

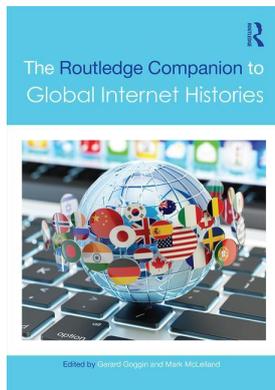
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3

THE STATE OF THE INTERNETS

Notes for a New Historiography of Technosociality

Nishant Shah

History is generally perceived to be a narrative of time. However, when it comes down to the nuts and bolts, history is actually about the sequencing of time but focused on space. Histories are both wedded to the geography and confined to the areas that they emerge from. It is in the nature of historiography that it simultaneously provincializes and globalizes locations. Thus, a cursory glance at almost any history project of the Internet focuses on the Euro-American unfolding of the Internet, positing that narrative as the de facto history and also the global history of the Internet. This becomes such a powerful metaphor that the world gets separated into the West versus the Rest (Postill 2011), where the West is the location of the Internet and the Rest becomes the site to be rescued by the Internet.¹

These histories are informed by three presumptions that are often critiqued, and yet fiercely reinforced, in history writing. The first is the genesis paradigm. There is a deep conviction that things begin from a single point that can be marked as the beginning. The Internet has had many and multiple beginnings, like Charles Babbage and Ada Lovelaces's differential and analytic engines to the production of the ENIAC that mark the emergence of the computer, as well as the industrial-military complex of the Second World War that propels computing into the networked era, allowing for an encrypted circulation of digital traffic to emerge (Markoff 2006). More contemporary histories of the Internet might focus on the personalization of the Internet and the countercultures that led to the visions of the World Wide Web (Berners-Lee and Fischetti 2000; Turner 2006), or the production of global information structures and infrastructures that make the physical spread of the Internet possible (Hafner and Lyon 1996). While these beginning points can be multiple, defined by the inquiry and the intention of the historian, identifying the different layers of technology and usage that the Internet embodies, they are all marked by a single point origin that always resides in the Global North, thus initiating the prevalent imagination of the world where some geographies are where the Internet is built and some other geographies are where the Internet gets applied.

They acknowledge and allow for multiple interpretations and disarticulations of the Internet, but they still tie it to single origin points that allow for these histories to be the de

facto and global histories of the Internet, located in provincial towns that become the global hubs for talking about the Internet. Thus, Silicon Valley, for instance, doesn't become a West Coast American History of the Internet. Instead, it becomes such a powerful genesis story, like the garden of Eden and man's fall from grace, that any other location around the "flattened world" becomes a mere mimicry or pale imitation of that Silicon Valley (Friedman 2005). Thus, even when producing a new history, a new narrative, a new geography and genealogy for the history, the original Silicon Valley remains the unquestioned reference point, shaping all the other histories as alternative or derivative. The genesis history of the Internet remains the only measure by which all other histories are to be written, and it becomes the burden of the alternative historian to qualify and justify the new locations and stories as measuring up to the rubrics established by these monolithic historical narratives of the Internet. Such an history mimics what Donna Haraway (1991) calls the romantic imagination of the human that "depends on the myth of original unity, fullness, bliss and terror" (1991: 151). Indeed, taking a cue from Haraway, the quest would be to write a (cyborg) history of the Internet that is "resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity. It is oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence" (1991: 151).

