Cyber selves: Feminist Ethnographies of South Asian Women

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CHAPTER SEVEN

CARVING DISAPPEARING ANALOGUE/DIGITAL "SELVES"

Radhika Gajjala and Annapurna Mamidipudi

"writing
the self
through an Other voice
for the Other
pretending the Self
exists

my concern is not writing the body
I
have lost all perception of
my
body
intellectual bulemia
and anorexia
and greed
my
image in the mirror is someone
i do not
know
understand
did i ever?

wrything the cyborgian

body
I realize how
centuries of
transformations
have made it impossible
for me
to write the self"—Gajjala 1997 (http://www.cyberdiva.org)

> "If Being Digital is a state of being hooked to the network with one's point of view flying through empty space, then it is Being Material that makes that connection a reality. If cyberspace is seen as an extension of the material world, the performativity of material bodies in virtual spaces cannot suddenly be conceived in terms of being free of markings of race, gender, and class." Jayashree Odin, http://65.107.211.206/post/poldiscourse/odin/odin1.html

My writing, traveling selves have led me into ongoing (aborted, incomplete, questioning) acts of building and inhabiting multimediated heterotopic technospaces (Munt 2001). Re-designing and re-booting continually—I have re-birthed in various forms in my four decades of life. At various stages the mirrors in my life have reflected me, and both allowed and hindered processes of re-invention. —Gajjala, personal reflection, February 2003

What is it that will give me "identity"? A lot of it is how I am perceived by someone else. Today I seem to have given away this power to people who have a vested interest in seeing me as one thing or the other. . . . I am constantly in the position of negotiating for more space. . . . Do I get more people to negotiate on my side, do I decide that I and only I will decide my identity . . . in a "RL" [real life] world where my identity is already threatened by my own ignorance. . . . Will not the net just be one more place where I am "ignorant"? —Mamidipudi, personal e-mail communication to Gajjala, 1999

R,

Of course, you may quote me.

Academic diction is quite different from everyday parlance. It is also specific to location, but often abstract and indirect. So, too, can everyday speak also be abstract and indirect. However, in the act of writing, the diction—word choice—is structured to meet context/situation expectations. You might also think of it as "style difference"—high style or low style, high cul-

ture or pop culture. Typically, there has been a snobbery associated with high style—colloquial language is usually punished in the academy, as is local dialect. However, what do we lose as academicians if we embrace this attitude? How do we make our work increasingly inaccessible to those we "study" or dialogue with (my preferred parlance)? Language matters. We know this. But, how we execute that language matters more. It becomes an opportune moment to question the power structures that under gird such assumptions and, hence, practices.

—Denise Menchaca, personal communication, March 2003

Radhika's Note: This chapter is written in an attempt to negotiate academic audiences located in a westernized academy. This chapter began as an attempt, by me, to place the continuing dialogues between Annapurna and me within "disciplinary"[1] venues for publication, as defined by my departmental Promotion and Tenure documents at the time of preparing to go up for tenure. However, now it is being rewritten also from a different stage in my subjectivity and professional history. Placing this exchange in a "disciplinary" context is no longer a material necessity for me, the one responsible for (guilty of) initiating the translation of our exchanges into Western Academic venues (however, I am still professionally situated within the U.S. Academy and the politics of production implicated in inhabiting such a location so I am not suggesting for a moment that I have somehow been completely "liberated" from what all that entails). Therefore the articulation and form are freed up in different ways—but still restricted. For we are still faced with the unequal relations of power within which this articulation will be circulated, read, and interpreted. However, now instead of trying to make the disciplinary argument, we want to try and present this as a problem for feminist and other critical methodologies. On discussing the problems encountered in the forming of this chapter with several feminist colleagues, the authors of this chapter have decided to perform this chapter in diverse forms—for this is how the collaboration between the two authors began and continues—in diverse forms of writing, speech, diction, and traveling awkwardly through spaces where our speech, diction, and writing is molded, disciplined, and changed. The stuttering and awkwardness therefore are moments of disarticulation meant as a gesture toward the impossibility of our task.

