

PlayBlog: Pornography, Performance, and Cyberspace.

I intend to make two arguments about internet pornography that might, at the first glance, seem to be already well made, made around other media forms, and made by names more famous than mine. The first is about how pornography on the internet needs to be understood, not in its sexual content but in the narrative devices and the performance within the blogosphere. The second is about how a pathologisation of pornography in the third world, especially in the case of India, is symptomatic of resistance to another larger phenomenon – something that is perhaps best left to its amiable ambiguity – Globalisation. By the time I reach the end of the essay, I hope to have revisited both the arguments and formed them differently to propose a certain understanding of interactive cyberspaces.

I want to make a quick clarification that throughout the essay, I shall be making the distinction between the use of the words internet and cyberspace. While the internet refers to the technology that binds several networks through a single access protocol, cyberspace borrows from William Gibson's definition of it in his novel *Neuromancer*. Gibson coined the term cyberspace and defined it as something more than a network: "Cyberspace. A consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation, by children being taught mathematical concepts. [...] A graphical representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system." (pg. 128). Gibson's notion of cyberspace was necessarily inter-active and agential. **The 'consensual hallucination' is a deliberate act of creation- of the space and of the self. The 'sense of who' is firmly connected to the 'sense of where' within cyberspaces.** This interactive nature and the embodiment of the self in the space are crucial in my deployment of the notion of cyberspace. Another distinction that I would like to preserve is between pornography on the internet and cyberspatial pornography (or netporn as it is more popularly called) and hope to formulate the two differently in the course of this essay.

I would like to suggest that categories are produced by the law through a process of reification – where the abstract idea becomes hypostatized into an object or a thing. **Pornography is a reified product where the notions of sex, sexuality, morality, obscenity, vulgarity and prurience all converge to produce the ‘thing’ that we identify as pornography.** In the virtual world, the reified object is actually ephemeral in nature, thus leading to a new definition of internet artefacts. The law is a big player in the construction of these categories and the state’s attempts at policing and governing are essentially through the medium of law. Also, an artefact comes to be recognised as ‘pornographic’ through the interventions of the legal system.

In this essay, I hope to look at the interactions of law, culture and cyberspaces in order to come to a new understanding of netporn outside of the prejudged categories of morality, obscenity, and sexuality that are generally deployed in conceiving of any notion of the pornographic.

Penetrating Pornography

The internet in India arrived at a time when pornography and ‘obscenity’ were already emerging as public concerns. Here is a brief outline:

1993:

- The outrage surrounding the **Kamasutra condoms ads** generated a lot of talk about the nudity and sexuality they used to market their product.
- The first major controversy around ‘obscenity’ in the imagination of a ‘spectating public’ around Subhash Ghai’s blockbuster movie *Khalnayak* where the heroine and her accomplice shed the conventional roles of chastity and purity, and unabashedly celebrated their sexuality and desires in a song and dance sequence to the lyrics “Choli ke pichey kya hai...?” (What lies behind the blouse?). Though the petition demanding a ban for the song was rejected, the Information and Broadcasting Ministry (I&B) actually recommended revision of the Censor Board for Film Certification (CBFC) guidelines to curb material that was ‘obscene and vulgar.’

1994:

- Anjali Kapur, advocate and model, was charged with accusations of obscenity when she posed naked for the cover page of *Fantasy* magazine. Nudity was immediately translated into ‘Pornography’ without examining either the framing of the subject in the picture or the attempts at ‘aestheticisation’ of nudity in the picture.
- The Shiv-Sena in Maharashtra announced its intentions of protecting India by “repelling the attack on culture by sexual permissiveness.” Under the aegis of Pramod Navalkar, the then Shiv Sena Minister for Cultural Affairs, there were attempts made to remove sex and vulgarity from Indian popular cultures through an indiscriminate confiscation of books, magazines, and films that contained sexually explicit material.

