## Table of Contents

1. **Technology and the City** 168  
   1.1 Unpacking Space-Place-Technology Triad 176  
   1.2 Technology and the Ecology of Fear 187  
2. **Blurring the Boundaries** 199  
   2.1 The Anatomy of a Flashmob 206  
   2.2 Smart Mobs 208  
   2.3 At the Crossroads: India’s First Flashmob 211  
   2.4 The flashmob, the flash-site and the legal order of things 214  
3. **Reconfiguring Technosocial Spaces** 221
Chapter Three | Technosocial Spaces

The notion of ‘Technosocial Spaces’ building upon the various ideas of the Technosocial discussed in the earlier two chapters, addresses an anxiety that has been at the heart of Cyberculture debates: the anxiety about the separation of the real and the virtual. There has been a wide array of literature which looks at the intersections between the emergence of digital technologies and the consequent reorientation of physical spaces. Technosocial space refers to a hybrid imagination of space where the physical and the digital coincide. Technosocial spaces have been imagined in many different forms – as digital overlays on physical maps, as digital cartographic practices mapping the world around us, as digital spaces that simulate physical reality, and as physical spaces that mould themselves around the digital ideas of transparency, traffic, movement, connection, lifestyle etc. Materiality, physicality and territory have been revisited often within Cyberculture discourse. Particularly, the idea of space in ‘cyberspace’ and the geo-spatial imagination and extension of our physical worlds into digital simulations and realities, has resulted in confusing approaches that either posit an origin-extension model where the physical reality is the authentic original and the virtual engagements as only fantasies of the real, or a real-virtual divide where seemingly (despite contrary experiences) the modes of operation in one world don’t seem to have any relevance or effect in the other. In this chapter, I shall look at the main points of debate in the existing scholarship in Cyberculture to show how the various approaches to understanding and conceiving space within the digital realm, need to be better understood. I seek to move away from the cause-and-effect relationships that reiterate the real-virtual divides within Cyberculture theory, thus excluding a more nuanced notion of Technosocial Space – space that is produced by a dialectic bleeding of the virtual into the physical and vice-versa.
I propose the idea of Technosocial Space to forward the argument about a contextual technology mediated identity as was discussed in the first chapter, where the two concepts are inextricably linked together. In the discussion of Technosocial Space I stay away from the space-place debates mapped in the *Introduction* that have informed much of the debates in Cyberculture discourse, but do not productively contribute to understanding either the technology-space relationships or the materiality of technology mediated practices. Instead, I focus on Technosocial Space as a ‘space-in-making’ that is tenuous, transactional and tentative; a site upon which the contestations, conflicts and anxieties around Technosocial Subjects unfold and are the most visible. I do this by looking at the internet information ecology - specifically borrowing Michael Davis’ (1999) eloquent idea of ‘Ecology of Fear’, though appropriating it for a different discourse - as shaped by users, state governments, internet authorities and regulators, as well as market forces to understand the complex mechanics of Technosocial Subjectivity.

1. TECHNOLOGY AND THE CITY

Po Bronson (1999) in his quest to find The Nudist on the Late Shift, in an eponymous book, brings to attention the lack of discursive attention to the people who are producers and often form the support and infrastructure for digital technologies to proliferate. In his book, Bronson uses his journalistic skills to uncover the people who, during the dot com fever in 1999, became legends in the inner circles of the Silicon Valley – people who were not only in intimate relationship with technology but shaped the very platforms and ideas that fuelled the expansion of the Internet. As he lyrically writes in the beginning of his book,

> By car, by plane, they come. They're just showing up. They're giving up their lives elsewhere to come here. They come for the tremendous opportunity, believing that in no other place in the world right now can one person accomplish so much with talent,
initiative, and a good idea. It's a region where who-you-know and how-much-money-you-have have never been less relevant to success. They come because it doesn't matter that they're young, or left college without a degree, or have dark skin, or speak with an accent. They come even if it's illegal to come. They come because they feel they'll regret it the rest of their lives if they don't at least give it a try. They come to be a part of history, to build the technology that will reshape how people live 5 or 10 years from now. They come for the excitement, just to be a part of it. (3)

Bronson’s book finds resonances with the historical work done by Katie Hafner and Matthew Lyon, who, in Where Wizards Stay up Late (1998) seek to map the people and ideas that shaped the internet in its early days. However, his work puts greater emphasis on the idea that the unfolding of technology is not merely about the people (consumers / costumers / users) who use it but also about the different circuits of finance, governance, policy, regulation, creativity and ideation, and that there is another kind of technosocial subject who creates the interfaces and mitigates the markets, the public and the personal in the production of these interfaces. While Po’s own journey is in looking at the aspirations and desires, dreams and motivations of the people who flocked to Silicon Valley to be ‘a part of history’, what is interesting to this dissertation is the new dimension it adds to the understanding of the technosocial – the notion of technosocial spaces.

Technological revolutions have always been central to the formulation and imagination of the city. Political boundaries, historical reconstructions, social analyses, economic evaluations or spatial surveys of the city have implicated the proliferation and spread of technological infrastructure in their unfolding. Be it the nostalgia for the ‘agorae’ of the past or the hope for the ‘cities of the mind’ (Jones, 1999); be it ‘cities not in the accepted sense’ (Walcott, 1992) or the ‘unintended city’ (Sen, 1976); be it the ‘information superbahn’ (Mitchell, 1996) or
‘societies of information’ (Roszak, 1994); technologised conditions of production, consumption, and interaction have featured prominently in the imagination of the city as a space. The technologised nature of the city has also led to the recognition of the city as in a tentative state of transition from ‘geo-to-chrono-politics’ (Virilio, 1986).

Before I go into a detailed discussion of Internet technologies, fear and city spaces and the way in which certain phenomena have shaped the internet landscape in India (to further talk about Technosocial spaces and subjects) it is necessary to look at some of the more influential views and scholarship around technology-cities across different fields like radical geography, urban planning, architecture and design, communications and technology studies.

Many of the theoreticians of urbanisation and globalisation have already pointed out that the city is not a coherent homogenised entity and that the infrastructural development and the scope of technology, especially in Asian cities, are not uniform. Different models of technologised production have been influential in imagining the city in various different ways. Marshall McLuhan’s idea of ‘the Global Village’ (1964) referred to the technological reshaping of a social space implied by the shrinkage of distance in the ‘new galaxy’ of communication. In the introduction to Understanding Media, he writes, ‘after more than a century of electronic technology, we have extended our nervous systems in a global embrace, abolishing space and time as far as our planet is concerned’ (3,4). He concentrates upon telecommunication technologies to talk of the global village. The basic precepts of his view are that the rapidity of communication through electronic media has overcome the limitation of geography and lifestyles. This ‘shrinkage’ connects all our senses in a constant flow of sensory reception and transmission of information. He imagines spaces – even physical spaces – as nodes in a network, facilitating this incessant performance and interaction (19).
This is also the model that Stephen Doheny-Farina identifies as the ‘Network Neighbourhood’ (1996), where the individuals become agential in creation and transmission of meanings that form the community as envisioned by McLuhan (1964). The city thus imagined, as a digital node on a seemingly seamless global communication circuit realigns itself – the scaffoldings and facades of culture, markets, houses, roads, etc. – to suit the interactive design as framed within the technological neural circuits. The other model is that of social-sharing and bonding. Jonathan Carey in his work on Communication as Culture, writes, ‘here communication is linked to such terms as ‘sharing’, ‘participation’, ‘association’, ‘fellowship, and ‘the possession of common faith’” (1989, 34). While within the transmission model, communication technologies are viewed as a product of transactions, creating new networks that help construct the experience of the urban, within the social-bonding model, communication is viewed as a process which shapes social relations which in turn shape the imaginations and material practices that constitute the city.

These concepts and the production of the city and technology are persuasively worked out by Michael Sorkin (1992) in his engrossing book, See you in Disneyland. Sorkin traces the production of the city and the end of the public sphere in an unusual and insightful reading of the production of the fantasy land of Disneyland. Sorkin suggests that Disneyland ‘invokes an urbanism without producing a city…it produces a kind of aura stripped hypercity, a city with billions of citizens…but no residents’ (1992, 112). Sorkin’s marked reference to the urbanism of Disneyland, makes it sound like a hyperspace which straddles the two worlds of the virtual and the real. He looks at Disneyland as the production of a never-never land which is defined entirely by the technology on the one hand and the promises of cultural entertainment and meaning making on the other. For Sorkin, Disneyland is a self contained unit that houses
urbanity of a different sort. He further goes on to make the argument that the Disneyfication of the world – the recreation of the world as a land of fantasy – is one of the tasks of globalised technologies like digital transnational cinema and cyberspaces.\textsuperscript{1} While it might be an exaggerated claim that the world gets slowly and surely converted into a fantasy theme park, with consumerism, we have witnessed the creation of these fantasy pockets in the shape of the lifestyle spaces like malls and multiplexes that emerge as the masthead of the postmodern urban space in India.

Sorkin asks the extremely difficult question of whether the Disneyland exists before the users, as a pre-given space which invites the user, or does the Disneyland get produced and sustained through the practices and the participation of the user. He looks at the design of Disneyland – a network of directions leading nowhere and everywhere, creating a linked navigation system – to define it as a space that is a self contained that allows the users to continually forget the world outside. It is in fact necessary, for the hallucination and the illusion of Disneyland, that the user willingly suspends all notions of reality and immerses in this new space to bear the responsibility of reproducing it. Sorkin identifies the user as caught in a paradox where the illusion is supposed to be pure and untainted but is caught in consumption practices that incessantly evoke symbols and objects which refer to the very world that they are trying to erase.

Sorkin looks at the consumption practices in Disneyland where the imaginary and ‘pure’ world of the illusion – the movies, the fairy tales, etc. – is surrounded by the souvenirs, collectibles, rides, economic transactions that remind the user that there is a world outside,\textsuperscript{1} Arjun Appadurai (1996) turns this notion upside down to formulate that ‘the whole world is a Disneyland’ and that there is no outside, in the new globalised worlds being created; the conditions of production, the free and easy flow of labour and the global expanse of brand and value, have shrunk the world to become an extensive pleasure ground, Appadurai argues, where the outside is only an imagined space.
without which the illusion of Disneyland would not survive. He concludes that at Disneyland one is always poised in a condition of becoming, always someplace that is ‘like’ someplace else. The simulation’s reference is ever elsewhere; the ‘authenticity’ of the substitution always depends on the knowledge, however faded, of some absent genuine... The urbanism of Disneyland is precisely the urbanism of universal equivalence. In this new city, the idea of distinct places is dispersed into a ‘sea of universal placelessness as everyplace becomes destination and any destination can be anyplace’ (1992, 217).