The second presumption that marks all these histories of the Internet is the idea that they know exactly what the Internet is. While there is a recognition that the Internet is ubiquitous, intertwined with socio-cultural and economic-political processes, the Internet is also produced as a discrete, complete, and concrete object which can be traced in all its forms, formats, and functions through time and space. The attempt of historicizing the Internet is often to understand its contemporary practices and structures. However, ironically, the history writing demands that a clear understanding of the Internet as we know it now be presented in order for the historical narrative to emerge. This strange paradox where the historiography is in the service of understanding the object, but simultaneously demands a clear understanding of the object in order for the history writing to begin, often leads to the reduction of the Internet to its technological materiality and specificity. Such a process is an attempt at what Bruno Latour in *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence* (2013) describes as "making history systematic" when it isn't. Latour argues for a contingent history that is assembled by different modes of inquiry where each mode is differentiated and yet interlinked. However, in the absence of this, the Latourian Internet is reduced to its technology infrastructure or rendered through gadgets and devices; it is located in corporations that build it or in the users that consume it; it is contained in spaces where it becomes manifest or in the networks that configure it. The demand for a clear idea of what the Internet is does not discount the many and contesting meanings of the Internet, as well as the conflicted interpretations that are around us. However, it does make it imperative for the historical narrative to still produce a coherent and consolidated vision of the Internet that would synthesize and stitch together these different fragments, producing the Internet as a monolithic structure that has expected and accepted practices, processes, and people who embody and illustrate it (Bagga, Keniston, and Mathur 2005). The diversity of the Internet is replaced by the scale of the Internet (Shah 2015a). And any history writing, no matter how alternative the approach or how unusual the location, is expected to follow this trope where it distills the Internet into a clear object, removing its messiness and its untowardness to create gentrified histories that reduce the scope of what the Internet is and how it could be studied.

The third presumption that is prevalent in the dominant histories of the Internet is the role of the Internet in defining subjectivities in and outside of these global provinces. It is clear that the Internet allows for and enables a multitude of practices for different users. However, the practices of the Internet are not global, and the location of the user often gives

it meanings and values. Thus, a global community of Facebook users might be constructed as homogeneous because they all perform similar functions designed by the interface and algorithms of that platform. However, as Jonas Löwgren and Bo Reimer in their coining of “collaborative media” (2013) show, the homogenization of design that is often considered as the prerequisite for collaborative work is actually a fallacy. This idea easily gets exploded when we locate it in the context of protests and activism, as we realize that the Like button has a very different function when it is being used to spread messages of political solidarity than when it is being used to share pictures of cute cats.

The geographical context of the user and the intention of usage obviously inform the value of such a practice. These differences are accounted for in these histories. However, these differences are not about the technological, but social, usages. Even when these differences are accounted for, the technological protocols and the subjectivity of the ‘liker’ are considered to be uniform and homogeneous. Kavita Philip (2005), in her work on the history of the technological pirate, shows how the difference becomes stark when the same practice, using the same technologies, towards the same intentions, still constructs some users as creative entrepreneurs and artists as it penalizes others as criminals and pirates. Philip takes up an advertisement from Apple, which branded its iMac and the introduction of iTunes with the slogan “Rip. Mix. Burn”, encouraging its privileged users to share files, to override copyright, to eschew licenses, to mix and burn new discs with music, movies, and software, thus realizing the true potential of the digital and connected technologies. In the same year, following mounting pressures from American companies that were exploring India as the new digital market and off-shore processing hub, the Indian government cracked down on local markets that were ripping licensed software, mixing Hollywood music and movies, and burning discs to sell in the “grey” market, labeling these practices as acts of piracy, and introducing criminal proceedings against the users and distributors involved in these processes.

This chapter is an attempt to look at the three different entry points that introduce new locations, objects, and frameworks by which the history of the Internets in India can be told. These are histories which are not about names and numbers, dates and events, gadgets and usage. They are also not shaped to mimic either the military state’s development of the Internet or the neoliberal market’s appropriation and escalation of these technologies. Instead, they root the Internet firmly in the Indian context and propose that the history of the Internets in India is the history of its interaction with the Indian state. Firmly drawing attention away from the market-driven rhetoric of India as an emerging economy, as the largest untapped consumer base, and as the new frontier of frugal innovation known as *jugaad* (Rajdou, Prabhu, and Ahuja 2012), the approaches, instead, identify three blank spaces in the unfolding of the state and the Internet in India to help understand the trajectories and terrains that have formed and informed the making of the technosocial contemporary.