1996:

- The infamous **Tuff shoes** advertisement that had a naked couple (models Madhu Sapre and Milind Soman) locked in an embrace, wearing nothing but a snake around their neck, saw moral panic attacks coming out in a rash.
- The Delhi High Court was flooded with petitions that demanded immediate censure and legal action against an idea that was not yet launched – An adult entertainment channel called Plus 21.
- Mira Nair’s controversial movie *Kamasutra – A Story of Love* was released, banned, re-released, censored and shunned by many audiences.
- Metropolitan magistrate Prem Kumar asked Doordarshan – the State owned television network - to stop screening all material that did not have a Censor certificate (*The Pioneer*, 4th July, 1996). Kumar also issued directions that authorised the police to enter a place that screened objectionable material and seize it. A High Court decision later stayed Kumar’s orders (*The Times of India*, 31st July, 1996).

1997:

- The Bajrang Dal – a youth wing of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) attacked an exhibition of artist M.F. Hussain’s paintings where he had portrayed Hindu goddesses in the nude (*The Times of India*, 30th January, 1997). This overtly communal attack was articulated through the ideas of ‘obscenity’ and ‘vulgarity’.

These arguments were later mapped on the internet though they were not specific to the internet. **The arguments are indeed an extension of the claims that were made**

against satellite television, beauty contests, music videos, free economy, Hollywood movies and the re-appearance of Coke [1] in the Indian markets. They were arguments against the outsider, who was slowly penetrating the Indian socio-economic sphere and effecting a new way of living; around a change which threatened to disestablish the existing order of things and altering the domains of life, labour and language [2], in unprecedented ways; around Globalisation and the paraphernalia that it carries with it; arguments which were eventually mapped onto the arrival of the internet and the easy access to ‘pornographic’ material that it provided.

It is within such a quagmire of moral panic, redefinition of the notions of decency, obscenity and culture that the internet made its presence felt. In May 1997, a national film magazine – *Stardust*, carried a morphed picture of Pooja Bhatt with the title: “Scoop of the Month: Actresses caught nude in the net.” The first public face of the internet was the possibility of unmoderated, unpoliced pornographic material on the WWW – the realm of the forbidden, the dirty, and the desired.

The State’s initial reactions to the internet were also rooted in technophobia and pathology and a strong desire to police this new space. From attempts at blocking the ports that supply pornographic material to passing laws against the underage use of internet and the public consumption of internet in cyber-cafes [3], the State has tried and failed to monitor or thwart the proliferation of pornography on the internet. Eventually, unable to predict or control the cyberspaces, the State took a new approach towards the internet and its users. Computers and technology were looked upon as the panacea for curing all the diseases that Development had spawned in India. The policing of these technologies was taken to a new level of ‘responsible usage’ and ‘ethical consumption’ of material.

The State adopted a policy of disavowal with regards to the internet and instead of focusing on the grave concerns that pornography and its proliferation through the internet were posing, it decided to put the onus on the individual user [4] and transferred its attention to fights over the radio spectrum and the threats to national security that the new

technologies posited. **The State has a policy of [reactive resistance](#) to internet pornography – taking measures as and when the material ‘offended’ an individual who reports it to the machinations of the state.** The new [cyber laws](#) that exist in India blame only the consumer of pornography for his/her (generally his) access to the pornographic material, thus creating the category of a consuming citizen who is responsible, law abiding and morally ‘chaste.’

However, the State’s side stepping of the problem has had new age mutant cyber theorists dwelling on many interactive sites like P2P networks [5], IRC chat rooms [6], MMORPGs [7], MUDs [8], webcams, forums around pornographic material [9] etc. in order to understand how pornography proliferates newly in the ungoverned circuits of cyberspace. Most of them look at the easy availability of pornographic material online and do not set out to define or understand netporn. **I would like to suggest that what needs to be studied, in relation to internet pornography, is not the easy availability of pornographic material on the internet or the sexual content of this material, but the shaping of pornography within cyberspaces.** While the internet with its multimedia platforms serves as an ideal space for sharing pornographic material in different formats – erotica, still images, moving images, webcams, anime, etc. – this is not what netporn is about. I would like to make a claim that **pornography as a genre is defined differently within each of the media it populates** [10]. Cinematic pornography and its conventions of framing, performance and narrative, for instance, are very different from still image pornography in magazines like *Playboy* or *Penthouse*. Similarly, written erotica/pornography has different structures to operate within. To club all of these as netporn is to overlook the differences between these pornographic products. More significantly it draws our attention away from pornography as it is shaped and designed by the internet. **We need to start by defining netporn as a category of pornography that is structured within cyberspaces and inherits the characteristics of the medium within which it is produced.**