The City and technology link also finds place in David Harvey’s work on urban geography and planning. Harvey established the idea of ‘Time space compression’ to describe the ways in which the cities – in space and in time – have come to be reconfigured in current times. Harvey recognises ‘Postmodernism’ and global capitalism as the fundamental forces that produce this compression of time and space. He suggests that

The general effect, then, is for capitalist modernization to be very much about speed-up and acceleration in the pace of economic processes and, hence, in social life. But that trend is discontinuous, punctuated by periodic crises, because fixed investments in plant and machinery, as well as in organizational forms and labour skills, cannot easily be changed’ (1989, 230).

The goal of this speed-up is to accelerate ‘the turnover time of capital’ which is composed of the ‘time of production together with the time of circulation of exchange’ (1989, 229). In this process, the rapidity of time annihilates the barriers of space. As Harvey puts it,

innovations dedicated to the removal of spatial barriers...have been of immense significance in the history of capitalism, turning that history into a very geographical affair—the railroad and the telegraph, the automobile, radio and telephone, the jet
aircraft and television, and the recent telecommunications revolution are cases in point’ (1989, 232).

All these modernizations have served to make the world a smaller place, and have in the last quarter of the twentieth century connected disparate markets together in the creation of a world market with global producers and global consumers.

For Harvey, the new cities of the world are created in a state of ‘shrinkage’, where the rapid networking of the markets all around the world, has led to the imagination of the city as a paradoxical space – at once stretched across transnational boundaries and painfully shrunk as a local community; a space that transcends the spatial bottlenecks like the nation and simultaneously contained in the small waterholes of network neighbourhoods. It is in this paradox that Harvey locates a global production and cultural circulation that creates new communities and spaces with interact with each other over lifestyles, time-zones and geographies. Analysing the effects of Satellite Television, Harvey documents the rise of the Information Systems and the distributed production of the City:

  TV news gives us in one half-hour, images, coupled with sound bites of processed information, of Palestinians throwing rocks down sun bleached streets in the middle-east, of Hutus and Tutsis swinging axes in the green southern valleys of Africa, of a face of a tupac amaru guerilla in Peru, of a Parisian drinking wine in an outdoor dinery, and of a mid-western town drowned by a flood; while the Discovery Channel takes us to the Himalayas on our couch; and grocery stores are filled with "Kenyan haricot beans, Californian celery and avocados, North African potatoes, Canadian apples, and Chilean grapes (Harvey, 1989, 300)

Harvey argues that this mode of production and circulation of cultural forms and goods informs the space of the City, so that each city is uniquely a producer of such cultural
iconography and the consumer of images and signs that emerge out of an eroded space of the urban, creating, what Sorkin calls the ‘universal placelessness’ (216-17).

The one thing that all these different models share in common – even though they have different disciplinary moorings is that they propose a certain cause-and-effect relationship between cities and technology, where each is independently available, and leads to a transformation when they interact. In MacLuhan’s work, for instance, the city simply becomes a neutral site which does not seem to affect or shape the technological advents and the media in any form. Harvey understands the city as being produced through an economic flow of labour, capital and conditions of production. Sorkin presumes that the city is an empty form which can be shaped by the dominant technologies of the time.

Two dominant strains emerge in this discussion – One, where the city is looked upon as a physical entity, mapped, plotted, available through material practices and thus traced in its transitions with technology; Second, where the city is not confined only to its material existence but resides in the imaginations, representations, the realms of experience and the intangible flows that traverse through the city.. Both these ways of talking about the city, only reinforce the Real-Virtual, Physical-Digital binaries that the first four decades of Cyberculture studies had made popular in talking of ICT enabled forms. Instead of adding to this self-perpetuating binary, I intend to look at the space-place-technology triad in order to understand the processes that go into the crafting of a Technosocial Subject.
1.1 Unpacking Space-Place-Technology Triad

The last few years of the emergence of ICTs in India has garnered great academic interest from various academic disciplines. Questions of the new-working class, urban restructuration, ownership, piracy, etc. have found many different approaches and analyses. However, there is a dearth of scholarship that looks at the complex relationships between spaces and technology. Despite the very central presence of spatial metaphors in the imagination and language of Cyberspace, most research falls in the strains identified above, when talking about this relationship.

The emergence of Graphical User Interface that simulates the physical places has significantly affected Computer Human Interaction and blurred the lines between physical places and digital spaces. Platforms like Second Life or the digital universes of MMORPGs have led to an easy idea of cyberspace imitating physical spaces and adding a creative re-rendering of the law of Physics in the process. Whenever the question of Technosociality is discussed, it is easily assumed that it means the creation of imitative space within digital networks. The most visible of Web 2.0 spaces are the Social Networking Sites (SNS) like Facebook and Orkut that serve as a consolidation platform for a range of activities that people perform within and outside of technologised circuits (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). However, the SNSs share the anxieties about questions of authenticity on the one hand and about concerns of geography and technology on the other. The questions of authenticity manifest themselves (and indeed serve as the fuel for peoples’ incessant production of information) in the need to prove that the user persona or avatar on the SNS is genuine or authentic. Through a series of protocols like testimonials, public sharing of private pictures, of displaying friends’ networks, affiliation with ‘Real Life’ validating structures like schools, universities, work places,
belonging to groups and adherence to causes, all come into play in the production of authenticity.

The questions of geography become crucial because they serve as crucial filters for the contextualisation of data and the localisation of information as well as finding relevant and sensitive processes within the networks exploding with data streams. There is a demand upon the user to produce strong meta-data and geo-tags which reinforce the physical spaces which the user occupies and inhabits. Within the ‘blogosphere’ there is a certain premium on the users’ geo-political location that marks them as unique or authentic. The entire argument of ‘alternative voices’ or the political power of blogging is premised on a notion that the first hand experience of a user, documented as reportage is more authentic, less mediated and more valuable. The infusion of contextual data and the need to produce a perspective or an idea which makes a strong departure from mainstream media which operate in a certain ‘universal placelessness’ is a part of the excitement of citizen journalism and blogging.

The emergence of geo-data applications like Google Maps or Yahoo Streets foreground the metadata of geographical tags to reconceptualise the internet as a space that is firmly anchored in physical geographies and terrains (Miller, 1996). Questions of privacy and surveillance also concentrate on the geographical territory and the detailed physical location of the individual. Triangulation technologies used in Cell Phones or the correlation between ISP addresses and the physical location of the user are central to the laws and regulations being developed by different State Authorities in order to fight cybercrime. These examples only bring into focus the fact that there is a way by which the notion of space and physical geographies is extremely important to the production of a Technosocial Subjectivity online.

---

2 See the emergence of citizen journalism platforms like Global Voices (available at [http://www.globalvoicesonline.org](http://www.globalvoicesonline.org)) which are predicated on this idea.
And yet, the debate is palpably missing from the existing discourse that focuses on technology mediated identities. The physical location is only invoked to reinforce the idea of universality when it comes to dealing with questions of technology mediated subjectivities. An engagement with this body of literature, especially within Cyberculture does not offer any fruitful dialogue. Hence, instead of focusing on the more traditional literature around questions of technology and space, I engage with literature about technology and subjectivity to show how the neglect of acknowledging Technosocial space undermines the otherwise sophisticated and seminal formulations.

Julian Dibbell (1994) in his landmark essay ‘A Rape Happened in Cyberspace’ produces an extremely cogent and useful theorisation of the ‘quotidian identities’ that get shaped in the virtual worlds. Dibbell analyses a particular incident that occurred one night in a special kind of MUD – LambdaMOO (MUD, Object-Oriented) – which was run by the Xerox Research Corporations and subsequently has been shut down. A MUD, as has been described earlier, is a text-based virtual reality space of fluid dimensions and purposes, where users could create avatars of themselves in textual representations. Actions and interactions within the MUD are also in long running scripts of texts. Of course, technically all this means that a specially designed database gives users the vivid impression of their own presence and the impression of moving through physical spaces that actually exists as descriptive data on some remotely located servers.

When users logged into LambdaMoo, the program presented them with a brief textual description of one of the rooms (the coat closet) in the fictional database mansion. If the user wanted to navigate, s/he could enter a command to move in a particular direction and the database replaced the original description with new ones, corresponding to the room located
in the direction s/he chose. When the new description scrolled across the user’s screen, it
listed not only the fixed features of the room but all its contents at that moment – including
things (tools, toys, weapons), as well as other avatars (each character over which s/he has sole
control). For the database program that powers the MOO, all of these entities are simply
subprograms or data structures which are allowed to interact according to rules very roughly
mimicking the laws of the physical world. Characters could leave the rooms in particular
directions. If a character said or did something (as directed by its user), then the other users
who were located in the same ‘geographical’ region within the MOO, would see the output
describing the utterance or action. As the different players created their own fantasy worlds,
interacting and socialising, a steady script of text scrolled up a computer screen and
narratives were produced. The avatars, as in Second Life or even on Social Networking Sites
like Orkut, had the full freedom to define themselves, often declining the usual referents of
gender, sexuality, and context to produce fantastical apparitions. It is in such an environment
of free-floating fantasy and role-playing, of gaming and social interaction mediated by digital
text-based avatars, that a ‘crime’ happened.

Dibell goes on to give an account of events that unfolded that night. In the social lounge of
LambdaMoo, which is generally the most populated of all the different nooks, corners,
dimensions and rooms that users might have created for themselves, there appeared an avatar
called Dr. Bungle. Dr. Bungle had created a particular program called ‘Voodoo Doll’, which
allowed the creator to control avatars which were not his own, attributing to them involuntary
actions for all the other players to watch, while the targeted avatars themselves remained
helpless and unable to resist any of these moves. This Dr. Bungle, through his evil Voodoo
Doll, took hold of two avatars – legba and Starsinger and started controlling them. He further
proceeded to forcefully engage them in sexually violent, abusive, perverted and reluctant
actions upon these two avatars. As the users behind both the avatars sent a series of invective and a desperate plea for help even as other users in the room (# 17) watched, the Vodoo Doll made them enter into sexually degrading and extremely violent set of activities without their consent. The peals of his laughter were silenced only when a player with higher powers came and evicted Dr. Bungle from the Room # 17. As an eye-witness of the crime and a further interpolator with the different users then present, Dibbell affirms that most of the users were convinced that a crime had happened in the Virtual World of the digital Mansion. That a ‘virtual rape’ happened and was traumatic to the two users was not questioned (Dibbell, 1994). However, what this particular incident brought back into focus was the question of space.

Dibbell suggests that what we had was a set of conflicting approaches to understand the particular phenomenon:

Where virtual reality and its conventions would have us believe that legba and Starsinger were brutally raped in their own living room, here was the victim legba scolding Mr. Bungle for a breach of *civility* … [R]eal life, on the other hand, insists the incident was only an episode in a free-form version of Dungeons and Dragons, confined to the realm of the symbolic and at no point threatening any players life, limb, or material well-being… (1994)

The meaning and the understanding of this particular incident and the responses that it elicited, lie in the ‘buzzing, dissonant gap’ between the perceived and experienced notion of Technosocial Space. The discussions that were initiated within the community asked many questions: If a crime had happened, where had the crime happened? Was the crime recognised by law? Are we responsible for our actions performed through a digital character
on the cyberspaces? Is it an assault if it is just role playing? Many of these questions are discussed in the further chapters in the dissertation. However, the crucial question of ‘where’ the crime was committed is of the utmost significance here.

