Network as a unit of Computer Mediated Communities

The network is one of the most potent metaphors of understanding the world with the emergence of the Internet Technologies. If the narrative was the form that was privileged by the print and the cinematic technologies, there is no question that IT age privileges the network as a form of cultural expression. One of the very first images of technological modernity that made its appearance at the beginning of the last century was that of smiling operators flipping switches on a telephone dashboard. More than a hundred years later, the network is still physically present around us. Huge towering pylons on long winding highways, acres of cables connecting houses in an urban jungle, transmitting and receiving towers that enable connectivity on cell phones; the idea of a network, more than any other time, encapsulates the contemporary cultural imagination of the city and the people who live in it/ pass through it.

Most digital objects are designed to be a part of different networks. The value and worth of an individual, the objects s/he possesses and the simulated environments s/he is in, are often assessed by the ability to become a significant node in dynamically developing networks. Why does the network emerge as the single most important form in Internet Technologies? Can we explain the popularity of the network by analyzing the specificity of the internet and the aesthetics of the cyberspace? This paper is an attempt to theorise the network as an epistemological category which guides the contemporary imagination of the global urban city and its occupants in India.

Computer Mediated Communities

The rhetoric of globalisation proposes that the world is slowly shrinking, that the boundaries are no longer insoluble and that the new urban citizen is a world trotter, a true citizen of the world. Computer Mediated Communities (CMCs) have given rise to much speculation about the possibility of human social interaction mediated entirely by digital technologies. New technologies of communication and interaction, especially the performative spaces of cyberspace, have given rise to many unusual networks through

which users can connect with each other through diverse narrative techniques and discussions The CMCs have created virtual neighbourhoods, fantasy worlds, simulation cities and second-lives.

In 1968, the then research directors for the Department of Defense's Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA), who also set in place the first online community, the ARPANET, C.R. Licklider and Robert Taylor suggested that online interactive communities 'will consist of geographically separated members, sometimes grouped in small clusters and sometimes working individually. They will be communities not of common location but of common interest…' The virtual space, despite its virtuality, was still a space to be occupied and visited; it takes up, in our imagination, the shape of an informal public common. Ray Oldenburg in *The Great Good Place* suggests that there are three essential places in people's lies: the place one lives in, the place one works in, and the place one gathers for friendly interaction. Oldenburg proposes that the spaces of public interaction are the unacknowledged agorae of modern life – the cafes, beauty shops, pubs, clubs and town squares.

William J. Mitchell echoes similar sentiments in locating the third space in contemporary times. 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 computers, often across vast distances. 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 in great detail. As technology becomes imbedded in our lives and literally disappears into the woodwork, Mitchell sees the possibility of new kinds of extended communities. Network technology has enabled 'discontinuous, asynchronous global agoras' (1996, 9) says Mitchell, exemplified by the most recent blogging phenomenon. Organisers use digital spaces to help orchestrate public gatherings, which in turn generate images fed back to the internet, spurring interest across geographies and

lifestyles. Mitchell also posits a utopian structure of CMCs as more and more users across the globe get connected in the largest informal network in the world – the www.

However, the technologies that globalisation has harnessed have proven to be brutally territorial, establishing new visible and invisible (often non-negotiable) boundaries and creating individual identities that are detrimentally circumscribed by the physical contexts of the user. The Network Neighbourhood exists as an antithesis to all these speculations about CMCs and the positing unterritorialised uncontextualised hyper-worlds for people with multiple digital technologies to occupy. The Network Neighbourhood is a small geographical location that gets connected by technological access and infrastructure. The network neighbourhood is not a new concept that emerges with the cyberspace technologies. The cable television networks where a particular cable service operator provided satellite television channel access as well as a plethora of private/pirated entertainment and news was already in place by the time the new digital technologies emerged in the collective consciousness. Even before that, the post independent India was imagined as a collection of small network neighbourhoods formed through national television, radio and the distribution and reception of circuits. However, the network neighbourhood emerges as a significant entity with the emergence of ICTs because of particular reasons: First, the network neighbourhood becomes a node in a larger network, thus becoming the smallest unit of imagining the networked city or the networked nation. Second, the network neighbourhood thus imagined included a specific form of participation, sharing, collaboration and access for the people who formed it. Third, the network neighbourhood came to occupy the space of the "third place", the common informal public space of collectives and initiatives which was never made possible earlier[1].