Owning up to a brief doesn't automatically make one accountable . . .
Isn't that the problem . . .
I guess that's why this dialogue space is so important . . .
[or should I call it squabble space . . . ☺]
—A on the Third-World women list, April 1998
There is a traveling of theory and a hierarchy that privileges "Western" epistemologies even in "Other" spaces—especially in bourgeois and elite spaces that end up speaking in place of "the subaltern" —R, personal e-mail to A

.

In this chapter, we try to make sense of this process for ourselves and others knowing that there are others trying to work through similar issues—adopting various tactics and strategies for the disruption of colonizing discourses and methodologies. In a continuing effort to provide the context for our discussions and to connect our continuing dialogues regarding gender, development, cyberfeminism, technology, and handloom weavers to various conversations currently happening in the Academy (whether in communication studies, cultural studies, feminist studies, development studies, cultural anthropology, or postcolonial studies), we trace the history of our collaborative writing. We invite others to dialogue with us—we can be reached via http://www.cyberdiva.org.

In what follows, the metaphors are based in multiple media—when we write "Take One" and so on, for instance—we invoke video/film production and viewing. In places we invoke theater and theatrical writing. Through the insertion of "hyperlink" here and there and "moologs" and "msn chat" logs, we insert three different kinds of Internet-based diction—a) MOOs (Multi-User Domains Object-Oriented) are text-based environments with programmable "objects" that form the background and serve as props within that space of performance and MOOs are still mostly accessed through "telnet"; b) MSN chat is also text-based and synchronous; c) while hyperlinks are based in web culture. Take One takes us through the route of "communication studies" (the discipline within which one of the coauthors is located) [illegitimately] mapping in questions of feminist epistemology. Performatively, we attempt to demonstrate the struggle of being heard as non-Western

(feminist?) researchers/practitioners, where in our class/caste location (whether geographically situated in the Third World as Annapurna is or geographically situated in the "west" as Radhika is) we

> must think and function within the context of a powerful tradition that, although it systematically oppresses women, also contains within itself a discourse that confers a high value on women's place in the general scheme of things. (Narayan 1990: 259)

We are thus, as Indian women of class/caste privilege, faced by the "dark side of epistemic privilege" (Narayan 1990: 265), where we must be wary of discourses that require us to take on subject positions of either "victim" or "victors" of our cultures.

Take One: "Communication Studies" as Audience

The purpose of this section is to attempt to situate our ongoing dialogues in relation to gender and technology, cyberfeminism and e-commerce, old and new modes of production within the discipline of communication and media studies. We have juxtaposed different and apparently contradictory contexts as we have textually performed subject positions resulting from our engagement with our contexts. Our print and online collaborations, therefore, form a part of our continuing attempt to interrogate binaries such as "local/global," "traditional/modern," and "theory/practice" produced within modernist framings of technology, culture, and development.

This section lays out the theoretical grounding for the project from a communication studies location. Our perspective is critical. Critical research, Sholle suggests, must "uncover the historical specificity of our dominant practices, to map out interconnections, and to discover the forms of discourse that coheres in them" (1988: 38). In an attempt to engage in such a process of uncovering, we attempt these dialogues so as to open up analytical categories and social spaces (both online and offline) that do not merely pose differences and binaries, but help aid in the articulation of processes for the relational, interconnected, empowering, and contextual use of technologies.

Technologies and their uses must be examined contextually if we are to understand how they aid or inhibit specific communities' democratization and material progress. As Jennifer Daryl Slack argues:

> technology is not simply an object connected in various ways to the institutional and organizational structures from within which it emerges to be reconnected in a new context, but . . . it is *always an articulated moment of interconnections among the range of social practices, discursive statements, ideological positions, social forces, and social groups within which the object moves.* (Slack 1989: 339; italics mine)

Our engagement leads us to examine two different modes of production—one related to the production of handloom fabrics and vegetable dying in India and the other related to the production of digital spaces and academic analyses of cyberspace in the United States. Both are attempted against the grain of the "continuist, progressivist myth of Man" (Bhabha 1994: 236). Further, as Lawrence Grossberg argues, "the technologies of power of the modern—temporalizes space and rearticulates the other into the different. . . . [Therefore], by temporalizing reality and human existence, 'the modern' effectively erases space" (Grossberg 1993:1). Our long-term project therefore is one of recovery of place and context—spaces that have been submerged in the emphases on speed, motion and linear progressive Eurocentric histories. Our questioning is initiated through theoretical frames at the intersection of communication studies, cultural studies, postcolonial feminist theory, and subaltern studies (Guha and Spivak 1988).