The lack of ‘whereness’ of the crime, or rather the placelessness of the crime made it especially more difficult to pin it to a particular body. The users who termed the event as rape had necessarily inverted the expected notion of digital space as predicated upon and imitative of physical space; they had in fact done the exact opposite and exposed digital spaces as not only ‘bleeding into reality’ but also a constitutive part of the physical spaces. Their Technosocial Space was not the space of the LambdaMoo Room # 17 but the physical locations (and thus the bodies, rather than the avatars) of the players involved. However, this blurring was not to make an easy resolution of complex metaphysical questions. This blurring was to demonstrate, more than ever, that the actions and pseudonymous performances or narratives which are produced in the digital world are not as dissociated from the ‘Real’ as we had always imagined. More importantly, the notional simulation of place or a reference to the physical place is not just a symbolic gesture but has material ramifications and practices. As Dibell notes in his lyrical style,

Months later, the woman in Seattle would confide to me that as she wrote those words posttraumatic tears were streaming down her face -- a real-life fact that should suffice to prove that the words’ emotional content was no mere playacting. The precise tenor of that content, however, its mingling of murderous rage and eyeball-rolling annoyance, was a curious amalgam that neither the RL nor the VL facts alone can quite account for (Dibbell, 1994).
The eventual decision to ‘toad’ Dr. Bungle – to condemn him to a digital death (a death only as notional as his crime) and his reappearance as another character take up the rest of Dibbell’s argument. Dibbell is more interested in looking at how a civil society emerged, formed its own ways of governance and established the space of LamdaMOO as more than just an emotional experience or extension; as a legitimate place which is almost as much, if not more real, than the physical places that we occupy in our daily material practices. Dibbell’s moving account of the entire incident and the following events leading the final ‘death’ and ‘reincarnation’ has now been extrapolated to make some very significant and insightful theorisations of the notions of the body and its representations online. Indeed, in the already proliferated world of cyberspaces, actions of misogyny, hatred, or dissemination of offensive material is now punishable by different laws depending upon the country of origin of the persons involved. There is an over-determination of the individual’s physical presence and placing which is linked to the physical location and being.

What is perhaps more interesting is to see how the successive theorists, and indeed Dibbell himself, could not see that these theorisations and formulations, remain unresolved and produce responses rooted in surprise because they have always avoided the idea of Technosocial Spaces when talking about Technosocial Subjectivities. Dibbell perpetuates the VR-RL dichotomies and is taken aback when the two blur. He remains, like many other cyber-theorists, rooted in the idea that the material world remains the original and the primary whereas the virtual or digital experiences are ‘Technosocial’. In fact the biggest flaw in Dibbell’s extraordinary account is that he looks upon the material presence and responses of the two people behind the victimised avatars as the only valid and real response. He needed to see the post-traumatic tears running down the subject’s cheeks. Her cries when the act was happening, her testimonies online, her discussions and arguments were merely words or just
digital acts. This leads to Dibbell and his followers not being able to account for technology mediated practices in the physical world. So deeply rooted is this bias of the physical being the primal, that they can only conceive of Technosocial Subjectivities as digital extensions of the physical self, where the physical self’s actions are legitimate and valid, whereas those of the digital avatar are always only in the realms of the performative. This blindside which disallows Dibbell from examining the intricate nature of technology mediated relationships is also the root for much anxiety, fear and alarm in the contemporary unfolding of Web 2.0 practices.

In a very different vein, in his Science Fiction work, William Gibson draws upon this anxiety between the virtual and the real as a source of great creative tension in his narrative as well in his concepts. In his novel, *Neuromancer*, Gibson coins the portmanteau ‘Cyberspace’ and gives a definition that is now cult and classic:

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. Unthinkable complexity. Lines of light ranged in the non-space of the mind, clusters and constellations of data. Like city lights, receding...(Gibson, 1984, 22).

Gibson, in his imagination of cyberspace, and coining the digital matrices formed by the imagination of the networks, through the metaphor of space, fore-grounded one of the most crucial characteristics of cyberspace. For Gibson, the cyberspace does not exist *ex-nihilo*. We have been trained to look upon physical spaces as existing, as empty receptacles which can be

---

3 The section on ‘Technology and Ecology of Fear’ in this chapter focuses on this particular relationship.
occupied by the people who have knowledge of it or rights of access to it. While Gibson is often attributed with making the new relationships between the biological and technological not many theorists notice that even for Gibson, the division between ‘meat’ and ‘machine’ is an anxiety which is located within the tensions of the virtual and the physical spaces. In the description of cyberspace, Gibson is already falling into the trap of defining it through physical places. In Gibson’s post-biological world, the virtual and the physical have become so intrinsically fused that instead of being replaceable each becomes the referent by which the other is defined. Thus, while the material practices of the body produce the place, if only to prove its inferiority, the processes of meaning making and experiences within the ‘consensual hallucination’ of cyberspace are always notionally and symbolically referring to the physical place. The dialectic relationship between digital spaces and physical places continues as a crisis for the techno-narratives of our times.

However, Gibson doesn’t formulate a benign, feminised cyberspace which can be moulded into whatever the users want it to become. Instead, he manages to make a distinction between the internet and cyberspaces. The internet is a technology, a common access protocol which binds together several distributed networks and allows them to talk to each other, enabling the users to travel from one network into another, treating the users as simultaneously a database of practices and a network node of transmission (Black 2010, 14). The packet switching technology that the internet uses, in fact has emerged as one of the biggest strengths of the internet. It is largely a technological feature, where the data can be now disassembled into various tiny pieces and remade, without apparent distortion at the other end. It is interesting to note that in this data-set reading of the web, the users are also reduced to a set of data streams that completely disregard their physical presence and posit them as highly mobile within these networks and databases (Black 2000, 56). The technological
limitations and possibilities of the internet have their own set of transactions with the different users who engage with them. These technologies determine the architecture of the spaces that can be built using these aesthetics. These technologies also play a crucial role in containing, monitoring and storing the kind of transactions that take place within the digital matrices. The internet technologies (or ICTs, as they are more popularly known) are central to the defining of the data type, the modes and methods of transmission and the intentions that are accrued as meta-data (Schewik 2010, 97).

Cyberspace is a constituent, though probably the most visible face of ICTs. Cyberspace is a technologised form that emerges out of the deployment of several internet technologies, for specific reasons of sharing, collaboration, networking and storage. The first generation users who have seen the emergence and evolution of ICTs and the arrival of cyberspace, still remember the pre-web days where the internet was only a series of protocols and machine languages which were used to manipulate the computational devices to hook-up over the existing telecommunication networks (Hafner and Lyon, 1998). Cyberspace, in the history of ICTs, is a young phenomenon and is still in the process of being created, hence annually spurring new and interesting phrases like Deep Web, Web 2.0, Interactive Web, Digital cyberspace, etc. in trying to incorporate the changing face of cyberspaces and the transactions it entails.

Cyberspace evolves through various different applications of ICTs, starting from email and then subsequently emerging as a tool of networking, information dissemination, archiving and narrativisation, thus realising Gibson’s notion of ‘consensual hallucination.’ It is in this polymorphous nature of cyberspace, in the fluid range of its applications and the centrality of the users’ activities to the definition of what cyberspace means, that this chapter finds the
need to talk about the production of technologised spaces – not merely to look for examples in the forms of cybercafés, IT Parks, Special Economy Zones and spaces of neo-liberal consumption, but to actually dwell on what the technology-space-place triad offers us to think about technosocial practices in emerging information societies like India.

This section sought to unpack the space-place-technology triad as it plays out in different ways of studying technology and its infrastructure, as well as those that explore globalised lifestyles and the processes of consumption and identity formation. In the next section, I start looking at the emergence of ‘Ecology of fear’ in popular discourse and everyday practices of the Internet technologies, in order to look at how Technosocial Spaces are closely interrelated to Technosocial Subjects. Through three case-studies, that have been at the centre of public discourse in their own times but have garnered no academic attention or scholarship so far. In all the cases where different kinds of Technosocial Subjectivities are involved, I shall try and show how the absence of Spatial discourse and the irresolution of the anxiety between physical and virtual spaces, precludes a detailed and nuanced understanding of incidents which are otherwise deeply circumscribed in their contexts.

1.2 Technology and the Ecology of Fear

Kevin Robins, in his essay ‘Cyberspace and the world we live in’ (1992), looks at the atmosphere of war and tension that new technologies of war and surveillance have produced in our daily lives. Robins further makes an argument that there has been such an explosion of technology enabled warfare and its representations – the pictures of the Iraq war, the fiction enabled by the cold war struggle for technological supremacy, the expeditions by NASA to search for life and life enabling conditions on other planets – that we have internalized and trivialized the ecology of fear within which we exist. Kevin’s main point is that even as a
global fight against terror seeks to fight terror and create spaces of safety, it also sustains the imagination of terror in our everyday lives.

The imagination of the city as steeped in an ‘ecology of fear’ as proposed by Mike Davis in his exploration of the city of Los Angeles and how the cinematic production of disaster reinforces it, as powerful and influential ways of looking at the production of Technosocial Space. Davis’s argument is useful to understand how the regiment of surveillance and security gets shaped due to such cinematic interventions. He also further demonstrates very effectively, the links between technologies and the related politics of understanding, realizing and experiencing the city. I find Mike Davis’ formulation of ‘the ecology of fear’ particularly productive because he maps the apparatus of the state and its processes of surveillance and regulation as a necessary part of the ‘cinema effect’. The model is interesting because the government, despite being a stakeholder in the infrastructure development and regulation of cyberspaces, has never featured very actively or prominently in discussions of Technosocialiy. So strong is the rhetoric of agency and choice when it comes to looking at technology mediated subjectivity, that very little attention is paid to the different actors who are centrally important to the shaping of Technosocial spaces and subjectivities.

The anxiety of the irresolution between physical and virtual space and the complex ways in which Technosocial Spaces are created differently from the kind of assumptions that inform Dibbell’s analyses, are better demonstrated in a particular series of incidents that have unfolded in the recent past in India. I focus on two specific cases, both of them, incidentally associated with the Social Networking System web portal Orkut that has found huge popularity in the country. In both the cases, I hope to show, how without factoring in the notion of a Technosocial Space, neither the incidents nor the way they were received and
interpreted, can be accounted for, both in the unfolding of the events as well as the media reportage that followed. Moreover, I hope to show that the idea of the physical, the spatial and the technological are necessary contexts within which the Technosocial Subjects can be conceived of and various interested stakeholders can be made visible.