Sex in the Cyber-City

The first signs of recognition of netporn come from other spaces. Microsoft Networks (MSN), on September 24th 2003, announced the [closing of its chat rooms](#) in certain parts of the world – largely the third world. The concern about pornography and the Internet was suddenly made more visible and vocal as claims were made that the chat rooms – interactive Internet forums – were used for “illegal sexual acts” [11]. This was a new notion of Internet pornography – pornography not as something that was created in a place of production and then circulated through a medium but pornography as created in the unfolding of the very space within which it is housed. **Unlike the earlier media forms like print and moving images** – especially moving images- **the creation and consumption of pornography were the same process**. This is the first take off point to start thinking of Internet pornography as constituted within interactions. Earlier interactive sex sites like telephone sex or ‘talking dirty’ were often objected upon as obscene or indecent. However, it is only with the internet that these interactions are looked upon as products – as pornographic in nature. Netporn then, can be located separately from the proliferation of pornographic material on the internet. It is housed in the interactions that take place within cyberspaces across different platforms like IRC, MUDs and blogs. Netporn is not only a product of cyberspaces but it also becomes the visible characteristic of most cyberspaces.

Traditionally, pornography was a visual spectacle of sorts where the dividing line between the performers and the audience was very clear. On the one hand were the paid professionals who embodied the desire of the audience and performed several sexual acts for the gratification of the audience. On the other hand was the audience who took vicarious pleasures out of the acts being performed on screen by performers, who were the manifestation of their own desires. **With netporn, the performers and the audience are the same people**. Sherry Turkle maps how users of interactive cyberspaces do it not for something else but for the act itself. The action becomes an end in itself and this is a characteristic that is common across interactive cyberspaces.

There is absolutely no audience to a chat or a blogging network outside of the participants in the blog or the chat – participation can range from active performance to passive and innocuous lurking. The blog, though documented, is ephemeral and often lost in the matrix, remembered only by search engines and internet archives. **These are forms where the user becomes a performer as well as the audience. Netporn seems to encourage such a narcissistic turn where the embodiment of our desires are us.** A similar claim can be made for webcams that allow capturing a person's daily life and making a spectator out of the person. Sites like www.defycategory.com have proved that the performer in front of the webcam is as much a spectator as anybody else.

While pornography within cinema and earlier forms is so predicated upon the body, netporn is essentially disembodied porn [12]. Due to the very nature of interactive pornography, the pornographic value of the production is not about gratification but about the projection of this gratification. To take an example, within a blog, if the user does not make a representation of his/her orgasm – the ultimate aim of most pornographic acts - the pornographic value of the production is completely lost. Even if the user in the physical world does not reach an orgasm and yet makes a representation of it within the conversation, it is accepted as the culmination of the production. Disclosure on a blog would not become pornographic in nature till it is consumed and visibly desired by the audience that it is produced for. Self-representation – visual as well as verbal - becomes pornographic because of the address the representation carries and the responses it elicits from the consumers of the representation. **The 'pay off moment' in netporn is not in the physical orgasm of the consumer/producer, but in the desired or projected orgasm of the user behind the virtual handle.** This disembodiment of pornography and its severe wrenching from the notions of body is definitely a unique characteristic of cyberspatial pornography.

Once a-porn a time...

Within the blogosphere of Livejournal [13], netporn needs to be defined through the motifs of blogging and the methods of networking which are deployed in this sphere. Let us start by defining a blog. Traditionally – in a conception that seems to think of

cyberspace as an extension of the 'real' world; a space of fantasy and escape – blogs have been looked upon as an evolution of personal diaries or personal publications. It is easy to define blog as a web-publishing tool, thus spiralling an immense amount of speculation, discussion and critique of blogs as replacing the traditional news media and bringing out subversive narratives that shall change the world. However, this conception of blogs comes from a techno-utopic idea and is redundant after some time. **While it is indeed a valid argument that the documented visibility of non-mainstream and marginal voices leads to a certain impact on the way information and knowledge production are treated, this is not the structural motif of blogging** [14]. Nor is it the defining characteristic of a blog. Instead of looking upon blog as a medium of communication and information dissemination, it might actually help in treating it as a cultural artefact.