The network neighbourhood, then, challenges the utopian disembodied, virtual ideas of a networked community. While cyberspaces indeed allow for virtual communities of

[1] Even with cinema, arguably the largest form of popular consumption and the constitutional space of access and rights for the defined citizen, there was no 'space' where the people could actually gather for different collaborative actions. The theatre was always a transitory space which could not be possessed. The fan-clubs were often mobilized around the imagined cinematic space but there were no specific sites of belonging or collaborations outside of the scope of the cinematic.

common interest to come into being, it necessitates that these communities get embedded in the physical territories of their being. Before we begin to look at the network neighbourhood, it might help to anchor the cyberspatial networks – the CMCs into the physical and geographical contexts of the users. Looking at one of the most successful forms of social networking systems in the last year, Orkut gives us a sense of this need to be physical and territorial. Orkut, a Google project, is one of the most thriving social networking systems that allows people to reacquaint themselves with the morsels of the past – the people they knew when they were younger, and the bytes of the present – the people the know in their personal and professional lives. Orkut follows the AmWay Economic model for its social networking, where, an individual person inherits the friends of friends, thus often connecting themselves down more than fifty levels of friendship. If you make two friends on Orkut, you will be connected to a couple of thousand people through these inheritances. Such a connection, such possibilities of networking, and this imagination of belonging to a dynamic, growing, expanding network gives the users a heady rush of emotions, using Orkut for various reasons – from dating to meetings to public performances of private emotions and blind dating.

Most users find themselves members of communities which are created around themes, hobbies, issues, ideas, movies, heroes, idols, books, religions, universities and schools, organisations, institutions, subjects, disciplines, music, et al. It would be natural to imagine that these communities become hot spots of international public discussions and theorisation, of polemic and rhetoric, of arguments and debates, as literate affluent people from around the world are bound together by specific interests and inclinations, orientations and negotiations.

However, it is now a ready fact for anybody who cares to examine it that most of the communities are dead waterholes, indicative of what the person is interested in with none or negligible participation on the part of the community members. Most communities have also become breeding grounds for spammers who have identified the communities as potential databases of people interested in particular activities and attack them with spam messages every day. The only communities that seem to have active participation,

an interested user group and a really vibrant presence, are the communities that are firmly anchored in the physical proximity of these individual users. Hence, a small community dedicated to "Dating in Bangalore" has an active group of people soliciting several non-commercial favours from each other whereas a larger international community for "I like dating models" is a spammer's heaven, targeting all the users with advertisements for pornography websites. Similarly, a community of users in a particular flat, locality, area, university or school shows a high traffic and participation but communities of fans, idolaters, trendsetters and hero worshippers are dormant and redundant. Even within the smaller communities, it is an obvious pattern that the communities where the users are more in physical proximity with each other and with the potential (it is very rarely realised) of meeting-up are the more successful ones.

The Orkut community is not bound only to the physical location of the user but also to the physical body of the user behind the profile. While it is of course necessary to invoke a virtual avtara within Orkut, because of the nature of social networking with people one already knows/has known, there is a certain disinvestment of fantasy within Orkut. Users often have pseudonyms which participate in more secret or clandestine affairs but most users have a visible face which tries to approximate their real life persona online. Unlike in the circuits of blogging or role playing games, Orkut emphasises the need to be a 'real' person, thus validating its unique feature of 'Scrapping' where the users are encouraged to publicly perform their intimacies and relationships which are easily documented and tracked by others outside of the one-to-one interaction. There is a specific need to narrativise the self on the profile through the various functionalities available on Orkut. Orkut is slowly becoming the equivalent of a social visiting card which keeps a track of your online (and often offline) interactions and relationships.