Thus far, observations resulting from our collaborations can be listed as themes that emerge regarding modernity, globalization, and communities of production. Most salient of these as we see them today are: action (and governance) at a distance (Sassen 1998); mobility/immobility of labor and capital (Ong 1999); and differing spaciotemporalities of communities of production and the disciplining of well-tempered transnational labor forces for a "new" digital economy (Miller 1993). Each of the themes produce, and are produced through, varying degrees of privilege and lack. Implicit in these themes is the fostering of a sense of a "new economy" that regulates everyday life by way of intellectual technologies, practical activity, and expert authority in all realms of social life (Burchell, Gordon, and

Miller 1991). It is the contradictions that are encountered as well as the power structures and material needs that necessitate relations and conversations between very diverse communities that are of interest to us.

You now hear an echo, a reiteration, as we make a connection to feminist philosophers questioning epistemologies:

> *In our engagement with each other's contexts several issues surface both implicitly and explicitly. These are themes regarding globalization, Modernity and communities of production. Most salient of these as we see them today are—action (and governance) at a distance, differing spaciotemporalities of communities of production and the disciplining of transnational labor forces for a "new" digital economy. Implicit in these themes is the production and a fostering of a sense of a "new economy" that regulates everyday life through the use of intellectual technologies, practical activity and expert authority in all areas of social life, where epistemologies based in knowledge of contextual skills and expertise through the process of learning "how to" are devalued in favor of knowledge-making processes that privilege propositional knowledge. For example, Dalmiya and Alcoff (1993) describe an epistemological hierarchy between propositional and practical forms of knowledge which is implicit in modern epistemology. In describing how all knowledge in modern epistemology become propositional (i.e., information transmitted through impersonal propositions), they cite the example of how the expertise of midwives was invalidated epistemically, while their knowledge forms were constructed as ignorant "old wives's tales."*
>
> > *The epistemic invalidation of old wives's tales has been caused in part, by the fact that modern epistemology has forgotten the lesson from Aristotle that knowledge can come in two forms: propositional and practical (Dalmiya and Alcoff 1993: 220).*
> >
> > *—from Gajjala and Mamidipudi 2002*
>
> *The echo fades slightly merging into the following observation by Annapurna based on her fieldwork:*
>
> > *However, the synthesis of chemical dyes almost hundred years ago in Europe has had a calamitous effect on traditional Indian dyeing practices. Except in very small isolated pockets, natural dyeing practices, which were the pride of the textile industry of this country, have been totally replaced by the chemical ones. The further effect of the spreading*

> *wave of modern science has been the creation of the perception of traditional technology as outmoded, resulting in almost total erasure of knowledge of the traditional dyeing processes within these communities. But the European documentation of these local practices had been initiated only in the eighteenth century. This process was further continued indigenously in the early twentieth century in a bid to preserve information about practices that seemed to be going into extinction. But this pattern meant that knowledge which had been firmly in the domain of practice of the artisans now was converted into textual information; shifting the ownership of the knowledge squarely into the lap of those able to "study" rather than "do."*
>
> *The organic processes of the traditional artisan weaver turned a full cycle back to popularity when the color of neeli (indigo) caught the imagination of the ecology conscious green world in the late 1970s. But even as there was a tremendous amount of self congratulatory back patting among the nationalistic intellectual elite who felt that they were finally getting their due—for the weaver, who had internalized to a great extent "modern" chemical technology, however, it was the sound of the death knell. Just as they were beginning to find a footing in the modern market, their practical knowledge (now naphthol dyes) was again found wanting. The only available information about vegetable dyes was in the language of the colonizers, codified and placed in libraries or museums—now totally inaccessible to the traditional practitioners from whom the information had been gathered in the first instance. Thus though a demand seemed to have been created for their product, in reality it further reinforced the image of the weaver's technology as needing of modernizing input from outside experts, both in their own minds as well as in others.* —Annapurna, in Gajjala and Mamidipudi 1999.