A cultural artefact, to avoid any confusion, can be clearly defined as a living repository of shared meanings produced by a community of ideas. A cultural artefact is a symbol of communal (in the non-violent, non-religious sense of the word) belonging and possession. A cultural artefact becomes infinitely mutable and generates many self-referencing and mutually defining narratives rather than creating a master linear narrative. Because the cultural artefact is beyond the purview of the law and becomes a signage for the construction of the Symbolic Order within a community, it carries an illegitimate authority, which is not sanctioned by the legal systems or the State, but by the lived practices of the people who create it.

Blogs, if looked upon as cultural artefacts, can reveal different ideas as to why people blog and what are the motifs of the medium – cyberspace - that they inherit. I would suggest that blogs be looked upon as structured around the idea of Hypervisualisation. Hypervisualisation can be detected in the Disney and Pixar animated movies where the aesthetic of the movie is not in the narrative structure but in the rendering visible of that which was not available to a normative eye before this [15]. It is easy to claim that cinematic pornography also made the usually invisible acts into viewable performances and hence is hyper-visual in nature [16]. **It is necessary to understand that**

Hypervisualisation is not just a method or a tool of framing but an aesthetic which helps us make sense of an artefact.

It is easy to confuse Hypervisualisation with Realism but a close look at the techniques reveals that Hypervisualisation is actually almost the reverse process of Realism. While Realism sought to represent reality, Hypervisualisation seeks to substitute it with a higher and more believable notion of the real. Apart from the penetrative gaze that it offers, Hypervisualisation is essentially about unravelling and revealing that which was hitherto unavailable to our notion our sense of the self and the spaces we inhabit. Hypervisualisation is the characteristic motif of interactive cyberspaces wherein it becomes a trope for revealing [17]. The users within interactive cyberspaces like blogs get into a virtual striptease of sorts, where they increasingly reveal parts of themselves which adds not only to the notion of their self but also to the idea of what blogs are.

Most studies of blogging seem to concentrate on what they call ‘political’ blogs or ‘information’ blogs that have a large audience and are more visible. However, we need to look upon blogging, as not inspired by these promises of reportage or analyses but as driven by the innate desire to tell a story; and a story, not of the other but largely of the self. **A large section of the blogosphere consists of ‘personal’ blogs – biographical narratives documenting the ephemeral experience of living every day.** At the cost of sounding lyrical, I would suggest that blogs are an attempt to achieve immortality – to create documents that shall outlive the user and live in the limbo of the virtual. It is the same drive that perhaps drives an artist to bleed in paint on her canvas or an author to angst in words on his pages.

The visible face of blogging – the informative blogs and the meta-blogs that analyse the blogs - are actually exceptions rather than the rule. They are visible because they are rare and it would be a mistake to look upon these blogs as representative of the blogosphere. They need to be evaluated as subversive rather than allied to the nature of blogging. This is the reason why I look upon the blogging community within Livejournal rather than looking at the more celebrated blogs that have a large readership and are

looked upon as ‘objective’ representations. I would rather focus on blogs that tell the story. In the methods of telling this story and the kind of things this story telling enables, I shall try to formulate the notion of netporn as we have conceived it so far.

A typical life cycle of a blogger on ‘ElJay’ (as it is often known amongst the more prolific bloggers on Livejournal) is interesting [18]. A ‘Noobie’ starts with tentative narrative accounts of the world around him/her and initiates a commentary about their daily life. This is what I call the foreplay of blogging. **The writer in the narratives is exploring, expanding, nudging and unfolding the physical surroundings around him/her.** Through user-pictures, personal profile pages and subscription to communities, the blogger begins to reproduce him/herself in a specific way – trying out different names, forms and identities. As the bloggers start ‘befriending’ people and increase their audience and readership, a strange thing happens. Instead of suddenly becoming more cautious of the self and the things that are being revealed on the blog, [the blogger increasingly sheds the layers of pseudonymity](#) and facades that they create in their early narratives. There is a typical increase in talking of the self in these narratives and one can notice a sharp shift from the exploratory narratives to the intimate revelatory biographies that are produced in the blogs. The disembodied protagonist self makes it easier for the blogger to strip his/her virtual garments and exposes more of the self than ever before [19].