Orkut also offers a way of avoiding writing that one clumsy email every holiday to that one friend you know for no other reason that you know them and keeps a feeling of being connected just by the fact that you appear on each others' mutual friends list on the main profile page. There is a sense of being connected as equal and important nodes within the same network; and this connectivity is not due to an active participation but because of

the architecture of the website and more importantly because of the imagined incessant network that you are a part of. It is perhaps ironical that the people who generally scrap each other the most are people who also interact very regularly and physically in their lives as well. However, the other correspondents, in spite of the fact that they are on the periphery, feel equally involved and 'in touch' because they are also on the same network and because they have access to the various personal conversations and relationships that you perform with other nodes within the same network. They get to inherit your friends and their friends and their friends, thus becoming a part of a large global community, while still interacting mostly with people who are in the same geographical locations as themselves and with people who are verifiably 'Real.'

The problems that Orkut throws up – the deceptive non-hierarchical nature of the nodes within the network, the creation of imagined collectives which belie the fact that they are bound to the geography and the physical body of the individual user, the privileging of the nodes and the content over the medium, the collating of the physical and the digital imprints of the user, and the processes by which notions of verity, authenticity and 'reality' of the users is determined, are common to most other sites online. In the case of Orkut, a lot of the questions of agency and authorship of the networking are easily resolved because the network is created of users who make a conscious choice of becoming a node and establishing the needed connections. However, the questions become even more complex when the computer mediated communities are constructed by an external authority in imaginations of physical spaces as parts of an extensive global network – neighbourhoods, cities, countries.

The Notion of the Network

Before I proceed, I need to briefly comment on my conception of the network. In a very common sense use of the word, especially when we associate it with computers and laptops, the network refers to a linking up or connecting of two or more digital devices for the purposes of sharing, collaboration, and exchange of information through a centralized hub. However, the network works at a more cognitive and conceptual level

than just the connections made between two machines. The network offers a non-narrative way of referencing and collating information in a way that was hitherto not possible. A network, no matter how complex, is a collective of nodes. Each node in the network has a specific (though not an exclusive) definition and profile. The collection of nodes can be understood as a database that is organized according to specific schema of themes, hierarchies, relevance etc. The data types within a database can vary significantly in their textuality, in their materiality, in the medium they reside within, and in the contexts of production and reception. If the data – no longer a qualitatively defined 'information' but an objective, non-discriminating (but not non-discerning) object of transfer – is a subset of the database, the database itself, or rather, a collective of such databases form the node in a network. The network is a cognitive model that makes possible, the interminable, self-referencing, non-linear world of nodes.

The digital networks especially emphasise the fact that the nodes are infinitely and non-linearly connected, thus making possible, an almost infinite number of choices and patterns of sharing data and generating information. It is often easy to confuse the network with the database or the information that is being transferred through it; for instance, for a large part of the internet users in the world, peer-2-peer networks are synonymous with networks of piracy and sharing of contraband information without supervision or centralized monitoring, often forgetting that the network, has almost nothing to do with the data being transferred. The network treats the data in a quantitative manner, identifying it not for its content but for its form, its format, its size and the 'traffic' it produces on the network. One easy way of distinguishing between the network and the database is that the database precedes the network i.e. the network can be built only when two or more databases exist. The network facilitates the transfer of data from one database into another where as the database is relational collection of data types sorted and distributed in a particular manner. The reason why people often confuse between the two is that it is always easy to think of a larger database – a database of networks which again gets connected with other databases of networks in a larger network.

The network also works as a metaphor that transcends the immediate physicality of the hardware and exists on a cognitive plane that allows us to view different forms of cultural expression as having meaning outside the narrative paradigms of earlier technologies. Cinema and print both sired a narrative understanding of collectives, mapping them in a certain linear motion of causality and effect. Even in forms like cinematic montage, there is a certain linear perspective that guides the user to form a narrative. It is only within the digital technologies that the network realizes its potentials of being an ever-expanding, unmappable or only tentatively plottable entity. The network is realized in its varied formations and shapes only by the fluid users that form an essential part of the nodes. More than the hardware, the technologically augmented gadgets and the wires (visible or otherwise), it is the experience of the network that gives it a cognitive value. The network, more than a noun, works as a verb, where the actions performed by the individuals towards the larger aims and functions of the network (but not always) that realizes, shapes and materializes the network in our collective cultural imagination.