The first of the cases resembles the ‘Rape’ that Dibbell discusses, in that it was a ‘crime’ that was committed within the realms of cyberspace with symbolic or notional references to the RL outside of it. The processes by which the ‘crime’ was detected, reported, recognised (and determined as crime) and the subsequent steps that were taken by various authorities are the elements that make this case of interest. In October 2006, following a petition filed by Aurangabad based Advocate Yugant R Marlapalle, the Aurungabad branch of The Bombay High Court sued Google for the alleged spread and dissemination of material that was categorically and unequivocally ‘anti-Indian’ and promoted hate-speech against ‘Indian ideology’ and governance, through its Social Networking Site Orkut (The Times of India, 2006). Marlapalle had come across many different groups within Orkut which professed to be Anti-Indian. One particular community which was called ‘We Hate India’ and had the picture of a burning Indian National Flag, drove him to filing a PIL which demanded that such material be censored and that the person(s) responsible be located and punished for their ‘crime’ against the country.

The formation of such a group and the members who were affiliated to it (even though there was no confirmation that either the creator of the group or the members who joined it were Indian) was looked at as a specific act of terrorism and proper actions were demanded to be taken against them. The same article dated 10th October 2006, further reports that ‘[t]he
petition has also appealed to the government to appoint a `controller’ under the Information Technology Act-2000 to regulate all such communities being in operation on the internet’ (The Times of India, 2006). Under legal attack, Google immediately agreed to comply with the Government’s ‘request’ to aid them in locating the miscreants who were responsible for these actions. Following the legal case, Google issued a notice which stated that Google was not responsible for the dissemination of material or the quality of the content that was posted on its sites. The statement that Google issued, further added

When dealing with requests from authorities, we are very careful to balance the interests of our users while still being as cooperative in the investigation and prosecution of crimes as possible. Authorities, including those in India, are required to provide appropriate legal process in order to get user-identifying information. Google has very high standards for user privacy and a clear privacy policy (The Times of India, 2006).

Whether or not Google was right in thus giving access to the authorities to look beyond the pseudonymous structures of the cyberspace, is a secondary question. The important and more immediate concern is Google’s recognition of a particularly jurisprudent authority over the international social networking community of Orkut. Instead of attempting to resolve the question of virtual and physical space which is crucial to the understanding of terrorism or particular kind of hate-crime, it immediately dislocated the anxiety of place on to the body of the user; the Technosocial Space became a question of the Technosocial Subject; the question of ‘Where’ became a question of ‘Who’. The lack of resolution for the relationship between the notional space India and the Sovereign Geo-Political State could not be resolved. Immediate questions which have been asked of the body and digital cyberspaces were to be asked here as well: How do we determine that the India that is referred to, largely
symbolically and in a larger context of role-playing and performance, is the same India that demanded for a blocking and curbing of these impulses? If the user is not located within the sovereign Indian State, can his/her actions still be contained by the Indian State? These questions very clearly demanded a certain resolution or at least addressing of the anxieties around virtual and physical spaces and their relationship with technology.

Since then Google faced similar confrontations in China, where, as Siva Vaidhyanathan (2011) shows in his book *The Googlization of Everything*, it was asked to present certain material about history and historical accounts in their censored, State approved form. Since early 2010, it has withdrawn its services from China and the domain name google.cn now takes you to the google.hk servers residing in Hong Kong. Google was able to make this transition and put up resistance to demands of State censorship in China, and portray itself as a hyper-spatial structure that guards the privacy and rights of its users (Vaidhyanthan, 192). Google was faced with a problem that threatened to affect, both its credibility as the world’s largest information company and its stake in the emerging markets of China (Lovink and Reimens, 2010). Favouring the physical location of data would have reflected in a steep decrease in the number of users who would be concerned about the ownership of their own data, transactions and privacy. A decision that defied the State’s sovereignty and insisted on holding back data or assistance would have resulted in decrease of privileges and befits that the Indian government has been offering to ICT Multinationals investing in India. At the same time, it was necessary to reach a resolution which would untangle the legal proceedings. Unlike in China, where it acknowledged the hyper-territorial nature of cyberspace, Google eventually accepted the sovereignty of the Indian State. However, it did so to map the anxieties and the tensions on to the body of the user and accepted the sovereignty of the State,
not on the geographical location but the physical bodies – the Technosocial subjects – inhabiting that location.

The laws that were unable to transcend the geographical limitation of their jurisdiction, eventually led to regulation of the body of the user which was considered more mobile and subject to better control. New directives were established so that the Internet Service Provider (ISP) as well as the hosting websites, were asked to provide with the personal information of the user(s) who might be involved in ‘activities that were anti-India’ (The Hindu, 25th November, 2006). The anxieties of virtual and physical space re-emerged as an anxiety about cyber terrorism or technology enhanced violence at the hands of a potentially harmful individual who posits a threat to the geographical space s/he lives in. According to this formulation, ‘a person who ‘performs’ a narrative event in the cyberspace becomes at par with the person(s) who might actually perform the action’ (IT Act, 2008). The easy conflation that cyberspaces provide – that of blending action and speech; something that resonates Dibbell’s argument around the ‘performance’ of rape in LambdaMOO – the performative elements of the users were overdetermined into being the realised act, thus including such activities into the ever widening sphere of the ecology of fear that ICTs have inspired.

The other cases, now notoriously dubbed as ‘Orkut Death’ perhaps complicate these questions even further to demonstrate how the emergence of a Technosocial Space forced the bodies of the Technosocial Subjects into the processes of regulation and containment. The first of the cases I discuss is chronologically second but demands immediate attention for the exact corollary it provides to the ‘I Hate India’ case. It is the tragic and unfortunate death of a young teenager Adnan Patrawala, who was abducted and strangulated to death in Mumbai in 2007. The events that led to the death of Adnan Patrawala are now the stuff that urban
legends are made of. Conflicting multiple reports, misrepresentations by the popular media and irresponsible journalism coupled with technophobia, have obscured the exact details of this ‘Orkut Death.’ However, a reconstruction from popular media reports gives us some information which can be deemed as facts.

We know that sixteen year old Adnan Patrawala, a resident of Mumbai, had a profile on Google’s Social Networking System, Orkut. We also know that in one of the many random encounters that are characteristic of social web, Adnan was approached by a female avatar who went by the name ‘Angel’, and that she expressed her desire to meet him after declaring that she found him attractive (Sen, 2007). We know that Adnan, after some initial hesitation, agreed to meet ‘her’ on a blind date. These facts are available from the publicly visible ‘scraps’ that Adnan and ‘Angel’ had exchanged. What happens hereafter has many different stories. However, almost all the stories coincide on a few points. It is known that the night Adnan went to meet Angel, August 18th 2007, somebody deleted all the scraps between the two of them (Alam, 2007). It is known that on the same night Adnan called his parents from his cell-phone to tell them that he was out with his friends and was going to be out all night. The parents confirm that on the next morning, they received another call from Adnan’s cell-phone, by a caller who refused to identify himself and demanded two crore rupees as ransom for their alleged kidnapping of their son. The Police confirm that Adnan’s parents, who first thought it was a prank, soon got repeated calls from the same number and hence sought the

---

5 Contrary to what the name suggests, the case did not refer to an incident of death that occurred on Orkut in the manner of the snuff-videos that had gained cult status on video sharing social networks like Youtube or even the notional death that the toading of Dr. Bungle indicated in the LamdaMoo community.

6 The report on LiveIndia webportal (available at http://www.liveindia.com/news/21aug07.html) suggests that Orkut had no role to play but that the first interaction happened in a gaming centre in suburban Mumbai. The local news site Merinews, (available at http://www.merinews.com/article/orkut-brought-death-for-adnan/126031.shtml) ran an article titled “Orkut brought death for Adnan”. Several other news articles and TV channels produced different versions of this event. The reconstruction has been done through looking at the reports in the English daily newspapers, internet sites and TV channels in India, over a period of three weeks.
help of the police, registering a case with them. After the registration of the case, Adnan still got an opportunity to talk to his parents, assuring them that he was not hurt (Kumar, 2007).

On the same day that the parents registered the complaint about the kidnapping of their son, television news channels caught on to the story, made it their feature and announced to the entire world about how Adnan had been seduced via Orkut and kidnapped by his ‘friends’ on Orkut. The news was aired on almost all the major news channels in the country and was reported on different websites and the National daily newspapers. The stories ranged from mildly fantastic to wildly speculative, all insisting that the Police had a clue about the abductors. Once the news became public, Adnan’s parents received no more phone calls from the kidnappers. The police were still working on revealing the identity of the kidnappers. On the 20th of August, the police finally recovered Adnan’s body, strangulated to death and left in his own car. The tragic story got channelled into yet another round of media fetishisation and was immediately dubbed as an ‘Orkut Death’. Further statements from Adnan’s friends and family accused the mainstream media and the police of prematurely releasing the news of his abduction, thus creating a panic attack for his kidnappers and forcing them to murder Adnan without waiting for the ransom. Four of Adnan’s online friends were eventually nabbed and put to trial. The news shocked the country and Adnan’s Orkut profile, which was cleaned of all his earlier conversations, was flooded with people expressing disbelief, comfort, condolences and shock at the tragic story of a young boy who ‘died on the internet’.

There are many significant areas of discussion and speculation that the Adnan Patrawala case threw open for public debates. One of the most talked about questions was the one of safety

---

7 Adnan’s scrapbook and profile remain on Orkut, now manned by his brother who responds to peoples’ messages. Available at http://www.orkut.co.in/Main#Scrapbook.aspx?uid=14160249575654797975
and caution on the internet. Different stakeholders from conservative political parties and local leaders appeared on thirty second television capsules either demanding a shutting down of Orkut (and other such social networking systems) or for higher amount of censorship (including proof of birth and documents while registering with Orkut) and supervision online. Orkut itself was filled with many communities that paid Adnan a tribute, offered fond memories of him and also raged with speculation about the identity of the murderers and the punishments that they should be meted with.

The phrase ‘Orkut Death’ captures my attention because it provides a case in contrast to the narrative that Dibbell was building in his story of how a Rape happened in cyberspace. In the case of LamdaMOO, we saw how a ‘crime’ that was committed on cyberspace was actually linked to the real bodies and the spaces of the people who were behind the abused avatars. Moreover, the lack of placelessness of the space where the crime was created, did not acknowledge either the punishment or the possible emergence of civil structures as anything more than notional or symbolic. In the case of the Orkut Death, the crime was committed and orchestrated entirely outside of the realms of cyberspace. There was never any conclusive evidence that the avatar of Angel was linked to the 4 young men the police finally attributed the crime to. Apart from the fact that Adnan had come into contact with his would-be killers through the social networking system Orkut, there was no other way in which Orkut could be held responsible for what happened.

