that has been promised us/That which has been written on the parchment of destiny/When crowns will be hurled into the air/And thrones brought to the ground**) for WSF 2004. This is the song, rendering of which by Iqbal Bano in Pakistan became a major inspiration for civil liberty movement against dictatorship in '50s.

Once the song was recorded, filmmaker Mahesh Mathai, made a music video along the themes of WSF. The video was screened on the opening evening and subsequently through the daily video bulletins. But the scale of impact that we aimed for through this project could not be achieved at the end.

Interactive Sessions

During the forum each morning there were interactive sessions between the visiting artists and local participants. Each day's session was dedicated to one discipline such as visual art, documentary filmmaking, street performances and collaborative art works. Each day the discussion explored the issues of globalisation and market economy in the context of cultural practices and the specificity of its impact in each region.

Video Bulletin

Co-ordinated by Paromita Vohra

The WSF Video Bulletin was conceptualised as a project with two aims – to document to the extent possible the events of the six days of the conference; the second, to mobilise students in the city.

We tried to maintain a mix of neighbourhoods, languages and class in selecting colleges. Some of the colleges we visited were – National College, SIES College (Sion), Chetana College, Sophia College, Sophia Social Communications Media, SNDT, Wilson, St.Xavier's, Shivaji College, Mithibai, St. Andrews and so on as well as student members of a media organisation in the Ulhasnagar-Dombivili areas. 16 students were finally selected on the basis of a one page note about why they wanted to be involved.

Two weeks of preparatory workshops were held. The workshops were designed to give technical familiarity but more importantly an intellectual and political framework from which to understand and cover the WSF.

Producing the video bulletin

a. The Team

There was a core editorial team that worked with students to guide them in research and scripting of the stories. There were a total of 6 teams, each having a professional cameraperson and sound recordist and two student producers. 4 Editing set-ups operated simultaneously to edit stories.

b. The Bulletin Structure

The bulletin was structured to include a certain amount of reportage but also more complex thematic stories. Each bulletin had news round-up – plenaries, rallies, general events. It then had stories under the following headings – Ideas for Another World, WSF and the City, interviews and Something Special. Each bulletin ended with a section called Vox Pops – this was a series of interviews with people, each of whom were asked the same question – e.g., What is your message to George Bush? Why is the WSF a big story? What is your personal slogan for the WSF?

The bulletins came up twice a day. The bulletin played on TVs both outdoors and indoors. The outdoor TVs were definitely more popular as they were put up in

trees and it was dramatic to see them play once it got dark. People would gather around the TVs while eating or just standing around. At the Closing evening, three small video, which were edited highlights from the video bulletin were played and it was obvious how happy people were to see the events they had been part of building.

The Bulletins have been consecutively collated on 5 tapes and being copied and distributed. They serve as technically excellent and intellectually accessible mini-films, which can be used to raise discussion, mobilise further or place in the mainstream media.

Currently a full length documentary film is being edited with the 200 hours material that is generated by the video bulletin units.

Afterthoughts

- a) There had been 2500 artists who were physically present in the cultural programme of WSF 2004. There, of course, were many more who could not accompanied their works. The number is impressive but yet not adequate. For the World social forum it could have been many more.
- b) Though we worked very hard to create a space conducive to political culture and made a complex scheme to address the issues of political culture and culture of politics, finally all our schemes and spaces burst out of their seams. Hundreds of unscheduled programme, the impromptu rallies, the mobile exhibitions, the incessant drumming and the sea of humanity during the forum brought the colour, vigour, cacophony and dust to the process and often over shadowed the scheduled programme. If today the culture@wsf is considered as a significant event, much of the credit goes to these thousands of unofficial artists who both challenged and encouraged our efforts.
- c) We deeply regret our inability to ensure representations from some of the most important political-cultural phenomena. Programme from Kashmir and upper Northern areas and North Eastern states in India, Central Asian countries and East European countries were grossly inadequate.
- d) We hope the broad alliance of artists and cultural activists, which have been forged through the process of WSF, would be strengthened further through common agenda against globalisation and communalism.