One of the most dominant presences of the network is in the Internet Technologies. The internet, as we already know, is indeed a huge meta-network that gives a single protocol access to the various subsets and smaller digitally enhanced networks. The World Wide Web is one of the largest network developed by human beings, connecting more than 200 million users in a complex and intricate form of interaction, sharing, collaborating and forming communities, in historically unprecedented ways. The globalisation rhetoric of shrinking timelines and geographies, the myth of the 'global village', the jet-hopping lifestyle, and the image of the global citizen are all premised upon the notion of the internet networks. As we increasingly rely upon internet technologies for the crucial mechanics of urban survival, we are forced to reinvent our notions of ourselves and the world around us through the metaphor of the network. Techno-cultural forms like Social networking systems, peer-2-peer networks, digital bulletin boards, blogs, Massively Multiple Online Role-Playing Games, lead to a conception of individuals, places, spaces and locations as nodes within the network. As the digital networks necessarily rely upon the transmittability, the transmutability and the transcendentality of the objects residing within the network, there is a specific need to translate the individual and his/her

immediate environments into data-types that can be digitally stored, archived, retrieved and transmitted across the network with minimal unintended distortion. As administrative policies, basic services and governmental structures also enter into the authorship of networking, imagining the country, the city, the citizens within such digital domains, increasingly the translatable elements of these 'objects' becomes their recognised and fore-grounded identifiers – the digital signatures, physical imprints, IP addresses, URLs, passwords, PIN codes, social security numbers, etc. The citizen database becomes a quantitatively formed collective that relies on unique data types that can be recognised by the digital network and can be transferred through the network without digital distortions or qualitative metadata.

It might appear at first sight that the Network is passive, in the way that roads (to borrow the metaphor of a transport network again) are passive. However, in both the cases it is important to realise that the traffic, the nature of traffic, who gets access to the traffic, who gets to be recognised as traffic, the very nature of information (or the vehicles that travel on the road) are determined by the network. The network is not just the physical infrastructure but also the traffic, the nodes and the people who belong to it through direct access, through interaction and through imagination. With the increasing digitisation of the world around us, there is a peculiar logic of translation that comes into being as the 'Real' object becomes the 'Digital' object: Reality -> Media -> data -> database -> Network. The Earliest interventions in cybercultures and social sciences exploring new digital technologies concentrated on the questions of the Real and the Virtual, looking at how the medium mediates the data. They constructed a duality where the Original (pristine, physical, tangible, mortal) object and the Translated (tainted, digital, virtual, immortal) were two different objects. The second wave of cybercultures theory that came to the fore with the vulgarisation of the new digital technologies and the emergence of the world wide web, demolished this duality and were interested in asking questions of imprints: Of how the actions and capabilities within one medium (what was earlier considered as the only Real, became one of the competing paradigms of reality) affect and distort the abilities and interaction within the other. The impulse was still guided by exploring the human agency which discerningly mediated between the various systems as

the human agent learnt to navigate and make meaning in the different systems over which the agency was distributed. It is only with the internalisation and normalisation of the aesthetics of digital technologies, as generations started growing up in technology rather than with it that the questions of the very forms and processes of meaning making as guided by the technology, come to the fore. The network, hitherto only theoretically imagined as an organic, evolving, many headed idea was realised in a combination of hardware (the machine), software (the application) and wetware (the human agency). The network is a part of our lived practices, our everyday experiences and the crucial mechanics of belonging and possessing. The networks overflow the circuits of cyberspace and become a way of relating to our immediate environments and the other people occupying them. We have learnt to think of ourselves as intricately and inextricably placed in the different overlapping, often contrary networks that take shape around us.