Through moods, through user icons, through the music that they mention they are listening to, through emoticons, through subject lines, through the filters that they set around their posts, and through the metadata that they generate, the users initiate long discussions that range from existential angst to the best kind of bread to eat with pita salad. However, more than the content of the blog, it is the nature of conversation that they encourage and the element of the personal that comes out in the conversation. Flirting, talking dirty, using sexual innuendoes, putting intimate pictures of the self, or even inventing sexually charged blogging language like [‘comment whore’](#) or ‘blog virgin’ are a part and parcel of this stripping. **The narratives of the self take on the overpowering temptation that the internet offers – of stripping the self bare without**

any inhibition of any kind. The blogger enters an orgiastic setting where s/he is intimate with a huge range of people. These are the people for whom the filters don't work and the most intimate and personal feelings and descriptions are put forward. Advice, exchanges, sharing of emotions, bonding – the process takes many different roads. With each of the persons in this clique, the blogger develops a sense of safety, security and intimacy that allows him/her to take things at a different level. It is the post third date scenario and things are going to hot up.

Directly in proportion with the conversations that people start on the blog, the blogger becomes more revealing, more explanatory, more stripped of the layers that technology has imposed on him/her. And then comes a moment when the blogger finally achieves what s/he is looking for – an acceptance of his/her narratives and the realisation that comes from the reciprocal actions by the others who read their blogs. The content of the blog no longer matters. The blog often dwindles into something that is mundane, dull, everyday, regular, uniformly un-anecdotal – private. The blogger realises that it is not so much the content of what s/he is writing as the act of writing that is important. This moment when the blog content comes a full circle and resembles the first posts is the moment of 'blorgasm.' The sense that the self has been realised and that the experience of the moment is captured in that one representation or conversation is the pinnacle of pleasure for a dedicated blogger [20].

This is also the moment where the blogger engages in a [reverse strip tease](#). It is at this supreme moment of climactic joy that the blogger suddenly becomes conscious of the publicness of his/her virtual persona. The hypervisualised self becomes the naked self and this sense of rawness is evident in the way the blogs are written. They are no longer for a wide audience or the large readership that the blogger has accrued. The narratives are a form of exchange of sexual signs between the blogger and the adulterous group of close friends that the blogger has cultivated. Often the comments take the form of an orgiastic setting so embedded in personal views, shared meanings and language that they make no sense to anybody else. If pornography is indeed a representation of an exchange of sexual signs in a post-Derridian world, then blogging falls under that pattern.

It also leads to an unsettling reverse embodiment which is perhaps unique to interactive cyberspaces. In the first half of their blogging cycle, most users try to map their known-imagined-aspired for bodies in the virtual world and look upon these bodies as an extension of their physical presence. In the post-blorgasm world, where the blogger suddenly becomes conscious of the disembodied body and makes a call for privatising the public, **the disembodied self comes to be mapped upon the physical body of the user** – something that needs to be hidden from the people not in the grid of the blogging community. **The very act of blogging becomes pornographic in nature as it moves towards creating a certain ethos of sexual interchange and a coming of the self in the course of this interchange.** The blog becomes a space of shared meaning where signals need to be decoded and signs get produced out of intimately shared meanings. The blogs on ElJay, specifically the personal blogs, take on the form of pornography as they use the pornographic structure of interplay and represented pleasures of a disembodied spectator in their unfolding.