The crime - both the kidnapping and the subsequent murder - happened in the physical world, in the city of Mumbai, and was definitely a crime. And yet, the mobilisation of the facts and

---

8 For example, the debates on the discussion forum at RxPG on ‘How safe is Orkut?’ available at http://www.rxpgonline.com/modules.php?name=&file=viewtopic&t=71407&start=60&postdays=0&postorder=asc&highlight=

9 See for example the story where BJP demands a state ban on Orkut, available at http://www.dnaindia.com/mumbai/report_bjp-demands-state-ban-on-orkut_1118586
the coverage that this particular case received, always, in all narratives, was attributed to the
digital spaces. The tragic and untimely death of Adnan Patrawala, perhaps fuelled by some
very irresponsible media behaviour, was labelled as an ‘Orkut Death’ as if his death
happened on cyberspace; as if the real material death had direct reference to his notional or
symbolic presence in his avatar on Orkut. Ironically, a few days after his death, another
profile, using the same picture that Adnan had on his profile, and using the same name
sprouted on Orkut. The digital Adnan continues conversations with people who write to him.
Just like Dr. Bungle could reincarnate himself as Mr. Jester, it was possible for a notional
reincarnation of Adnan Patrawala, who also found recreation of his quotidian identity in the
many different digital shrines and memorials that are set up in his memory 10.

The anxiety about the irresolution of virtual and physical space is also visible in the reception
of Adnan’s kidnapping and murder. The necessity to bring in Orkut into the picture and
attributing the crime to the particular portal is not simply technophobia. It is in fact a
symptom of the larger problem at hand – the grey areas and interstices that exist between RL
and VR, between the virtual and the physical. The case like the Orkut Death only reminds us
of the fact that this anxiety between RL and VR has not really been resolved. It has merely
been deflected and emerges in different forms of regulation, control and censorship. I would
suggest that for a majority of the communities demanding justice and seeking a sense of
closure, the legal resolution of punishing the murderers was inadequate because their
experience of the case existed in a grey zone between the virtual and the physical where the
actions in one realm do not necessarily foreclose the possibilities in the other. It is this lack of
resolution, rather than the fear of the unknown or a lack of understanding of technology, that
adds to the cultivation of the ecology of fear around technology and the city.

10 A Universal Search through communities on Orkut reveals at least 25 communities, across different
categories like “Religion and Beliefs”, “People”, “Individuals” etc. devoted to Adnan. The search can be
accessed at http://www.orkut.co.in/Main#UniversalSearch?searchFor=C&q=adnan+patrawala
The second case of the death of Koushambi Layek only demonstrates the same pattern of irresolution and anxiety, but even more mystifying in its attributes to Orkut. Koushambi Layek, a 24 year old woman, who was employed with an IT firm, met Manish Thakur on a train when she was travelling for work (Rajput, 2007). The first interaction led to attraction and then a very public ‘affair’ which was reflected in their very personal and intimate exchanges on Orkut. After a fairly long period of being in a relationship, Koushambi came to discover that Manish was actually a married man and had children. Heartbroken, she confessed all to her friends and family and tried to sever her relationship with him. However, Manish was not ready to take the rejection and persuaded her to come to meet up with him. They checked into a hotel together and in the middle of the night, Manish strangled Koushambi and shot her with his Navy Service revolver. He left the scene of crime only to be nabbed by the police who tracked him down from his Orkut profile and his exchanges with Koushambi. In this particular case of ‘Crime of Passion’ (Parmar, 2008), Orkut actually became instrumental to the law enforcing agencies in discovering the culprit and nabbing him. As in the other Orkut Death, the crime itself was committed outside of the digital domains. The different systems of interaction and the public nature of the interactions between avatars led to a quick resolution of the case and the mobilising of the mechanisms of justice.

And yet, just like in the other case, the closure still seems to be absent. There are still communities that ask for ‘justice’ on the behalf of Koushambi. Thousands of users have joined communities that offer condolences and tribute to the young woman’s memories. Many still use the particular incident for political purposes – asking for censorship, restricted access and abolition of pseudonymity on online structures. These same protestors do not
stage any protests against the railway, where Koushambi and Manish met for the first fateful encounter.

This lack of resolution as well as the attribution of a physical world crime to a virtual world system brings back the questions of Technosocial Space into focus. It helps in strengthening the idea that the anxiety around virtual and physical space contributes significantly to the Ecology of Fear that emerges in talking about space-place-technologies. It also goes on to show that the notion of Technosocial Space is not as simple as it has been accepted in popular discourse. Technosocial Spaces are not merely imitations or simulations of RL into VR but are shaped through a series of transactions and practices of the human in its interactions with the Technological. There are yet other incidents which also follow these patterns, becoming urban legends where the facts of the crime and the reporting or the reception of it and the anxieties it generate are not necessarily about the crime itself. The story of the ‘Bangalore Techie’ being robbed on his way home11, the horrific tale of a female call-centre employee raped by the cab-driver who was responsible for dropping her home late in the night12, the narratives of couples being harassed and mugged in remote areas of the city – have all become a part of the techno-narratives of the city, repeatedly bringing back narratives of the IT industry into central discussions and debates. And while these anxieties have been perceived of, as anxieties of the Technosocial Subject, it is evident that they are primarily anxieties about the Technosocial Space. Technosocial Spaces become the contextual lenses through which the shaping of the Technosocial Subject can be understood and they need to be acknowledged in the discourse around production of a Technosocial Subjectivity.

12 The story is available at http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report_call-centre-girl-raped-and-killed-by-cabbie-in-blore_1002626 and illustrates the ecology of fear that is drawn around IT related businesses and lifestyles as well.
2. BLURRING THE BOUNDARIES

We have so far looked at instances where the phenomenon was in the physical world and the attributions were to the digital dimensions. While these go against the popular grain of imagining Technosocial Spaces, I do not want to propose another hierarchy between the virtual and the physical spaces. It has been the ambition of this chapter to think of Technosocial Spaces as spaces in transaction and emerging in the dialectic between the virtual and the physical. The cases we have seen so far have been about the critical role that physical spaces have played in the crises that happened ‘online’. We have also looked at how the digital and internet technologies become central to our understanding of urbanism that even when we have events that happen in the physical spaces, we attribute them to the virtual spaces augmented by technologies. In these cases we do not have a direct mapping of one space on to another; there are no points of correspondence and equivalence and hence the coupling of the two produce the tensions that help craft the concept of Technosocial Spaces and the imperative to factor them when talking of Technosocial Subjectivities.

When the virtual and the physical do start resembling each other, a new dimension emerges to the Technosocial Spaces. I want to begin by talking about a phenomenon that did not happen in India but is seminal to understand the blurred boundaries of RL and VR. I treat this story as a pre-cursor to the more contextualised discussion of flashmobs that appears in the later part of the section.

In September 2007, the Rapresentanza Sindacale Unitaria IBM Vimercate (RSU), the official trade union representing IBM’s 9,000 workers in Italy, called for a strike against the company’s violation of its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and denying the fruits of its massive profits to its employees. The RSU sent a statement to The Register that said,
While IBM is one of the company [sic] with major profits, its employees are receiving very few fruits of this big mountain of money.

The internal climate is below all the IT industries (taking advantages for the famous IBM’s competitor: HP), and the drop that overflowed the glass is the long and inconclusive negotiation for the internal agreement.

What made this strike particularly interesting and garnered great attention was the fact that RSU had proposed, in an unprecedented move, a strike on cyberspace rather than in the ‘real world.’ Instead of demonstrations and physical protests outside the IBM buildings, the RSU harnessed the powers of social engineering and presence of IBM’s employees online, especially in the (MMORPG), Second Life, to call for a virtual strike, where the employees and supporters of the RSU’s demands were invited to join the avatars in picketing and protesting outside IBM’s presence in Second Life.

Second Life (SL for short) is a Massively Multiple Online Role Playing Game that has taken the virtual world by the storm. More than 25,000 users within Second Life, collective spend about 6,000 hours every day in producing simulations of life, bodies, property and economic transactions. Second Life is a graphic evolution of the MUDs that Sherry Turkle studies to look at, in her eponymous book, Life on the Screen (1996). It is one among several virtual worlds that have been inspired by the cyberpunk literary movement and in particular by Neal Stephenson's novel Snow Crash (Stephenson, 1993). SL adopted Stephenson's idea of Metaverse, a user-defined world in which people can interact, play, do business, and otherwise communicate. Actually, SL was intentionally designed to be an environment completely constructed by its users (Boellstorff 2010). Created in 2001 by Linden Lab and launched in the public in 2003, it registered a skyrocketing diffusion, and in a very short
period its users outnumbered those of any other similar environment (at the moment SL counts about 7 millions registered users from all over the world, among them more than half a million are very active (Boellstroff 2010, 4).

SL users are represented by motional avatars, which are the medium used to interact, explore, socialize, participate in individual and group activities, etc. SL users define themselves as "residents": it is noteworthy that this term suggests an idea of “citizenship”. As a matter of fact, early residents felt strongly about their belonging to the synthetic world, and they organized in public demonstrations to counteract specific policies or rules adopted by Linden Lab they did not agree upon (this happened, e.g., when residents were being charged for objects they created in-world: a protest has been set in-world, sending out a Thoreau-style proclamation against Linden Labs (Rymaszewski et al 2007, 282). Since SL was conceived as an empty world, its internal building system is powerful and easy to use (compared to other similar 3D development tools). It allows manipulation of geometric primitives: residents – alone or collaboratively – can mould these “prims” into new shapes, change their texture and physical qualities, link them together for creating objects as complex as they like, add contents (e.g. text, multimedia, etc.) or make them interactive through a scripting language (48). Content creation in SL involves skills like graphic design, three-dimensional modelling and programming. The ability of users to learn the relatively easily programming language and to create objects on their own made Second Life particularly popular. Creation and crafting is an intriguing component of SL: it attracts so many users and has played a relevant role in SL success. Actually, it was by engaging its users in the act of creation that SL produced an environment different from others virtual words: residents become producer-consumers (similar to the thousands of people who are mixing their own music, making their own movies or publishing their own art or texts on the Internet).
Many MUDs and MMORPGs have contents that were – and continue to be – built primarily by their users (Lastowka & Hunter, 2004; Turkle, 1996), but they imply at least two major constraints to creativity: objects and contents should often be tuned with the environment (e.g. medieval or science fiction) and the creator does not have any intellectual property right on them. On the contrary, following endorsements by Professor Lawrence Lessig from Stanford University, in the Linden Lab’s Press Release (2003)\textsuperscript{13}. SL residents preserve their intellectual property rights on each object or content they create in-world, and these objects can be sold or bought using a virtual currency (Linden Dollar), that can be traded for US Dollars according to a fluctuating rate of exchange. Lessig argues, 

Linden Lab has taken an important step toward recognizing the rights of content generators in Second Life . . . As history has continually proven, when people share in the value they create, greater value is derived for all. Linden Lab is poised for significant growth as a result of this decision (Lessig, in Linden Lab’s Press Release, 2003)

There has also been a reassertion of the fantastic and the ‘alternative’ nature of Second Life that subscribes to the ideological moorings of Free Software and Open Source movements that have expanded hand-in-hand with the consumerist cyberspaces. Political protests, petitions, communities and discussions on Second Life are analysed more as indicative of crises elsewhere – as if the Secondary nature of Second Life makes it never more than an extension of the Primary Reality within which the physical users behind the avatars are situated – and symptomatic of the changes that happen in the world around us. The discussions, debates, peer-2-peer networking, the viral passing of information and the

\textsuperscript{13} The Press release by Linden Labs, announcing their growth and success patterns to shareholders, is available at http://lindenlab.com/press/releases/03_11_14
creation of new nodes and forms of information on Second Life, are all clubbed under what Tim O’Reilly (2007) calls the ‘architecture of participation’.