It is this collectively imagined network that also encourages the ethos of a 'plugged-in' existence where the individual is within the network, even when s/he is not necessarily using it. Viral computing, collaborative computing, shared personal computing devices, etc. sustain the imagination of a node as in the network *in-potentia*. The dormant potential existence of the node within the network is important to the idea of a thriving and working network. The digital networks produce a certain working paradox where each node is equally important and exists in close relation with each other; while, simultaneously, replaceable and non-detrimental to the working of the network. For instance, within cyberspaces, if one does not look at the parameters of bandwidth, connectivity, hardware and software availability, and other such discriminators, each node is equally important and functional within the network[2]. However, the contemporary version of the internet technologies make sure that even when a node pulls out or stops

[2] I am not suggesting that these parameters are not important but actually emphasizing the fact that while all nodes are born equal within the network, some nodes are more equal than others. It is these very parameters that caution us from recognizing the network as a universal leveller, a utopian democratic space within which the ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity will be realised. The initial waves of cybercultures studies did envision the digital networks to be such spaces. However, the last two decades of democratisation of internet technologies and differential usage and experience of the users around the world warn us about attributing to the network, such miraculous cures. The network still remains a potent metaphor of meaning making, not in its failed idealism but in the very discriminations and imbalances that it carries with itself.

working, it is easily replaced by another. While the hubs of the networks are not always easily replaceable the nodes, for all their exclusivity, are still entirely interchangeable and do not hamper the working of the network. This differs drastically from the physical networks of say the transport system. Within a transport system, the nodes are not equally important but arranged in a specific hierarchy. A shut down at a small destination, of services, might affect nobody but the people in that confined geographical location. However, a problem or malfunction at a major destination can throw the entire system awry. Hence, specific nodes are recognised and serviced as important and unique, and prioritised within the network. The digital network has other ways of discriminating within the nodes but these processes are less visible; transparent, so that you see through them and never notice that they exist.

The interminable nature of networks, the possibility of infinite expansion, the apparently organic patterns of growth and the non-narrative comprehensibility have shaped the network into a mythical form that shapes many personal and collective practices within contemporary times. The mythic quality also means that the network is often approached, by artists, theoreticians, authors, and practitioners, rather uncritically. Many Local Area Networks (LANs) fail because they refuse to recognise the aesthetics, poetics and politics of networking. Certain powerful agencies, unable to grasp the potentials, limitations and disseminations of network, also end up investing an immense amount of wealth, energy and resources into establishing the networking infrastructure but without incorporating the imaginations and functionality of the network in the physical unfolding of the network.

The Neighbourhood Network

The creation of physical networks by bringing together different geographical locations by connecting them through digital networks of information is one of the largest fantasies of globalisation. It signifies an easy translation of social, cultural and economic resources into data types which can be transferred across geographies and lifestyles, thus enabling fluidity of individuals and finances. The neighbourhood network suggests the ‘wiring up’

of the neighbourhood – the definition and scope of neighbourhood is subject to interpretation; sometimes it is about next-door houses, at others it is about the next-door nation – in order to facilitate a non-hierarchical fluid and equal interchange and exchange of information and resources between different nodes in the network. While many theorists have ably pointed out the inequalities of the digital divide, the disparities in the world of the haves and the have-nots, the network still remains one of the most potent ways in which we imagine the world around us. This particular section looks at the authorship of neighbourhood networks and how the imagination of this network unfolds in a peculiar condition of governance and citizenship in the context of India.

I shall come to the manifestation of the neighbourhood network through a brief detour of a story. This is a particular story of the Indian State's Mega-City project that started in India in 2001 and focuses on a singular incident of the Sabarmati Riverfront Development Project in the city of Ahmedabad, Gujarat. As a part of the Nation wide initiative to build IT-cities or Mega-cities which can serve as the hubs of IT development to support the bludgeoning globalised economy, the city of Ahmedabad, once the textile and industrial capital of the country was put back upon the map as a site for constructing the mega-city. Generally acclaimed for its shrewd and enterprising business community and the home of the Hindu Right Wing Political Party (BJP), Ahmedabad is a city that is divided by the river Sabarmati. The Sabarmati runs through the city, dividing it into the old and the new, serving as the life-line for water and livelihood of most of the city.