The blog in fact becomes an illustration of netporn as I define it. **Cyberspatial pornography needs to be tracked in interactive spaces like the blog where the self – real or imaginary, physical or disembodied, consuming or consumed – is put on a display and reveals itself in progression, arriving at a stage where it realises itself through the conversations that take place in the blog.** There are thus two ways of understanding netporn – through the grid of experience, where the user is allowed to recognise the stripped naked self and the realisation of the publicness of the self, where the virtual persona of the user is mapped out on the physical body of the user. The elements of performance and participation also need to be understood as encouraging the process of stripping the self that happens in such environments. Pornography has been the major motif of attraction for young and first time users of the internet. However, the users get an intuitive understanding of pornography as existing not only in the visual/written material available freely on the internet. They recognise the pornographic potential of cyberspace and hence most users who come to cyberspaces looking for pornography also become producers of pornography in the interactive cyberspaces. More than the

legislating bodies or theorists, it is the users who have defined netporn in the interactive cyberspaces and have exploited them to escape the panoptical view of a blinkered State apparatus.

The geeks – the power users of cyberspace, the virtual flaneurs who have constructed, explored, exploited and coined cybercities - **had this idea of pornography and the pleasure principle long before the cyberspace became a democratic space of GUIs and intuitive navigation.** Pr0n, geek slang for pornography of a different kind, was already in existence to give us clues to the pornographic nature of the internet. In Geek lingo, pr0n has very little or nothing to do with sexuality, sexual act or nudity. It is about the pleasure of control, of manipulation, of knowledge and of penetrating through a system, not by breaking it but by knowing it inside out. **Pr0n is in the ultimate pleasure that arises out of interacting with and through a system towards a physical and virtual climax.** The subversive element of Pr0n is not in defeating the system but in embracing it, immersing in it and in deploying it beyond the initial conceptions of the system. The pornographic in blogging on Livejournal is not about getting heard but about practicing pornography without being detected by the machinations of the state.

While the incidents like MSN's closing of its chat rooms and [Yahoo's currently withdrawn 'personal room' service](#) are already hinting at their recognition of the pornographic nature of such platforms, the state remains impervious to such an understanding of netporn and clambers in the dark to arrive upon a policing of pornography on the internet. The IT law passed as late as 2000 understands internet pornography in the old fashioned grids of production, circulation, distribution and consumption [21].

The law is incapable of dealing with the ephemeral quality of netporn and the possibility that pornography is not always 'prurient or lascivious'. Hence it is unable to deal with either the digital sexual material that circulates so easily or the intensely subversive pornographic nature of interactive surfing that the users indulge in on the cyberspace. This policing of cyberspace from an external body is an indication of the failure of the

legal apparatus to understand, identify or account for the object under consideration – in our case, internet pornography. **The authority of policing has always been the privilege of the State and also one of the activities through which the State validates its existence. However, this authority is now displaced to governing post-geographical authorities that rule in the realm of the internet.** The pathologisation of the cyberspace by the very bodies that create and govern cyberspaces needs to be taken into account. The decision to police and to promote certain interactive cyberspaces is not just an economic decision but also a recognition of these spaces as embedded in cybercultural practices of a certain kind.

The last stroke

I had set out in this paper to explore the possibility of understanding netporn as a particular brand of pornography that is shaped exclusively within the interactive cyberspaces. It was my intention to recognise netporn not as embedded in sexual representations, but in the sphere of interaction and networking that emerges out of the practice of blogging. The need to recognise netporn as constituted in these spaces was to look at the possibilities of resistance and subversion without getting caught in the debates of obscenity and morality that usually surround any discussions of pornography. It is also interesting to note that netporn, thus understood, can be recognised as paraphernalia of the all-inclusive Globalisation. It also lets us recognise that the resistance that the internet meets in the names of obscenity and morality are actually misplaced and are geared towards protesting against the approach of globalisation in the third world. As a last remark, such an understanding of netporn gives the notions of subversion or dissent a new idea, allowing us to bypass the often-containing decisions of the Indian nation state where pornography – production, consumption or possession - is a crime. It also hints at the shifting paradigms of authority and power as bodies more powerful and pervasive than the geographically restricted nation state emerge and become the new policing and governing bodies in a world defined, understood and consumed through the deployment of cyberspatial technologies.