Laura Ripamonti, Ines Loreto and Dario Maggiorini (2008), in their exploration of Multi User Virtual Environments make a case for these activities as not merely disrupting the analogue narratives but also augmenting RL. Quoting gaming theorist and new media practitioner, Edward Castranova they look upon the distinction between the ‘synthetic’ and the ‘virtual’ as counterproductive to the understanding of the interactions. They posit that ‘as synthetic and actual worlds overlap, intersect’ they interact to ‘augment each other, instead of being counterpoised... (through) concepts like identity, relationship and place’ (pg. 3)

While looking at the ways in which identities, spaces and realities overlap and blur, they observe that, (as in the case of the IBM strike) ‘people using SL often experience a sort of “double belonging” that mixes together the actual and the synthetic places: for example, residents can interact through avatars present in a synthetic places while sitting in an actual place and discussing with other residents about actual life or work life issues’ (pg. 13)

What the IBM¹⁴ strike in Second Life has in common with the Orkut Death or the Rape in LambdaMOO is that all of them produce identities that seem to be constantly straddling the virtual and the real in their conditions of technologisation. Moreover, they encourage an

---

¹⁴ IBM made its presence felt in Second Life as a service and products provider, identifying Second Life as a potential market force. It also encouraged its own employees to spend time on Second Life, exploring the possibilities of virtual marketing and brand placement. It was imagined that the employees spending more time within this simulated world would encourage a strong community building and social networking within the organisation while simultaneously granting more visibility and cultural capital to the organisation. It was this particular availability of the platform, the pseudonymous nature of the avatars who populate the universe of Second Life, and the possibility of picketing and protest as a gaming aesthetic – residing within the interstices of the real and the virtual, the physical and the fantastic – that led to the RSU calling for a strike in Second Life. Unlike the physical strike that would have resulted in only a handful of employees to actually join the demonstrations, the strike in Second Life invited avatars from all around the globe, to come and join the protests as an endorsement to the ideologies and ideas that the RSU was fighting for.
element of role-playing and appropriation of space – physical or otherwise – to use it for unauthorised or deligitimised purposes. The strike in Second Life is obviously a form of protest and what makes the mode of protest interesting is that the employees were going to use the company’s own presence and resources on Second Life to protest against it. It also draws our attention to a new playful, almost irreverent trope of political participation that young users of technology seem to develop and embody as a part of their digital engagement. While the contexts differ widely and the strategies are informed by the contextual variables, there seems to be an ethos of playfulness that engagement with cyberspaces seems to shape.

The IBM strike highlights two crucial points that I have been trying to make in this chapter: First, that Technosocial Spaces cannot be understood as cyberspaces and cyberspatial activities that ‘overflow’ in to the physical world, providing points of disjuncture, and creating conditions of incomprehensibility. Instead, a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between technologised environments and the physical spaces needs to be formulated. Second, cyberspaces cannot be simply read as extensions of earlier forms but crucially developing new methodological and reading tools that force us to revisit earlier sites of technological intervention like space, body and subjectivity.

A growing discourse in urban studies, architecture and geography has also located Technosocial spaces in the physical and material infrastructure that accompanies the rise and growth of Internet technologies in the country. The renewed emphasis is on the significant alteration that these technologies usher in as new market economies open up and IT cities, Mega Cities and Special Economic Zones (SEZ) are brought into being. New physical spaces of consumption – malls, multiplexes, shopping complexes, body shops, cafes, IT
parks, etc. – are also under scrutiny and a cause-effect relationship has been established as a popular mode of scholarship over technology and space.

While the emergence of the aforementioned new structures are interesting and signify a particular change that Fredric Jameson (1991) recognises as the arrival of the post-modern, it is necessary to realise that these structures are more the effect of a transition rather than producing the changes. These ‘spaces of technology’ help in unravelling the politics, aesthetics and mechanics of the technology mediated practices and subjectivities when they are de-contained of the development and infrastructure discourse that surrounds them. It is the ambition of this chapter to read them as contexts within which Technosocial Subjects craft their sense of belonging, identity and community.

I propose that it might be necessary to revisit the relationship between space/place and technology through the idea of Technosocial Spaces as has developed in this chapter.

The last section of this chapter focuses on flashmobs and their short lived but interesting history in India, to wrap up this argument and forward a case about how not only is the dialectic between virtual and physical spaces important in the understanding of Technosocial Subjects and their practices but that they also shape and inform the scholarship, public perception and regulatory processes which are blind to the tensions that they create. In the process I shall also uncover a new aesthetic of digital and Internet technologies- of gaming, playfulness and cultural subversion - that the Technosocial subjects are embodying as a part of their everyday practices.
2.1 The Anatomy of a Flashmob

The flashmobs in India were literally a flash in the pan. They have had a very short lived history and have been generally dismissed as a fad. Bill Wasik, the man who is attributed with starting the first flashmob using digital technologies, himself intended the flashmobs to be an exercise in ‘doing something new’ to study the ‘hipsters’ who form this particular form of social collective (Wasik, 2006). The anatomy of a flashmob is simple enough. Different people, who are connected with each other through various technologies and technologised platforms but are not familiar with each other, are invited to participate in a particular activity that is minutely defined and hosted at a public place. A flashmob is a collective of people who organise at a public space, conduct a series of activities that are not in the logic of the space, and then disperse, leaving in their trail, a bewildered audience. Flashmobs trace their history to the early 18th century industrialisation, when a group of women working in the labour shops in Australia used coded messages to meet and discuss the problems they had in their workplaces. These meetings were organised at random, and the women used the very technologies of production that they engaged with at work on a daily basis to fight the oppression and the injustice of the people at the top (Wasik, 2006). The first modern flashmob, however, is attributed to Bill Wasik, editor of Harper’s Magazine, who, after the first failed attempt in May of 2003, managed to pull a successful flashmob where 200 people swarmed over the mezzanine floor of the Manhattan departmental store Macy’s, pretending to buy a ‘love rug’ for their commune where they supposedly all lived together; they left a bewildered audience and a bemused store staff behind them on 3rd June, 2003. Till Wasik, in 2006, revealed his experimental design to study flashmobs, they were variously discussed as an art form, as an act of viral community formation, as a physical embodiment of the MMORPGs, and as internet-fads that became appropriated by political processes (Nicholson,
Wasik’s declaration did not really change the reception or the momentum that the flashmobs had gathered internationally but did prove that the way the flashmobs harness the networking powers of cyberspaces, has already exceeded Wasik’s own imagination or design.

The protocols and processes that Flashmobs use have now become the mantra for understanding Web 2.0 social platforms and have also been used as a way of harvesting information for different projects. This is what Jeff Howe, as we discussed in the earlier chapter, identifies as ‘Crowd Sourcing’. On a similar note but looking in more detail at the ways in which collaboration, co-creation and mobilisation happens online, is James Suroweicki. In his fascinating book *The Wisdom of the Crowds* (2005) explains this way of connecting, mobilising and participating as a new form of viral and social networking which leads to people congregating in new virtual or physical spaces as peers who work collectively towards transforming the world. The crowd sourcing model is at the basis of peer-2-peer networks like Thepiratebay\(^\text{16}\) and CouchSurfing\(^\text{17}\) that have globally overturned the Intellectual Property Rights regimes and formed extraordinary care communities respectively. Collaborative Knowledge production sites like Wikipedia and Adavark serve as strong exemplars of the Wisdom of the Crowds. However, for this dissertation, I shall focus on the Flashmob as offering the most productive engagement with the questions we have been discussing.

\(^{15}\) Available at [http://journal.fibreculture.org/issue6/issue6_nicholson.html](http://journal.fibreculture.org/issue6/issue6_nicholson.html)

\(^{16}\) The bittorrent based file sharing website can be accessed at [http://www.thepiratebay.org](http://www.thepiratebay.org)

\(^{17}\) The online community that seeks to provide free hosting and hospitality to travelers world wide, also relies on a p2p structure for its community building. It can be accessed at [http://www.couchsurfing.org](http://www.couchsurfing.org)
2.2 Smart Mobs

Perhaps one of the most interesting studies of such collectives facilitated by technologies, is by Howard Rheingold, who coined the term ‘Smart Mobs’ (2000) in a book by the same name. While Rheingold’s own interest is in studying the effects of community formation and the potential of the digital networks to form collaborative chains of interaction, sharing and computing, his work lends itself to some very interesting formulation about the phenomenon of flashmobs.

Smart Mobs, as Rheingold imagines them, are a range of people who are distributed across various time zones and lifestyles, hooking up their computers to form a network of shared interest. In an earlier formulation, studying the text-based communities emerging out of an increasing population growing up with cell-phones and communicating through interface-to-interface communication in text – text messages, Internet Relay Chat (IRC), MUDs, etc., he posited the notion of ‘Real-time Tribes’ where

‘thousands of people…are joined together at this moment in a cross-cultural grab bag of written conversations known as Internet Relay Chat (IRC). IRC has enabled a global subculture to construct itself from three fundamental elements: artificial but stable identities, quick wit, and the use of words to construct an imagined shared context for conversation’ (23).

In *Smart Mobs*, Rheingold looks at the changing nature of human interaction and community formation, from Finland to Japan, as new generations grow up in the age of mobile computing and fluid social dynamics, living increasingly, on the interfaces of their portable devices of communication and interaction. In a slightly lyrical mode, Rheingold imagines users from around the world, hooking up their computers in a network that emerges out of
common interests and needs. He imagines a community of users who are not only capable of intelligently interacting with their digital devices, harnessing the powers of computing to augment their own identities, but also capable of distributing their own efforts across a vast network in order to form new collectives with people they might never physically meet.

Rheingold suggests that the people who make up smart mobs co-operate in ways never before possible because they carry devices that possess both communication and computing capabilities. Their mobile devices connect them with other information devices in the environment as well as with other people's telephones. Dirt-cheap microprocessors embedded in everything from box tops to shoes are beginning to permeate furniture, buildings, neighbourhoods, products with invisible intercommunicating smartifacts. When they connect the tangible objects and places of our daily lives with cyberspace, handheld communication media mutate into wearable remote control devices for the physical world. While Rheingold’s work is more about the future of social technology, and hence often ends up in the realm of intelligent prediction of what the current trends might lead to, there is one aspect of Smart Mobs which is of particular interest to me.