We engage in examining each other's contexts through exchanges of narratives (and every now and then, actual embodied travel to each other's "field"), in a sense performing dual ethnographies—interactively through e-mail, telephone and face-to-face dialogues. This requires us not only to analyze each other's narratives and to do fieldwork in each others' contexts, but also to examine our own processes of engagement with the material. There is a heightened awareness of our own personal locations and complicities and resistances as Third-World women from two very differ-

ent professional and geographical locations, yet who share very similar family, class, caste, national, and regional histories. Our self-reflective examinations of location, rather than being focused on "the personal as political" (as in first-wave feminist consciousness raising projects), is less "in terms of identities, but rather in terms of institutional and relational structures" (Grossberg 1997: 7) routed through our personal/professional engagement within these contexts.

Our purpose here is to begin an interrogation of the process of collaborative, cross-contextual processes that resulted in the above-stated observations. Therefore, while the two of us may address the above-mentioned themes in the dialogue that follows later, it is not within the scope of this chapter to detail these themes exhaustively.

Among others, some of the questions that are raised through our ongoing work together are:

> What might cyberfeminist e-commerce from below look like? Is such a contradictory "e-commerce" at all possible? What are the collaborations, connections, and issues that might emerge? Recognizing that the "local" is very much tied in with the "global" and vice versa in present day economic practices, how do we negotiate complicity and resistance, silence and speech within various communities of production and practice in an increasingly digital economy? How can we form discursive and action-based networks between the local and the global, "place-based practices" and virtual practices? In addition, while the digital economy and associated communities of practice and production situated within the so-called global practices and configurations of power feminize certain types of labor, what is the relationship between the building of online networks for communication and communities of production within everyday contexts?

But what does the communication studies discipline[2] have to do with all this?

The issues discussed in this chapter draw from work that articulates connections between knowledge/discourse practices surrounding modes of production. These modes of production shape and are shaped by cultural practices, which in turn shape and are shaped by political, social, and

communicative hierarchies, patterns, interactions, and contexts. While it is more than obvious that these are *communication issues*, it is the attempt to discipline articulations such as these within a "*communication studies*" framework that leads us on an intellectual/practical journey of critical and self-reflexive investigation, some of which will be engaged with in the present essay. While gender and technology (see for example Rakow 1988; Stone 1991; Condit 1994; Stabile 1995; Balsamo 1996; Reed 2000) and issues related to the Internet and cyberspace (see for example Warnick, 1999; Cassidy, 2001) have been examined by communication and media scholars (those who have written about these issues in journals published by the National Communication Association and the International Communication Association, for instance), cross-contextual dialogues not framed as interviews are rare. "Engaging in dialogue," within academic conventions and regulations of writing "is difficult in more ways than one," as Karen Altman and Thanes Nakayama (1991: 116) point out. Our struggle is similar to Altman and Nakayama's and we agree with them when they write:

> In everyday life, we all realize how much we gain by listening and responding to each other as well as by arguing our case. The forms and practices of inquiry, however, are resilient, if not outright resistant to change. As critical researchers and writers, we also struggle over form and voice. (Altman and Nakayama 1991: 123)

The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to raise questions, to interrogate some related theoretical concepts and issues that emerge, and then to raise further issues. Along with several other communication scholars, it is our belief that contextual critical engagement highlights issues in ways that might make academic work relevant to the everyday life and work of the communities we write about and speak for, about, or with. In our struggles with theories, practices, and contexts, we agree with Celeste Condit when she writes that "[h]onest and deep engagement with particular social struggles may provide the lever we need to recover the critical reflexiveness that has disappeared from the academy" (1994: 182) due to the use of theory in a rigidly totalizing manner.