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Images:

- 1 – *Khalnayak*
- 2 – *Kamasutra – A Story of Love*
- 3 – *Kamasutra – A Story of Love*
- 4 – Kamasutra condoms ad
- 5 – Tuff shoes advertisement
- 6 – M.F. Hussain painting titled Shiva-Parvati.
- 7 – Pooja Bhatt

Notes

[1] The story of Coke in India is fascinating. Coca-cola, the world's largest cola drink was available in India till the 1960s and was emblematic of a certain Western modernity and urbanism in Indian cinema and art. However, following the closed market policy, Coca-cola disappeared from the Indian markets, only to make a reappearance after almost thirty years when the Indian economy adopted the free market structure. Coke once again became the brand that skipped a generation to arrive as the new sign of modernity and progress. The reappearance of coke in the Indian markets was a sign of a new way of living and critiques of the State's economic policies and globalization have often revolved around this particular phenomenon.

[2] Michel Foucault in his *The Order of Things* talks about a paradigm shift visible in the domains of life, labour and language. Globalisation has changed the way we live, we work, we think of property and we create narratives of our self. It is one of the most visible paradigm shifts in the last century.

[3] In many Indian states, the cybercafés still demand a photo identity proof of age before allowing the users to access the net. In a recent discussion in the Indian parliament about the access to pornography in

public spaces, the concerned minister declared that they are encouraging cybercafés to do away with private cubicles and display panels, thus not giving privacy to the users.

[4] In the recent spate of MMS scandals that have been doing the run of cellphone users in India, the case of the DPS MMS is particularly interesting. The infamous DPS MMS is a short video clip shot by a male student at the Delhi Public School, New Delhi, engaging in sexual acts with a fellow female student. The clip spread like a contagion among the cellphone users around the nation and hit headlines. The court's decision over the case rules that anybody found in possession of this or similar clips on their cellphones or personal computers can face up to six months of imprisonment and/or a fine a ten thousand rupees. Here again is an example of the law's inability to understand a cultural form so that the producers of the material run free but the consumer of the material is found guilty. This is a definite example of disavowal on the part of the state, where instead of policing technology, it polices the consumption of technological forms.

[5] P2P or Peer-to-Peer networking has been one of the most used ways of sharing sexual content on the internet. Instead of uploading material on a home page on some server, the P2P allows the users to share files and folders unsupervised on the hard drive of their computers and transfer them across internet connections. P2P was also the biggest forerunner in encouraging piracy of media on the internet.

[6] Internet Relay Chat (IRC) has been one of the most prolific Internet activities and has come to stand in for the popular internet idea of 'forever connected.' Elizabeth Reid's account of IRC in her Master's thesis has been one of the more influential texts on the experiences and economy of IRC.

[7] One of the biggest excitement in the gaming world currently is about massive(ly) multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) which allow the users to work in an evolving virtual world at the same time over the internet. More information about the MMORPG is available at <http://archive.gamespy.com/amdmmog/week1/>.

[8] Multiple User Dungeons or Multiple User Domains are text based virtual reality platforms where players interact through massive role-playing and characterisation, investing a lot of time and text in creating the contexts and environments for their interactions. One of the most celebrated MUDs, Lambdamoo, has been made popular by Julian Dibbell's essay "How a rape happened in cyberspace." More information on Lambdamoo is available at <http://www.lambdamoo.info>.

[9] Very few studies of pornography on the internet have actually focussed on the physical moorings of cyberspace. Jane Gaines is a rarity who, in her productive article "Machines that Make the Body Do Things", looks upon the arrival of the electric vibrators (more popularly known on the net as dildos) as an indicator of the relocation of the female clitoris and its gratification; something that heterosexual porn had blind-sighted in order to focus on the 'pay off moment' – the sperm of the male orgasm spattered all over the body of the female performer. This was perhaps one of the first indicators of how netporn is not located in the material available on the net but in the way the users deploy the technology in their interactions with each other. These interactions are threefold – human to human, human to machine, and machine to human.

[10] In his study of the infant Jesus iconography, Chris Jenks, in *Childhood*, explores the objectification of the child for a particular gaze, religious, in this instance, as the beginnings of child pornography and the

constitution of the child as an object of pornographic interest. Jenks tries to make a claim that pornography is not constituted within the content but in the framing of the subject. With film studies and especially 'porn studies', this is an argument that has often been made. Ashish Rajadhyaksha, in his forthcoming book, talks of Realism in Indian cinema as pornographic in nature and looks at the world-renowned films of Satyajit Ray and Dada Saheb Phalke to make a case for cinematic pornography.

