**Overload, Creep, Excess: An Internet from India** is part of a series of titles supported by the Centre for the Study of Culture & Society (CSCS), Bangalore, under the broad theme of **Culture and Democracy at the Millennial Turn**.

Turns of millennia are usually occasions to review forms of knowledge production for what they have achieved. In India, however, such an endeavor takes unusual turns. Politically bracketed by globalization at one end and the onset of religious majoritarianism at the other, as the current century has worn on it has turned into something far more significant than merely a political crisis as we come to terms with the insufficiency of several founding concepts of modernity such as nation, freedom, identity, governance, and indeed of power.

Paradoxically, as the current volume shows, this struggle is rendered especially stark when placed alongside a contrasting, and widespread, optimism that *also* defined the era. The sudden availability of new open access research tools once found only in wealthy Western universities now promised a delirious new freedom as the archives opened and transdisciplinary and transnational access led to the crumbling of timeworn disciplinary silos. Variously characterized as the time of the ‘internet’, it was also a time of transborder conversations that only a scant decade earlier might have been inconceivable, and of the pluralization of *spaces* for doing theory and *means* by which theory could be done. While the series defines these spaces and means diversely, a possible common thread that runs through them will be a focus on new practices of trans-institutional knowledge production, typically brought together by the triad of *pedagogy*, *research*, and *public engagement*, often contextualized by the onset of mass public digitization.

It was in the spirit of the times that CSCS, together with a range of new institutions, initiatives, and projects across India, saw its role as moving beyond the limits of the orthodox institution: inventing the term ‘inter-institutionality’, contending that the range of research resources and networks that good interdisciplinary work needed could never be supported within any single institution, however large or well-funded.

It is clear that this period did not last. One sign of its demise may well be the loss of faith in the internet's neutrality, signaled by meltdowns, funding crises, corruption, fears of neoliberal excess, terrorist threats, surveillance mechanisms, and new global ecologies that would soon engulf us in the new century.

As we turn back to the millennial moment, however, such diversity of both location and method allows us to re-view the dilemmas faced by academic practice in this fraught era of modern political history. The diversity of means, in the expanded space of the human sciences, may need to be viewed alongside the expectation that new practices of pedagogy and public engagement be given full recognition as research domains. Both came together – this series proposes – in the larger academic response mounted to the political challenges of the time. Across the literature we find outlined an era that was politically fraught, facing crises that were at once of the moment and requiring a larger historical frame, capable of some radical interdisciplinary/institutional barrier-breaking, and sustained if only momentarily by the temporary convergence of academic-activist drive and independent support.

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## This Volume

The origins of this book lie in a CSCS project assembled by the authors in 2010. The previous year, the ‘Unique Identity for Every Indian Resident’ project, better known as Aadhaar (support), had been announced with much fanfare by the Government of India. Known then as the Identity Project, it sought over three years to research the grassroots social impact of mass digitization through detailed field research across seven Indian states. The multiple outcomes and findings of that particular project, on paper, PDF, and video, are in the public domain. This volume is, among other things, a retrospective turn to that epochal moment, and the decades that both preceded and followed it, using insights that are very much of the present.