The first section of this chapter lays out some concerns arising within our collaboration/translation across contexts, and in the second half both

of us converse on issues raised. The dialogue is between "Academic"/"Activist"; Communication Scholar/NGO Field Worker; North/South; First World/Third World. Therefore, a section of this chapter is in the form of a dialogue between the two authors and follows a precedent set by the communication scholars Altman and Nakayama (1991) in their chapter entitled "Making a Critical Difference: A Difficult Dialogue". Our performative juxtapositions in writing are an effort to displace tendencies of academic work that reproduces theories and methods that "become . . . cookie-cutter template[s] rather than . . . critically reflexive ways[s] of thinking that [would attend] . . . to specific local conditions and realities" (Condit 1994: 179).

This project draws on tools of inquiry made available through conversations in the field of critical communication research. As Daryl Slack and Martin Allor note:

> The opportunity for the field resides in the ways that critical research *redefines* old research questions and opens up new areas of inquiry. The challenge to the field resides in its confronting the role of power and epistemology in communication institutions and processes as well as in our own research. (1983: 217)

What would we label this project methodologically? As a "postcolonial feminist communication performative critical ethnography/dialogue"? Perhaps. How would we situate this project theoretically and in relation to disciplinarity? What fields of inquiry inform us as we participate in a dialogue on so-called global/transnational/international/cross-contextual issues? What qualifies this engagement as a "global" issue? What is our method of investigation? What is our "evidence"? How are our "results" valid? What models of causality are being employed? Where is this project politically and epistemologically situated (Slack and Allor 1983)? Which are the "disciplines" that enable this dialogue?

The larger project that informs the present chapter draws from arguments situated in a variety of intersecting disciplines. We frame this chapter around the assertion that power relations within communities of cultural practice/material production shape individual, classed, gendered, and multicultural subjectivities while in turn, the cultural formations and histories of (economically, socially, racially, postcolonially/colonially)

dominant groups shape the implicit and explicit hierarchical structuring of communities of material practice/cultural production. In this effort, we emphasize an argument already made by several critical/cultural studies communication scholars (see the works of H. Schiller, D. Schiller, and Grossberg to name only a few): that a combination of political economy and cultural approaches to the study of communication and media is necessary.

Grossberg, arguing for more attention to political economy within cultural studies, writes that "[t]he globalization of culture makes the cost of displacing economics too high," and that we need to "rethink the relations between the economy and culture without automatically slotting the economic into the bottom line" (1997: 9). In his discussion of media-cultural imperialism as part of a broader system of imperialism, Herbert Schiller writes that:

> the media-cultural component in a developed, corporate economy supports the economic objectives of the decisive industrial-financial sectors (i.e. the creation and extension of the consumer society); the cultural and economic spheres are indivisible. Cultural, no less than automobile, production has its political economy. (1991: 13)

Such approaches are especially useful in the examination of the hegemonic discourses that dominate most scholarly and popular understandings of cyberspace, Internet, and associated digital and financial technologies. Thus, we assert that, while cultural imperialism and cultural domination are not things of the past (Schiller 1991), the examination of representations, subjectivities, and discourses that emerge within the digital (post)modern culture/economy reveals that we live amidst sociocultural discourses and material practices that divide the privileged of the world from those less privileged. These divisions occur along cultural and material formations of classed, raced, and gendered subjectivities and no longer simply along the First/Third-World geographical divide. All these factors necessitate communication and media researchers to examine complex interactions of categories such as whiteness, multiculturalism, hetero-patriarchies, postcolonial nationalisms, globalization, and transnational capital as they function within private and public, local and global spaces. Such analyses by communication and media researchers would aid a contextual understanding of the multiple negotiations within

multiple contexts mediated by unequal power relations that produce (post)modern subjectivities in the present-day global economy.