The Missing Body

Different attempts at historicizing the Internet in India have pointed at the electrification of the country, the telecommunication revolutions, and the mass adoption of the personal computer and the mobile phone as landmarks where it can all be supposed to have begun. However, in citing these beginnings, the histories largely focus on technological inventions, infrastructure building, and governmental policies, developing a persistent blind spot when it comes to the body and its interactions with the Internet. Even within the discourse and implementation of the Information and Communication Technologies for Development (ICT4D), which has a strong rooting in the bodily conditions of its subjects, engaging with

a range of issues from poverty, illiteracy, gender-based discrimination, health, etc. the body remains on the fringes or as unaffected by the presence of the digital technologies and the Internet. The body, when invoked, is thought of merely as the infrastructure that can be accounted for in quantifications of usage, access, inclusion, and adoption.

Asha Achuthan (2011), writing a feminist history of the epistemology of the Internet titled *Re:wiring Bodies*, argues that this discrete production of the body and its dissociation and extraction from the developmental practices leads to two pre-wired responses that are characteristic of post-colonial societies that depend on these technologies as a form of rebuilding their nations. The body is either thought of as fragile, ready to be saved by the emergence of these technologies, thus rendered without agency or choice; or the body is understood as unclean and corrupt, unable to realize the potentials of these technologies and hence in need of correction and rehabilitation by these technologies.

Drawing particularly from the intersections of digital technologies and their penetration in women's bodies through contemporary healthcare practices in India, Achuthan shows how digital technologies of connectivity in their interaction with the state policies and operations produce the body in a condition of aporia. In explaining her characterization of aporia, Achuthan argues that when it comes to intersections of body with the digital, it offers a pre-wired set of responses. The first step is to fetishize access and insist that the sexual invisibility and inequity will be corrected by connecting everybody in the digital networks. Once access infrastructure building is initiated, there is recognition that access is uneven and does not guarantee presence. Efforts are made to train these identified minorities to be habilitated into the existing practices, making them "subjects" of technology. Presence proves to be inadequate, because in the burgeoning information sets of the digital Web, it is highly possible to be present, but not be visible. The next step is to think of inclusion and set up corrective mechanisms by which the underserved communities can be included in discourse, practice, and policy. This immediately establishes corrective mechanisms of control and regulation, where only certain kinds of bodies and identities can be created as occupying these positions of power, eventually amplifying the same inequalities that the entire process was set up to address. Aporia, then, becomes a trope by which the technology states are pitched against each other, and each shares a common blind spot where the body itself slips into a black hole.

Achuthan locates this aporetic body as being at the heart of the ICT4D movement that ensured that the Internet came in as yet another tool for the development state, and is in the service of fulfilling the indices of development which have equally been critiqued for being systems of accounting which do not take the individual or the body into account. The history of the Internet in India, for Achuthan, then, is a history of the state's encounter with science and technology and the ways in which the original impulses of the "scientific temperament" that construct the modern Indian nation state as a post-colonial country continue to shape both the spread of the Internet and the invisible ways in which it rewires the body in conditions of precariousness and neglect. In her comprehensive thesis, Achuthan argues that the technoscience industry in India predates the national industry. In fact, looking at the conversations between Mohandas Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore, two of the most prominent architects of the Indian freedom revolution and the new nation state, reveals how much faith was invested in the production of the nation state as a technosocial artifact. For Gandhi, the economic nationalist, the new nation state was to be constructed through the spinning wheel, which was not only the embodiment of an indigenous technology of production, but also a metaphor for the "swaraj" (self-governance) that was at the heart of the call for independence.² It is not a coincidence that in 2015, when the new right wing Hindu nationalist party BJP forms the government, one of their first projects, Make in India

(n.d.), which seeks to reconstruct India into becoming a digital superpower that attracts foreign investment and infrastructure building, invokes Gandhi's notions of *swaraj* as the historical antecedent to this project.