In his earlier work (1993), and even in the rest of the book, Rheingold thinks of these ‘Real-time Tribes’ as residing in the virtual networks of the cyberspace – IRC, Blogs, Text messaging, et al. However, in his study of the text-based interactions in younger users of mobile technologies, Rheingold posits the necessity of certain physical, digital and cultural infrastructure that needs to be in place for these virtual communities to sustain themselves (2003, 45). Rheingold observes that the various forms of open wi-fi devices require wi-fi connections so that the younger users, who often use their shared networks for dating and finding friends, form collectives or cults around the current objects of obsession (52). These
networks also work like the ‘grapevine’ where information is constantly transmitted, back and forth, changing nature with each transmission, often taking the form of ‘myth making’ (102). Because of the territorial nature of such information and the immediate need to ‘hook-up’ with other people, these communities are also contained within the immediate localities that the users inhabit (190). More than that Rheingold also speculates that the spaces that the users in the Smart Mobs mark out for themselves, often get produced and recognised as important on having the potential for social collective which otherwise escapes attention (198).

Rheingold himself does not dwell on this production or the marking of the space. His focus is in looking at the material practices of technology and community behaviour and hence the question of space as being produced or inflected by technology, apart from appearing as the backdrop for the staging of digital communities and transactions, escapes his analyses of Smart Mobs. However, it is this very dissonance which has escaped most of the analyses of these collectives – blogs, IRC\textsuperscript{18}, smart mobs, flashmobs, social networking systems, MUDs\textsuperscript{19}, MMORPGs – that I intend to focus in my analysis of flashmobs in India. Most theorists of digital collectives have, while they have celebrated the ‘escape from the tyranny of place’ (Wilbur, 2000, 44) in the formation of these collectives, have often neglected the paradox of network neighbourhoods or gated communities or the physical architecture that houses and supports these collectives.

\textsuperscript{18} Elizabeth Reid’s graduate dissertation on \textit{Cultural Formations in Text-Based Virtual Realities} (1994) is one of the few studies that look at the rootedness of space and the relationships that emerge with Internet Relay Chat in a particular geographical context.

\textsuperscript{19} Even Sherry Turkle, whose analysis of the aesthetics and dynamics of cyberspatial relationship in the book \textit{Life on the screen} (1996), is probably one of the first accounts of the lives that are lived on the MUDs and the lives that are affected by the MUDs, does not engage with the physical spatiality or the texture of the communities which are thus produced. Like most discourse on Cyberculture in that time, Turkle’s work also celebrates the MUDs and the new potentials that they have to offer rather than analyzing the ways in which these potentials are being realized.
While Rheingold is able to locate the mechanics of flashmobs in various local and cultural contexts, providing a layered history for the origins and the proliferations, the implications and ramifications of these phenomena, he is unable to either resolve the virtual-physical space anxiety or to acknowledge that this anxiety remains critical to the understanding of flashmobs. Instead, like a majority of the theorists in Cyberculture studies, Rheingold also takes the resolution as granted, unable to observe, in his own work, how the unresolved (and unacknowledged) tensions of virtual-physical spaces are central to the very politics and aesthetics that he locates in Smart Mobs.

2.3 At the Crossroads: India’s First Flashmob

I reconstruct the story of the first flashmob in India to demonstrate the centrality of the virtual-physical space dialectic and to see how it contributes into the shaping of the Technosocial Subjectivity. In the year 2000 a shopping mall in Mumbai created a furore amongst the people. It was the first ‘genuine’ shopping mall in India. The first all American Shopping mall – Crossroads, with its promises of unlimited pleasure and brand-tagged shopping opened up in Mumbai in the new millennium and attracted the largest crowd in its first opening week. When the mall was finally opened, there was a strict filtering process by which access was granted to the public desirous of gaining entry. As the director of the mall pointed out in his interview, ‘Crossroads is not meant for everybody’ (The Times of India August 23, 2000). In those days when cell-phones were still a novelty and definitely a curio for the upper classes Crossroads passed a stipulation which restricted entry for people not carrying a cell-phone or a credit card unless they paid an entry fee of Rs. 50.

On October 4, 2003, the mall again came into unexpected public attention. This time it was an email that started it. About 5,000 original mailers went off to people all around Mumbai
and even beyond the city, to go and have a look at a new blog for Mumbai flashmobs. The blog had a form which took name, email and mobile phone number. On the 3rd of October several cell phones rang, asking people who had submitted their details in the form, to check their inboxes. The eager expectants received a mail that agonisingly chalked out the time and space for a venue – a Flash site. SMS were also sent to all the members who had volunteered. And then at exactly 5:00 p.m. a group of about 100 participants moved in to Crossroads.

As reporter and participant Bijoy Venugopal (2003) documents the event, at the Crossroads Flashmob, the mobsters screamed at the top of their voices and sold imaginary stocks for a large Indian Corporate house. They danced the traditional garba dance that has emerged as one of the largest fads in popular Hindi Cinema. They all froze still in the middle of their actions. And then without as much as a word, after two minutes of historic histrionics, they opened their umbrellas and dispersed, leaving behind them a trail of bewilderment and confusion. This was India’s first recorded flashmob. People who never knew each other, did not have any explicitly suggested political purpose and did not really intend to extend relationships, got together to perform a set of ridiculous actions at Crossroads. They had come together for some serious fun, but they unknowingly marked Crossroads as a space that will be remembered as the site that hosted the first flashmob in India.

This flashmob at Crossroads was the first of many around the nation – most of them marking out spaces like multiplexes, shopping malls, gaming parlours, body shops, large commercial roads and shopping complexes as their flash sites. This similarity in flash-sites, no matter what the motivation for the flashmob, is something that might offer a first clue for the earlier discussions about the relationship between virtual and physical spaces. Is the flash-site a

---

20 Following a Public Interest Litigation, the mall eventually acquiesced to granting entry to the common public, only reserving its rights to admission at a notional level.
Technosocial Space? Is it possible that the flash-sites are a way of transforming public space into cyberspace? A more detailed reading of the flashmob, the structure of a flashmob and the events that surrounded India’s first flashmob at Crossroads in Mumbai, might offer answers to these questions.

While a lot of subsequent flashmobs in India were propelled by specific politics and activism, the first flashmob was looked upon, by the organisers, the participants and the authorities as ‘just some fun’. The organisers of the flashmob who started the website and sourced inspiration to the Macy’s Flashmob in New York went out of their way to suggest that the particular Crossroads flashmob was an extension of the ‘fun and games’ aesthetics that the digital technologies bring with them. One of the most celebrated accounts of the flashmob was by Bijoy Venugopal, a serious blogger and writer, who also reiterated the fact that the intention of participation was to have some ‘serious fun’ (Venugopal, 2003). Subsequent experience-sharing by other members of the flashmobs also endorsed the idea that the flashmob was like an extension of online gaming or the tenuous digital communities which are a part of the lifestyle choices and social networking for an increasing number of people in the large urban centres of India. The Flashmob seemed to carry with it all the elements that digital cyberspaces have to offer – a sense of tentative belonging, a grouping of people who seek to network with each other despite having nothing in common – a point of departure from the earlier understanding of political groups or social communities which were structured around commonalities and interests. The possibility of forming communities of technologies, gives a growing sense of a need to ‘enchant’ the otherwise quickly mechanised world around us, and an exciting space of playful interventions. The flashmob also carried with it the anxiety of irresolution of conflicts. It was, simultaneously an MMORPG as well as a physical mobilisation of a group. The flashmob existed, even in the reports of the
participants or the subsequent discussions by theorists, as a paradox, not clearly defined or easily made meaning out of.

Flashmobs as emerging out of these technologised platforms, foreground this relationship between space and technology that overrides the earlier formulations of space and its production. I now propose to read the first flashmob in India through this mapping of the production of a Technosocial space and Subject, to see how it produces incomprehensibility for legal and technology studies.

2.4 The flashmob, the flash-site and the legal order of things

The flashmob at Crossroads gained huge media coverage and local buzz and was talked about and debated upon quite furiously in popular media. The organisers of the flashmobs became instant celebrities and were questioned repeatedly about the reasons for organising the flashmob. The answer was always unwavering – the organisers insisted that the flashmobs were a way for them to instil fun and novelty in the very hurried life in Mumbai. On the website, Rohit Tikmany very passionately argues:

We are not making any statement here - we are not protesting anything - we are not a revolution, a movement or an agitation. Our purpose (if any) is solely to have fun… None of us is here for anything except fun. We will not have any sponsors (covert or overt) and we will never respond to any commercial/political/religious influences.

(Tikmany, 2003)

There was a particular and specific disavowal of the ‘political’. The organisers went out of their way to assert that they do not have any political cause that they endorse, that they are
not affiliated with any socio-political organisations or parties in the city, and that their actions were guided only by the desire to have some fun and games.

The flashmob presumed that participants were equipped with technological capital; they were informed about the flashmob through the internet, they were all expected to have cell-phones through which the flashmob was orchestrated, they were all expected to be conversant with English and have the cultural capital that enabled them to not only enter but also appropriate the awe-inspiring space of Crossroads for their performance. This was an indication of the rise of the new generation that was augmented not only by the possession of the ICTs but also by a certain lifestyle of consumption and networking that were hand-in-hand with the globalisation in India. In a shade of irony, these were the very people – Americanised, cosmopolitan, with a disposable income geared towards increasing consumption, in possession of cell phones and probably credit cards, in the premium market demography of 18 to 35 years – who were posited as the ideal consumer of the space of Crossroads before it reluctantly threw its door open to the Everybody.

The participants of the flashmobs, in their attempts at having fun, demonstrated how they could harness the power of collaborative technologies and the potential of networking that the ICTs and the corresponding cyberspatial forms had to offer. The blog, the email, the text messaging on the cell-phones – all newly emerging faces of the web and the proliferation of technologies in India – were all involved in the orchestration of the flashmob at Crossroads. In fact, one of the novelties of the flashmob and the coverage by popular media was about how technology is replacing the older public spaces of interaction and conglomeration and producing new channels through which, people otherwise unfamiliar with each other, form networks of communication and mobilisation.
This particular strain of argument is well documented in William Mitchell’s informed speculations and analyses in his book *Me++* (1996). Mitchell proposes that throughout history, humans have created unique physical spaces in which to live, work and socialise. However, the digital age has transformed the ways we live, think and communicate with others. We don’t congregate at the town bank any more for financial transactions. We visit ATMs or bank online. Interactions that once required people to face each other now take place via computer, often across vast distances (48).