In the present chapter, we consider the relevance of such projects to the communication studies discipline in general. Unavoidably, this act further disciplines[3] the conversations we have thus far engaged from within a U.S.-based field of power, in the production of a particular knowledge situated elsewhere. Thus even as we attempt to raise questions in relation to the accountability and responsibilities of the researcher in relation to the contexts s/he produces, we cannot deny our own complicity in these structures of power. These very structures of power name certain contexts as Other, Marginalized, and Local while leaving untouched and uninterrogated the "Flexible" (Ong 1999), Urban[4] Self's assumption of being the Global and universalizable perspective. The flexible (academic) Urban Self is thus complicit in the production of discourses of "universalization, embodied in the rhetoric of homogenization—they would become like us—[which] legitimated a project of world conquest and colonial violence" (Grossberg 1993:1).

Research that raises the topic of marginalization in U.S. communication studies often asks *what* is being marginalized, *who* is being marginalized (who has little or no voice), and, even *how* the marginalization takes place. These questions are engaged with through the various institutional structurings of the U.S. Academy, including the emphasis on disciplinarity and its links with funding and patronage of certain types of research. Therefore, we are still compelled to ask questions about these issues from frameworks of thought and articulation authorized through hegemonic processes of investigation. It is true that some communication scholars have in fact engaged issues of process, form, gatekeeping and access, showing how knowledge production disciplines and shapes our scholarship in various ways (for instance, see Altman and Nakayama 1991; Blair, Brown, and Baxter 1994; Conquergood 1991; Grossberg 1993; Hegde 1998; Lee 1993; McLaughlin 1995; Shome 1996; Stabile 1995; Wander 1993). However, there is little research that attempts to engage "other" contexts on their own terms. For instance, communication scholarship less often examines *how* these topics are addressed, transformed, and complicated, while the assumed transparency of the for(u)ms in which we as communication scholars capture and recover "Other" voices and contexts as we implicitly and explicitly ventriloquize frame and represent is left unexamined. There is a

need for such an engagement, however, if our research is to be genuinely useful beyond the walls of the academia. As Nakayama points out:

> If our research is to be useful and engaged in ongoing struggles outside the field, then it must be sensitive to the readings given by "others." [This] move does not eradicate a focus on communication (in its differing definitions), but pushes us to move toward relevance outside the field. (Nakayama 1995: 171)

Communication and cultural studies scholars such as Grossberg call for a radical contextualization of scholarship in terms of "its theory, its politics, its questions, its object, its method and its commitments" (1997: 1). Where is this radical contextualizing being done within communication studies, when and how? (For some discussions of contextualization see Stabile 1995; Grossberg 1997; Stone 1991; Slack 1989). We can confidently reply to this question by saying *on the margins of the discipline*.

The purpose here, however, is not to get into an exhaustive critique of communication research that does or does not address marginalized populations of the world, nor is it to critique the kind of self-reflexive and radically contextualizing work that communication scholars have attempted to date. It is to ask: What might a radical contextualization mean to the work that we—the two authors of the present essay—are attempting. How should we ensure that our attempts at radical contextualizing contribute to broader social and political dialogues in the world? At the same time, how do we generate evidence "in relation to some of the issues facing various communities rather than for the esoteric goal of 'understanding' communication" (Nakayama 1995: 173)? What does all this entail for the collaborations we continue to engage in across contexts and through a communication medium (the Internet)—a medium that all too conveniently erases complexities of context?

Therefore, as we engage in collaboration across contexts and seek to situate this work within communication studies we must continue to ask simultaneously "what are the standards of admissibility in other communities?" (Nakayama 1995: 173). For,

> When the research questions we ask, how we ask them, how we interpret evidence and how we present our findings are done without regard to the concerns of various communities, we risk degrading academic work and

> mocking communication scholarship. . . . Communication scholarship can (and should) make a difference in the everyday lives of people. The study of communication can (and should) be relevant beyond the confines of the field, but only if we resist the attempt to discipline our evidence and, by extension, our scholarship. (Nakayama 1995: 174)

This project is one of (imperfect) translation. What happens when real-life contexts travel through texts? What happens when they are communicated and translated to audiences across contexts and when reproduction of contexts through texts is mediated by unequal power relations? Further, these exchanges are situated within a hierarchy that privileges "transmission" of (empirical) experiences, as we convert them into (theoretical) knowledge, through a back-and-forth yet uneven exchange between various epistemological structures of thought and practice.