[11] It is hardly surprising that the only pornography that is objectionable in USA - child pornography - is presented as the reason for MSN and Yahoo's closing of their chat rooms.

[12] Take for instance, the blog of a 'desperate housewife' at <http://tademy.blogspot.com/> where the blogger writes about the most intimate parts of her life in a very graphic nature, often bordering on the pornographic.

[13] <http://www.livejournal.com> is now one of the biggest free blogging services available based on open source software. One of the biggest advantages of using Livejournal for a sample is the unique community features that Livejournal offers by which people of different tastes, preferences and geographical locations can come together to network and interact.

[14] Anna Nataro, in her forthcoming book provisionally titled *Introduction to the Blogosphere*, makes a strong argument for blogging as a Habermasian public sphere. However, such an argument is valid only for blogs that are obviously constructed for a notion of public participation. It would be misleading to say that blogs are primarily public in the Habermasian sense of the word.

[15] This setting of the Hypervisual against the Realist is an interesting juxtaposition. It allows us to look at Hypervisualisation as the overthrow of the cinematic ethos of Realism and the introduction of a new way of looking at the world around us.

[16] Linda Williams, in her work *Hard Core*, provides an illuminating account of how the pathologisation and clinical framework of approaching pornography is actually a way of controlling and shaping female desire and sexuality. Williams is bent on talking of pornography as that which renders the invisible visible, thus relocating the invisible in the domain of consumables and approachable. Though Williams doesn't use the term Hypervisualisation, it is on this simple understanding of 'make it visible' that she bases her argument.

[17] Within blogging, especially within the blogosphere of Livejournal, Hypervisualisation can be observed and studied in the interactive memetic behaviour across the blogs and user groups. Memes, generally identified as a bundle of data that gets transferred from one agent on to another, come in many forms and a liberal definition of memes would identify computer viruses, computer generated quizzes and results, chain letters and emails as memetic behaviour. My focus is more on [memes with two active agents participating in the transfer](#). Also, Livejournal, because of its interactive space encourages memetic behaviour and thus offers a strong connection between narrativisation and memeisation.

[18] A power blogger for more than six years now, Min Jung (MJ) at www.Minjungkim.com gives a hilarious, although a little stereotypical idea of a blogger's life cycle on his personal blog. However, my model moves away from his a little and is more typical of a user on ElJay.

[19] In an extremely provocative article titled “Bloggers need not apply” available at www.chronicle.com, Ivan Terrible, unwittingly notices the same trope of hypervisualising the self that is visible amongst the bloggers. In fact, Ivan goes ahead to warn prospective and current bloggers to make the same mistake of revealing too much about themselves. Ivan’s warnings have a ‘practical’ tone to them, but he too recognises the discomfort that comes from activities like blogging or other interactive cyberspaces.

[20] Paul Willemen, in his aspirations for a Pornoscape, draws a close link between Knowledge and the experience of sexuality. Drawing from the parable of the Original Sin and tracing it to the claims of authenticity that are produced through experience of sexuality, Willemen brings to the fore the power equations that revolve around the construction of sexuality and the pathologisation of it through an uninformed critique of pornography. The blogger, in the blorgasmic moment bridges the gap between experience and knowledge. The first cycle of blogging is experiential and the knowledge of that experience feeds the second part of the cycle.

[21] “Whoever publishes or transmits or causes to be published in the electronic form any material which is lascivious or appeals to the prurient interest or if its effect is such as to tend to deprave or corrupt persons who are likely, having regard to all relevant circumstances, to read, see or hear the matter contained or embodied in it, shall be punished on first conviction with imprisonment of either description or a term which may extend to five years and with fine which may extend to one lakh rupees and in the event of a second or a subsequent conviction with imprisonment of either description or a term which may extend to 10 years and also with fine which may extend to 2 lakh rupees. “ -- Section 67 of the IT Act (New Delhi, 2000).

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