However, for Tagore, the Oxbridge-educated spiritualist, this reliance on technology and science to build our national identity and society was problematic. Tagore, Achuthan points out, introduces the idea of a “*yantra danava*” (demonic machine) in his nationalist writing, as a metaphor for a technology that will engulf the nation and neglect the very bodies that it seeks to protect and uplift. For Tagore, the technological had to be superseded by the humanism of nation building, demanding that these machines are not just things that we use, but that they write us, create and construct us, that as we spin the wheel to produce cotton, we spin ourselves into becoming subjects of and to the technologies. Tagore's fear of putting all our faith in the resilience of technologies is often reflected in contemporary debates where the problems of development are often turned into problems of information technologies.³ Achuthan looks at the production of technologized healthcare for women in India, where a wide range of social and political factors that contribute to poor reproductive health, like poverty, corruption, illiteracy, ignorance, etc. are now reduced to becoming a problem of the informational subject's incapacity to receive, interpret, and act upon the information that is given out to them. She points out that the reliance on the Internet and its connectivity as the solution to some of the most historically endemic national problems replaces lived reality with informational reality. When faced with a problem that is both bodily and messy, these healthcare systems produce either a call for better data or more data, and eventually write the ill body as an unclean body which cannot be accommodated for or is not intelligible to the technogovernmental systems. This body then either has to be cured or corrected to become worthy of these Internet regimes and its failure to adapt exfiltrates it from the domains of care and support that these digital systems build.

Achuthan argues that the history of the Internet will have to begin with the history of the body, not in its use of technologies, but as it is written by the technological apparatus and the scientific industry of the nation state. She shows that the body is created, contained, corrected, cured, and celebrated as the state interacts with technologies, and that the contemporary digital body has its unshaken roots in the first model of the nationalist body that has remain unchanged, even as technologies transitioned into new political discourses from the nationalist to the Marxist, from the Marxist to the subaltern, and from the subaltern to the contemporary neoliberal digitality. This history of the changing technologies and the unchanging bodies, of the cleaned-up technologies and the body that remains dirty, of mobile digitality and the rooted biology, is a cyborg history of how the body becomes the site where the interaction between the political state and the scientific technologies become reified, thus offering a critical questioning of the digital that we otherwise access only as a suite of tools rather than a “set of attitudes” which define the very ways in which the body is conceived and controlled. Achuthan's approach is to think of the body as the Internet, as opposed to the body as merely the use agent of the Internet, and thus brings in questions of politics, justice, equality, and equity that are often lost in the interactions between the developmental state and the developing technologies.

The Place of Affect

If Achuthan's argument was to recenter the body and its rewirings as crucial to the telling of the history of the Internet as a technogovernmental artifact, for Namita Malhotra (2011), the history of the Internet is in rehumanizing its practices. Working at an intersection between

law, affect, and digital technologies, Malhotra, in her work on “Pleasure, Pornography and the Law”, brings forth a conundrum of the non-computational in contemporary Internet practices. Malhotra begins by positing law and affect, in this case pleasure, as unable to interact with each other. The incapacity of law to perceive pleasure, argues Malhotra, is akin to the digital systems’ inability to compute it. Both the digital and the legal systems are systems of counting, accounting, and accountability. They access phenomena by producing them as informational and data sets, which are then cross-referenced, correlated, and collated in order to form normative templates of subjectivity, ethics, and regulation. That which does not compute or cannot be parsed through the reified logical systems of law becomes problematic and pathologized.

Pornography, then, becomes the common ground where the digital and the legal coincide, as it perplexes and bewilders both these systems. As the popular meme goes, the Internet was made for porn, and guesstimates offer that 40 percent of the indexed Web is devoted to the production, distribution, and consumption of pornographic material (Tancer 2008). In India, the pornographic object has also been at the heart of great legal debates around questions of obscenity, prurience, morality, and the regulation of gendered and sexualized practices. However, when it comes to the regulation of pornographic images, both the law and the digital remain confounded on identifying and regulating it. The resistance that pornography offers is at three different levels.