Historically, the Sabarmati riverfront has housed the official slums that provide home to the manual labour and immigrant communities in the city. In the post-independent India, a large section of the riverfront was given to the migrants who came from Pakistan in the times of partition. Similarly, refuges that came to Gujarat from Bangladesh, during its partition from Pakistan also found home here. The migrating communities from around Ahmedabad but also from Rajasthan and Bihar, who came to Gujarat in search of employment opportunities, also found their home in these slums. The riverfront also provided a lifeline for many who found agriculture, cultivation and other home-based industries for running their houses. The central location of the slums, the cheap housing

and the easy availability of water made it an ideal location for the people working in the informal sectors and day wagers. Most manual labour, domestic help, day wagers, hawkers, vendors, people selling wares on the streets, women in the informal sectors, etc. have found the riverfront one of the most convenient spaces of living, giving them easy access to the work spaces and essential resources for survival. The Sabarmati riverfront, over the last fifty years has also become a second hand market of used and recycled goods, clothes, furniture, household wares, fixtures, construction material, books etc. According to the last census in 2001, the Sabarmati riverfront housed more than 20,000 families made of around a 1, 00,000 people on its 25 km long shoreline. The current informal estimate puts the figure to around 2,30,0000 people who live on the shoreline. The number of people and businesses supported indirectly by the riverfront sites is naturally much higher.

In 2004, as a part of the Vibrant Gujarat project initiated by the state of Gujarat, Ahmedabad became a part of the mega-city project. The imagination of Ahmedabad as a part of the larger network of international IT services and globalised capital entailed a significant restructuring of the city to meet the international standards conducive to Foreign Investments in the state. The building of roads, availability of cost efficient and comfortable public services, development of lifestyle consumerist spaces like malls and multiplexes, encouraging the service and hospitality industry, the reading down of the liquor prohibition law, beautification of the city with the construction of lakes and gardens, encouraging the growth of IT education and English medium education in the state, the e-governance projects and the cultural commoditisation of the city's heritage resources are all a part of the Mega-City project and have significantly changed the texture of life, the lifestyle options and the standards and costs of living. The restructuring – spatial, social, cultural and economic – of the city has been welcomed by most residents as they too imagine themselves as a part of the larger international neighbourhood networks of interchange and exchange.

The Sabarmati Riverfront Development Project (SRDP) is also a part of these changes in the city. The SRDP, now already under implementation since the last four years, is the

face-lift being given to the global city. More than 20,000 families have been relocated to new and far-away spaces in order to make way for neon and glass, steel and chrome spaces of consumption, recreation and leisure for the people who are expected in the city as a part of he Mega-city project. The SRDP was initiated as an attempt to recreate a skyline for the city, modelling it on the surface imaginations of other global nodes – Singapore, Taipei, Tokyo. This was not the first time that the riverfront project has been proposed in the history of the state. The first riverfront beautification proposal came in 1999 when the State, on the premise that the slums in the riverfront are unhygienic and breeding grounds for epidemics, tried to reclaim the land for other purposes. However, a strong campaign of protest from the inhabitants of the area, aided by many non-governmental organisations and activists, thwarted the effort. After the two month long communal riots in 2003, the riverfront project was again proposed, claiming that the riverfront houses some of the dangerous elements that disrupt the safety and security of the city. However, this claim was also found to be dubious and the State's attempt at reclaiming the land was frustrated.

However, in 2004, when the Mega City Project started taking shape under the aegis of the Vibrant Gujarat Programme, the SRDP was initiated with a different logic. This was the logic of networking. The idea was to connect Ahmedabad city with the other larger nodes in the networks of globalisation. This networking is expected to bring future employment opportunities, huge foreign investments and the emergence of new economic sectors in the BPO and the Call-Centre industries. So powerful was the imagination of the network that the SRDP was welcomed and met with very little protest either from the people who were being relocated or the non-governmental and Human Rights organisations that have, in the past, resisted such moves. The families were being relocated to the far fringes of the city, sometimes as far away as 25 kms from the original locations. It would be very difficult for the earning members of the family to travel to their places of employment, sometimes causing them to spend more money on the transport than they might be able to earn in a day. Similar problems would arise for children. Due to the huge settlement of many years, many municipal and free schools have been established in the area for the children from the slums, which now become redundant. Moreover, the new locations

where they are being relocated do not have adequate infrastructure for the children to be admitted. Many informal businesses and trades used to flourish because of the location as well as the proximity to the river. The relocation and rehabilitation plans do intend to look at the questions but earlier attempts at rehabilitation by the State have been often failed and flawed. What is interesting is that apart from a very few handful individual activists, nobody has registered protest against the reclaiming of the land for the new global face of the city.