Mitchell describes the disappearance of familiar public structures like phone booths, as well as the migration of work from office to just about anywhere a wireless connection is possible. As technology becomes imbedded in our lives and literally disappears into the woodwork, Mitchell sees the possibility for new kinds of extended communities. Network technology has enabled ‘discontinuous, asynchronous global agoras’ (109), says Mitchell, exemplified by the most recent Gulf War protests. Organizers used digital space (email lists and websites) to help orchestrate public gatherings, which in turn generated images fed back to the Internet, spurring interest in country after country, time-zone after time-zone. Mitchell believes that such networks open up new methods for human assembly and political organisation, but also increase the risks to individuals of surveillance (132).

David Bell, in his preface to *The Cyberculture Reader* also indicates the recognition of technology replacing and taking over earlier spaces of interaction and communication. Focusing specifically on spaces of Computer-Human Interaction (CHI), where our daily life is often defined by the practices that we perform in relation to the world of machines and the spaces that they are housed in, Bell suggests that there is a certain way in which earlier forms
of transaction (largely economic) and interactions (largely interpersonal and social) are inflected heavily by the new technologies that surround us, not only in terms of direct access to the internet or the World Wide Web, but through the earlier technologies themselves – cinema, television, gaming, medicine – which are also increasingly relying on new digital technologies and ICTs in their practices. Bell paints a large canvas to look at several instances which are now under the purview of what Arturo Escobar referred to as ‘Cyberculture’. Bell looks at how an individual is in a technologised state of being while
taking Viagra, or [engagement] with a pacemaker, or riding a bike, or withdrawing cash from an ATM, or acting out their fantasies as Lara Croft in the latest Tomb Raider game or as a Nato bomber pilot blitzing Kosovo, or anyone watching footage from Kosovo live on the late-night news…(ix, 2000)

He does not make a direct argument around the production of these spaces and the rise of ICTs. He does not analyse the relationship that technological forms and the aesthetic that they emerge with the aesthetic and the architecture of these spaces. Bell is more interested and focused in looking at how these different technologies shape human interaction and processes of realising the self. Bell’s elucidation of these crucial mechanics of urban survival, and the inclusion of these spaces in one of the first readers of Cyberculture, is indicative of the need to look at the anxious relationship between technology and space.

In less than a fortnight after the first flashmob in Mumbai, it was banned in the city of Mumbai. The Mumbai police invoked the Bombay Police Act (the Prohibition Orders) Section 37(1), which makes it a criminal offence for any collective of more than four people for a common cause within the city to meet without prior police permission, and specifically relegated the flashmobs, within Mumbai, to the realm of illegality. The Mumbai Flashmob,
following the intimation from the police chief to Rohit Tikmany, one of the organisers, was suspended until further notice. Subsequently 14 other cities in India, after witnessing flashmobs, also banned flashmobs as detrimental to the ‘safety situation in the city’ and the ‘sanity and security of public life’ (Mid-day, 9th Oct. 2003). In the final reports on the suspension of the flashmobs, Rohit Tikmany mentions how the police authorities in Mumbai asserted that they were not ‘anti-fun’ but that the flashmobs were ‘worsening the security situation of the city’ (Mid-day, 14th Oct. 2003). Though a few of the mobsters insisted on flouting the law and still continuing with the flashmobs, there were no concrete actions taken.

The flashmobs, in themselves, had no illegal element to it. Though they followed a certain fantasy filled role-playing gaming aesthetic, the very nature of the flashmob, the people who constituted it and the political disavowal, made them an extension of the cyberspatial aesthetic that the Indian State was inviting and encouraging as a part of its globalisation processes. And yet, they came to be not only recognised as dangerous and threatening but were also subsequently and rapidly banned across the country.

The invocation of the Bombay Police Act to ban flashmobs means that the flashmobs were seen to disrupt the security, safety and everydayness of the places they mark as flash-sites. I suggest that the flashmobs, in their attempt at making the place and its experience incomprehensible, foreground the place/space anxiety and force us to revisit it, thus feeding very strongly, into the ecology of fear. The flashmobs, with their mobile cyberspace networking, their gaming aesthetics and their very immediate, material and physical presence, create ‘ordinary’ places into those grey zones that exist between the VR and the RL. It is this very incomprehensibility or the ability to transform, even though momentarily, the narrative conditions and the material experiences of public places that the flashmobs embodied in their
unfolding. It was then no wonder that they were immediately looked upon as threatening and had to be contained using the judicial powers despite their lack of explicitly stated political agendass. Trying to ban flashmobs by rendering them ‘illegal’ is merely a symptom of how the technology mediated place-space anxiety can once again be differed to the future. It is seeking to resolve the crises of place/space by favouring the physical over the virtual, the place over the space, over-determining the possible meanings, function and usage of places.

The short history of flashmobs in India, clearly demonstrates three different layers of incomprehensibility that the flashmobs bring to the processes of producing and imagining the new urban spaces of globalised consumption. And at the heart of each of these layers are the dialectics and anxieties introduced by the emergence of Technosocial Spaces:

First, that the flashmobs, which are a cyberspatial form that overflow into the physical world and appropriate physical sites into sites of fantasy and gaming, social networking. They reiterate the dialectic between the virtual and the physical and demonstrate, with the use of digital and internet technologies, that Technosocial Spaces are an essential context to making sense of digitally inflected internet practices. It is not only an accidental characteristic of the flashmob that it produces bewilderment and mis-recognition of the spaces and actions for the audience, and often for the mobsters themselves. It is necessary for the flashmob, even if it is only for fun, to restructure that space, even though for a short period of time, in conditions of utter chaos and lack of meaning. As a product of new digital technologies of information and communication, the flashmobs inherit the ability to produce momentary and fragmented activities that can be immediately archived and layered in the historical narratives and semantic layers of the spaces that they inhabit. Flashmobs are able to highlight the Technosocial space not as the celebrated space of the IBM strikers in Second Life or the pathologised experience of the Okrut Deaths. Instead, they place the Technosocial spaces and
practices in a grey, unresolved zone of contestation and negotiation. The threat that is recognised in the unfolding of the flashmobs is not in their ability to mobilise unprecedentedly, large groups of connected people – something that was actually celebrated and applauded in the Tsunami Bloggers – but in their showcasing of the crises that ICTs produce in their interaction with the cities.

The second level of incomprehensibility that the flashmob produces is about the violation of the intent and the abuse of the spaces that they mark as flash-sites. The connections between technology and the circuits of illegality are not new. Even before digital technologies came to the fore, there was an imagination of spaces entrenched in the cultures of copy where copied and pirated material was available for public consumption. The arrival of the photocopying machine and then the emergence of the video cassette culture led to significant marking of spaces that housed, physically, these copies of the originals, that violated the sanctity of the original and the copyright laws that were in place to protect the original. However, these spaces were always contained in small pockets which could regularly be monitored and disciplined. For instance the Palika Bazaar at Connaught Place in Delhi or Burma Bazar at KG Road in Bangalore, have always been identified as the interfaces where transactions of piracy can be traced. The physical existence of the pirated copies that these spaces housed and the economic acts of buying and selling of the pirated copies immediately marked these sites in conditions of illegality enabled by/premised upon technologies of copying and duplicating. Moreover, these spaces fit into the logic of technology infused illegality that is a part of the urbanism experience. However, with digital technologies and especially the rise of the ICTs, these physical spaces no longer remain the only spaces that can be identified as spaces of theft or piracy. The proliferation of ICTs and the easy access to new technologies has de-territorialised the zones of piracy.
The flashmob at Crossroads brings to focus the nature of Technosocial Spaces and how they are contextually produced with the emergence of internet technologies in India. They challenge the easy rhetoric of lifestyle spaces and make visible the dynamic interaction between the physical and the virtual spaces. The flashmob revisits the anxieties that we have been discussing around Technosocial Spaces by emphasising that the material practices and the embodied Technosocial Subjects need to be located in such spaces. It shows how a certain condition of negotiation and transaction emerges in our interactions with internet technologies on an everyday basis, that produce the contexts for understanding the phenomenon of Technosociality, both in regards to space as well as subjectivity.

3. RECONFIGURING TECHNOSOCIAL SPACES

In this chapter, I have re-mapped Technosocial Spaces in a way different from how they are described or theorised in contemporary literature that focuses on relationship between internet technologies and physical spaces. I began by showing how, in most literature within Cyberculture discourse but also across different disciplines seriously engaging with the emergence of Internet technologies, there has been a bias towards the physical spaces over the virtual ones. There has been a theorisation of the virtual or cyberspaces as extensions or imitations of physical spaces. Technosocial spaces have been generally identified as virtual spaces with referents to a physical reality. I further demonstrated how, this easy presumption of knowledge about Technosocial spaces runs throughout the most influential literature on technology mediated identities and subjectivities. Also, this presumption which is integral to the larger theorisations is contested, challenged and exploded by the practices within the geopolitical urban contexts of India. It showed how Technosocial Spaces cannot be taken as universally homogeneous but are shaped by the local contexts and the unique set of circumstances that surround them. By looking at case studies from recent past in India, I
examined how the notion of Technosocial Space is invoked in everyday understanding, practices and policies in the country. The section ended by concluding that the Technosocial Spaces are not exclusively in the physical or virtual domains and attempts at producing cause-and-effect relationships are not very fruitful.

The second section made a point of departure from these VR-RL binaries and instead started looking at how Technosocial Spaces are at once physical and virtual and produced in the transactions between the two. The Technosocial Spaces were posited as being made intelligible by looking at the practices of the people who inhabit them. It also made a case for the factoring in of Technosocial Spaces as essential to our understanding of Technosocial Subjectivity. In looking at the case of the flash-mobs in India, I sought to present an analytical method of approaching technology mediated phenomena by not only looking at the unfolding of the events but in acknowledging the production of the Technosocial Space and the role that different stakeholders have in the shaping of such subjectivities.

Different moments of crises that create the ecology of fear, at the level of the experienced local and the imagined global, also have implications for the production of the cyberspaces and a regulatory mechanism around the access, distribution and proliferation of the related technologies. In identifying the presence of cyberspaces outside of monitors and access screens, PDAs and portable computing devices, this chapter hopes to position technology and technological forms as a constitutive part of our physical world. These Technosocial spaces shall occur in further discussions in different chapters – in debates of censorship and regulation, in discussions of piracy and terrorism, in formulating a cyborg identity, and in looking at the relationship between the State and the Citizen in exploring the processes of e-governance and administration.
This chapter wanted to emphasise that conceptualising Technosocial Spaces allow for a framework that makes a departure from the virtual-physical debates that proliferate in Cyberculture. I proposed a framework of Technosocial Space that helps in providing an account of how the IT Cities and specific spaces of consumption and lifestyle therein are created. Technosocial Spaces additionally, find their meaning not only in their spatial unfolding but in the practices of the Technosocial Subjects who inhabit it in a temporal, shistorical and embodied context. Technosocial Spaces thus become sites of dynamic interactions where they gather intelligibility and meaning from the Technosocial practices and subjects and also offer They become the grounds upon which the technologised enablement of specific tasks, bodies, labour markets and nations, particularly how their intersection with city spaces, governmental regulation and lifestyle options, leads to the production of Technosocial subjectivities.