The first is in the fuzziness of what constitutes pornography. As the famous court judgment from the USA has suggested, you can’t name it, but when you see it, you know it.⁴ The attempts on digital regulation of pornography through flesh detection algorithms, index of obscene words and actions, or even user-generated classification have all failed to varying extent. It is perhaps safe to assume that almost anything can be rendered pornographic, and that the proof of the pornographic pudding is in the eating of it. The second resistance that pornography offers to these two systems is in producing an externality to the meaning of porn. Malhotra argues that the final pornographic meaning resides in the visceral, the bodily, the affective responses that the user of pornography experiences. The same object, through repetition or through lack of interest, might become non-pornographic in time. The pornographic principle, as I have argued elsewhere, is not in the content or the representation, but in the acts of transgression, titillation, and trepidation that digital objects produce. This external location of the meaning of pornography, which resides in the pleasure it affords the user and the intentions, which render it pornographic, produce a stalemate for the digital and the legal systems. Hence, the law and the regulatory structures of the Internet produce draconian measures of dealing with the pornographic object, resulting in censorship, bans, and naturalizing and normalizing some sexual practices and bodies over others.

Looking at this common blind-spot, Malhotra suggests that the history of the Internet in India has to be written as the history of the non-computational and the affective. In her work, she draws the history of the Internet from the history of the law’s interaction with affect within the Indian context. The Internet, for Malhotra, has to be seen as emerging from and building upon the larger technological conflict where the very technologies that the nation state has invested in, to create new opportunities of legible and legitimized practices, have always been used to construct spaces of affect, of experience, of pleasure, which get rendered pathological or criminal because of the legal and the technological apparatus’ failure to read them.

In her analysis of an early case that was one of the first instances of Internet pornography in India—the DPS MMS case—Malhotra shows how the Internet and the law collectively fail to comprehend pleasure, and in this incomprehension, produce draconian measures that

seek to reduce the scope of expression and penalize any articulation that is not legible to these systems. The story of the DPS MMS case is as simple as it is now common. Two under-aged adults in a Delhi public school in 2005 made a multimedia clip of their sexual encounter, where the male was holding the camera and hence not identifiable, whereas the female was visible in her actions. This clip was leaked onto the Internet as an act of “revenge porn” by the guy after he was dumped by the girl. It went viral; it was shared illicitly as one of the first instances of “authentic” porn; it was sold in grey markets of pirated pleasures, and it was sold online on an auction site. When the clip came in the cognizance of the court, it led to a strange judgment where a crime was committed but none of the people identified with the crime were found punishable. The girl was pardoned because she was considered to be the victim, the guy was discharged because his error was attributed to his inexperience. The person who was trying to auction the clip online did not have an actual sale or proof of possession, but merely the intention of distribution, and the owner of the auction site where the clip was intended to be distributed was protected by Terms of Service.

In this case, as Malhotra argues, the court decided that this is a crime of the technology and decided to set up a committee that would regulate the Internet to decide what it can or cannot do. This idea of the Internet as doing things beyond the purview of the law was historical, because it started a dialogue between the Internet and the law to bring their systems of accounting and counting into sync. Furthermore, the role of the Internet and the law was then to produce limitations on pleasure and crack down on the affective realms of experience, which the pornographic object merely signifies. Through the regulation of these connected pornographic objects, both algorithmically and legally, there was an attempt to regulate and regularize bodies that will be allowed the space of pleasure, expressions which will be charged with obscenity, and the processes and practices which, even when innocent of sexual content, will be punished through decoding intentionality and affect.

As I have written elsewhere (Shah 2015b), this produces a cultural history of the Internet which is not about the Internet as a space of endless possibilities, but rather as a space that normalizes and contains the possibilities, allowing only a limited set of expressions, articulations, and practices online. By looking at the debates that have accompanied the growth of the Internet, and the alarming rate at which innocent users have been turned into criminalized pornographers, Malhotra argues that we need to understand the incapacity of the Internet to compute affect, and build new strategies by which this lack of computation does not result in culpability for the users drenched in their affective and sensory practices online. She calls for a history of the Internet which is not to look at the expansive penetration of the digital technologies, but the limitations of form and the constraints of computing when it comes to shaping and regulating human practices. Her work builds a case for examining the contours of the Internet instead of thinking about it as a seamless, global, and extensive connectivity network and argues that the limits of what cannot be computed need to be studied in conjunction with that which cannot be passed by law to form historical frameworks that question the centrality that the Internet has garnered in our contemporary human and affective practices.