The State's relocating these citizens from 'prime property' to fringes seems to indicate a certain 'making invisible' of these citizens to make space for new kinds of citizens in the city. It is, I suggest, the imagination of the network that makes such an act possible, plausible and feasible. In a network, the individuals who make the databases are at an equal standing with each other. As discussed earlier, because of the very nature of the connectedness of the network, the different nodes are imagined as equal and having equal access despite the disparity in their locations. It is possible, through the network, to posit these relocated citizens as connected and plugged-in to the newly structuring city, at the same time making them peripheral to the imagination of the city.

The physical identity of the citizen gets reduced to digital imprints, thus making it possible to think of them as transferable and transmittable data types which can travel without any hindrance across the network. The metaphor of the network imagines these citizens as equal to the mythical globe trotting jet-setting urban yuppie who lives a nomadic life across geographies and lifestyles. However, instead of the privileges that this yuppie gets, these citizens who are made invisible, are offered the potentials of such privileges in the future.

What was very interesting in this particular case of the SRDP was how the people who were being affected the most by the relocation were also accepting it without any protest. While most of them acknowledge that the relocation is going to be difficult, they imagine this relocation as relocation towards being upwardly mobile and socially affluent. They imagine themselves as a part of the imagined network which shall offer them better

lifestyle choices and comforts. Most of them look upon the relocation as a 'sacrifice' that they perform so that the future generations – their children and the others to come would have better global opportunities of employment and gain. Most of the people in the riverfront slums were not physically a part of the globalised IT infrastructure. While a few of them did work as the manual staff in a few IT companies, most of them were not even indirectly a part of the burgeoning new economy that has developed in the last decade in Ahmedabad. They did not have neighbourhood networks, did not possess computer, did not have internet skills and very rarely used internet services for some critical need through public cyber cafes with the help of the café operators. A lot of them had caught upon the new mobile revolution and hence possess cell phones. However, these cell phones more or less become the equivalent of a land-line phone and are very rarely used for anything more than taking or making phone calls. The people in the slums and the housing colonies on the riverfront were not 'connected' in the hardware sense of the word.

Yet, the State's imagination of the network made them feel as if they belonged to a larger global network by simply being a good citizen of the country. The network, for them, was a site, much like the cinema, the bank or the telephone kiosk, where they could enact their right as citizens. They feel implicated in the imagination, sustenance and development of the network and hence are eager to do their bit in the process. The SRDP project and the mega-city project both bring to the fore, questions of how the network emerges as a form of cultural expression, how it becomes one of the most potent metaphors of our times which is affecting the way in which political and cultural processes are being redefined.

Tying up the Network

This active participation of the people into the development and imagination of the network and in the transformation of their selves into nodes brings to the fore the idea of multiple authorships of networks. As individuals adopt the network as a unit of imagining themselves and the world around them, the networks can no longer be defined by a single

author or a centralised power. The network emerges as such a significant way in which it effects changes in the delegation of power, in the realms of governance and administration, because of how people become a part of the physical, digital and imaginary circuits of these networks. The network is no longer simply about the flow of information but also the flow of capital and power. The Network as an epistemological category allows us to enter the circuits of globalisation and the changing nature of socio-cultural interaction which otherwise is often rendered obscure and incomprehensible. Understanding the networking aesthetic, not only through the practices of the people within it, but also through the paradigms of computer programming, of authorship and of the imaginary circuits of networks, allows us to approach the complex nexus of globalisation, flow of capital, cultural practices and socio-political distribution of power. It allows us to unravel the engagement of the new urban and the global state with the changing nature of citizen subject.