The State in Transition

In both the approaches as suggested by Achuthan and Malhotra, there is a sense that the history of the Internet cannot be about the visible manifestations of the technology or about its apparent interactions with the state. While the state has to be a more powerful interlocutor in the analysis—much more than the market which, in the rhetoric of innovation,

experimentation, and upscaling, is often considered the primary benefactor of the digital—it is also important to understand that the alternative histories need to begin with that which is not easily legible. For Achuthan, it was the body in a state of aporia that is often left out of the state–technology dialogue, but is made to bear the burdens of their finality and imagined subjectivity, which was the location of the Internet and its history in India. For Malhotra, it was the affective, which the state apparatus of the law as well as the digital systems of regulation are unable to parse or compute respectively, and thus produce criminal positions for those engaging with the possibilities and potentials of the Internet that exceed and transgress the authority and the gambit of both these systems.

Ashish Rajadhyaksha (2011), in his work on “The Cultural Last Mile”, proposes that the focus does not always have to be on things that are dropped out of the state–Internet conversations. In fact, Rajadhyaksha, working his way through the sites of television, telecommunication, networked higher education, and biometric governance, proposes that what is often left out of the state–Internet equation is the changing nature of the state and its reconfigured capacities. Looking at the production of new social rights, of public–private partnerships, and of the rise of state-like institutions which dislocate the centrality of the state in the imagined model of India, Rajadhyaksha proposes that the idea of a technogovernmental state is caught in a paradox.

On one hand, the state—especially the Indian state, which has so extensively used technologies of cinema and telecommunication to imagine itself as a massive geographical entity that is diverse but united—is a technological artifact. Rajadhyaksha argues that the modern nation state follows a communication model of transmission where it resides at the center and governs through the management and distribution of information between its different units and with the citizens. The state is conceptually structured by the then-contemporary models of information and communication, and the different technologies of state-craft before the arrival of the Internet might have changed the formats and forms of state governance but not its fundamental structure. On the other hand, the state is an unrealized or a failed instance of the communication model—something that Rajadhyaksha coins as the “last-mile problem”. The technologically produced state has always been unable to make the information reach to the very remote and interior parts of the country, and its investment in different communication technologies has been in an attempt to bridge this last mile so as to reach the full potentials of its technologized statehood. The state, thus, is constructed by a model which it believes in, but this is also the model that the state is not able to implement in its entirety, and hence requires the technological mainframe to help in its evolution.

With the Internet and networked technologies, though, the Indian state seems to be able to escape this paradox for the first time. Even as it embraces these new networked technologies of peer-to-peer distribution, it does not seem to reconfigure itself through that model. In fact, through a series of contemporary problems of specious bans, of futile efforts at filtering and censoring the Web, at errors in regulating content, and in producing effective models of accountability, the state has often appeared as a buffoon, unable to catch up with the changed models of information and communication. However, this conflict is not merely about a state that is unable to change with the times, but a state that is realizing that the communication model that it embodies no longer needs to find its validation in the practices of the state. The practices of the digital and networked state, with the Internet at the forefront, in fact allow for the state to invest in these technologies not to justify itself but to build new structures of regulation, governance, arbitration, and adjudication which transcend the state’s own perception of itself.

In Rajadhyaksha’s thesis, the history of the Internet in India, while it needs to be in dialogue with the state, has to recognize that the ambitions of the state with regard to the Internet are

different. While the earlier investment of the state in different technologies was to validate itself, with the Internet the state no longer bears the burden of making the technologies work to affirm its status. Instead, it allows for the state to disinvest, to privatize, to enfranchise new entities that would take up state-like responsibilities and powers in the construction of new networked societies. The transformation of the last-mile problem that the Internet brings, replacing distance with speed and connectivity with access, is a new configuration of societies and the language of rights, safeguards, protection, responsibilities, and reprisals that we were able to deploy in the earlier technological practices of the state will no longer be adequate to address these changing structures.

The argument ends by analyzing the biometric governmental project Aadhaar,⁵ which promises to be the one-point technologized solution to a range of problems like poverty, corruption, inefficient delivery of public resources, widespread illiteracy, poor healthcare, etc. Rajadhyaksha points out that with the Aadhaar system, the legitimizing functions of the state have been taken over by the verification systems of the digital, operationalized by private registrars within the system. Similarly, the authority of the state to intervene and negotiate identities for its citizens have been outsourced to big data algorithms that create quantified profiles based on actions and identifications, as opposed to the historically rooted identity politics of caste, language, religion, etc. In both these instances, we see the ways in which the Indian state's interaction with the Internet is simultaneously a self-professed dislocation of its centrality as well as the creation of new proto-state structures, which are often invisible but need to be unpacked to understand the contemporary nature of the Internet in the country.

Rajadhyaksha ends with the claim that in the interaction between the state and the Internet, we often imagine that the Internet is under the patronage of the state and is being used to reproduce statecraft as it has been done historically through other technologies. However, the Internet produces a new moment for the state's capacity and interest in reproducing itself. The Internet is not a continuation of older state practices—not merely a digital rendering of old records and archives—but a digitization that reimagines the state within which these new digital technologies would be accommodated. Rajadhyaksha, particularly looking at the Aadhaar project, calls it the “cog that has to imagine the system”, within which it makes sense, thus arguing that the history of the Internet is not about building the future of the state, but of the state of the future, eventually hoping for the state as we understand it to disappear and new structures to replace it.

Towards Technosocial Historiography

To write the history of the Internet in India is to write the history of India. As Ravi Sundaram (2010) would have it in his formulation of “Cyber Publics”, the Internet needs to be understood not only as a tool for change but as the catalyst for transformation—a force that doesn't just create a new public sphere on the cyberspace, but radically constructs all publics into cyber publics. Extricating one from the other reinforces the two presumptions that have always marked post-colonial developing countries in their relationship with technologies. It presumes that the Internet is made outside and enters India only as a foreign tool, overriding the material practices and historical structures of embedded technologies and governance. It also emphasizes a romantic argument about the new frontiers in the erstwhile colonies that are seen as the panacea that will cure the problems of the powerful hubs. In telling the story of the Internet through the story of India, in establishing the Internet not as a commodity or a product, but as a powerful force that enters into conversation with the Indian state, we produce a different vision of the Internet as well as of India. In thus embedding the Internet into the history

and negotiation with the state, its apparatus, and affects, posits the Internet as a reconciliation force. It imagines the Internet as a point of convergence where multiple actors, interests, histories, technologies, impulses, ambitions, stakes, and values enter into a state of negotiation and contestation, thus providing new opportunities of localization which are more than acts of prosthetic translation.

In Achuthan's triangulation of the body, state, and the Internet, we see how the body becomes precarious and is made invisible in the negotiations between the other two, thus becoming the site where the technosociality is operationalized. In Malhotra's argument about the mutual blind spots of the law as the state apparatus and the digital as the new logic of networked governance, we see affect as being regulated through commodities that cannot be made legible to the intertwined systems of law and the Internet. Rajadhyaksha's description of the state in transition, as a state that is finally free to escape its older centralized transmission structures in an attempt to replace itself and the imagination of the new social rights and the new subject, allows us to write the history of the Internet as a history of how technologies have been central in imagining not only the future of our states but the states of our future.

Our project to document the histories of the Internet(s) in India⁶ was an attempt at alternative historiography rather than merely writing traditional histories of alternative spaces. We wanted to move away from the tropes of writing about the Internet that, even as they examine the effects and causes of the Internet, always think of it as a discrete, complete, and absolute object which can be disentangled from the larger industries of nation building. The alternative sought to simultaneously resist the imperial historicization where the new, the exotic, and the local are made legible and intelligible to a global gaze, as well as questioning the seamless expanse of history writing that subsumes more geographies, values, and people under the reified ideal origin that is nailed to particular spaces of power.

These approaches to the history of the Internet, in positing body, affect, and a state that is seeking to dislocate itself, offer disjunctures and disruptions to how we understand the Internet and how we embed it in our global provinces. These approaches are not comprehensive and complete, but they signal towards a technosocial historiography that defies provenance, refuses clarity, and overturns temporality, which is at the heart of traditional history making. They offer histories that will need to find beginnings that are not the genesis, locations which are outside the narrowed understanding of the Internet as digital technology, and help rethink the Internet as a technosocial process, thus expanding the scope and method of writing histories of Internets and the structures of governance, regulation, and statecraft that form and inform them.

Notes

1. An extremely telling example of this is a legal and public policy battle that is unfolding in India even as this chapter is written, where the social media and data aggregation giant Facebook is promoting a FreeBasics campaign through its non-profit organization Internet.org that seeks to overturn and undermine the principles of net neutrality that have long since been heralded as embodying the foundational values of the Internet. The imagination of India as a country with huge digital divide and Internet access as a way of correcting its perceived problems allows Facebook to propose a differential, preferential, and discriminatory Web access for the potential new users in the country. Facebook's attacks on net neutrality and its promotion of such bandwidth-shaping practices go completely against its self-avowed commitment to a responsible and fair Internet support in the developed countries. For an exhaustive coverage on the current net neutrality debates in India, see Medianama (n.d.).
2. An exhaustive compilation of the dialogue between Gandhi and Tagore is in Sabyasachi Bhattacharya's edited anthology, *The Mahatma and the Poet* (1997).
3. This caution of techno-utopianism and a certain reluctance to celebrate technological advancements which is a characteristic of left-leaning, post-colonial politics has had a strong presence in Indian history. Even when

Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of modern India, declared that he sought to build a new India through a “scientific temperament”, there was always resistance to these technological solutions. It is only with the emergence of the Internet that the country could reimagine itself using the tropes of technology as the strokes to paint the new contours of the country. Nandan Nilekani, one of the strongest advocates of technogovernmental policies and structures in the country, writes in his book *Imagining India* (2009) that digital connectivity offered a way by which the new India could dissociate from the old India, and start building a future that is not just going to use the digital technologies but also be constructed by them.

4. Potter Stewart famously stated in *Jacobellis v. Ohio* 278 US 184 (1964): “I shall not today attempt further to define the kinds of material I understand to be embraced within that shorthand description [hard-core pornography]; and perhaps I could never succeed in intelligibly doing so. But I know it when I see it, and the motion picture involved in this case is not that.” This has been used, since then, as one of the strongest comments on questions concerning free speech, expression, artistic intent, and pornographic material. More about the case can be found at Wikipedia (n.d.).
5. In his other work, Rajadhyaksha has edited an anthology called *In the Wake of Aadhaar* (2013), where, along with a set of critical scholars, Rajadhyaksha shows how the project needs to be understood both as a crucial point of departure from informational governance in India, as well as a continuation of the technogovernmental structures that have shaped the idea of a citizen and their right to interact with the state.
6. In 2008, at the then newly started Centre for Internet & Society, Bangalore, where I was a co-founder and the Director of Research, we started a project on the *Histories of the Internet(s) in India*, which produced seven alternative monographs and frameworks of unraveling the layers of the Internet, as well as the ways in which these could be studied through a technosocial framework. This chapter draws from the conversations that framed that project, and owes its intellectual debt to Asha Achuthan, Ashish Rajadhyaksha, Namita Avriti Malhotra, Rochelle Pinto, Aparna Balachandran, Nithya Vasudevan, Nithin Manayath, Zainab Bawa, Anja Kovacs, and Arun Menon, who all contributed to this project and helped in developing the critical knowledge summarized in this chapter. To stay within the size constraints of this chapter, I have drawn from three of the inquiries initiated by the project. The larger research publications and discussions can be accessed at the Centre for Internet & Society (n.d.).

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