How do each of our personal investments, complicities, and resistances influence the further reading and traveling of concepts derived through such engagements, given our lack of control over readers' interpretation of our texts? What concepts and conclusions will be drawn out of these dialogues in spaces where we have no voice or in situations where just one of us has more voice than the other? What new "buzz words" will emerge? Finally, what does "Access" mean in this situation? What is the exigency driving the researcher's attempts to access Other contexts.

Take Two—Feminist Studies as Audience

What are the frameworks available for studying issues of gender, technology, and postcoloniality? What, for instance, do feminist scholars have to say about the Internet, about information communication technologies (ICTs), about science, technology, and women in the Third World? Are these frameworks adequate—are they at all useful for our struggles in attempts to find sustainable solutions to both the issue of dialogue and voice online and the issue of providing sustainable economic solutions for weavers in communities of production that privilege a participation in the global information society?

Issues related to women and access to technologies have been studied from several angles. Scholarship that attempts to negotiate various disciplinary and contextual boundaries is produced by scholars, activists, and

cyberfeminists working in development and other related fields attempting to place subaltern and indigenous populations onto the global cyberspatial map on their own terms, and raising critical questions in relation to the challenges posed by IT design and contextual sociocultural and economic-based gendering processes in technological environments. They practically, theoretically, and contextually engage a variety of issues that intersect and complicate matters when attempts are made to use information technologies against the grain and texture of the mainstream. Feminists working on issues of technology and women fall under various categories—feminist science studies, feminist Internet studies, women in development, cyberfeminists, and gender and technology. Each of these provides us with varied lenses with which to examine our sites of engagement and each of these in turn produces different solutions based in assumptions and complicities embedded in the approach.

For instance, the gender and technology approach often falls into trap of universalizing certain Western-centric notions of "gender"—that is, there is an assumption implicit that findings about gendered experiences based on genders produced through gendering processes within certain class, race, and geographical contexts can be applied without question across class, race, geography, and world cultures. Thus, in spite of very visible protests and articulations from women of color within the United States and from transnational/postcolonial feminists arguing for the contextual, situated nature of gender formations, race, geography, and class end up being mere add-on categories. On the other hand, in the women in development approach, the term "gender" is very simplistically equated with "women" (see for instance work such as Hafkin 2002).

Both the above categories of research, while offering points of entry for us in our efforts to foreground issues related to marginalized communities of production and absent voices online also inhibit our ability to find applied solutions to the problems we articulate. Sometimes even the articulation of the problem is inadequate to the contexts we engage with.

The body of work on feminist philosophy and science studies does offer certain theoretical critiques that allow us to engage further in-depth into the problem of voice, access, and communities of production by centering issues of epistemology and ontology of knowledge-production. As Sarah Kember argues, there is a serious need to "explore the representational, epistemological, ethical and political dimensions" of situated sci-

ence and technologies (2003). Feminist critiques from this perspective show how the practice of science and technology can be steeped in a sociopolitical discourse that leads to the objectification and erasure of the Other/(Woman/Native).

Even then, sometimes, here too we face the task of having to carve out a path for what strategies and tactics must be adopted is in the specific instances and contexts we engage with. The task is made difficult by the fact that much of even the feminist critiques are located within contexts so far removed, materially, ideologically, culturally, geographically, and even temporally from the context(s) we attempt to write about. In application, this approach often implicitly maps out the possibility of including the populations outside of the logic of the global information networks within digital circuits. Such exclusive frameworks succeed in highlighting the absence and discomfort of impossible subjects within a logic where westernized science and technologies reside, but do not help carve out solutions. Thus this apparent forgetfulness on the part of several feminist science and technology studies is reminiscent of movies like *Matrix Reloaded* where the skeletal and simplistic juxtaposing of the worlds of the Matrix (digital) and of Zion (the mechanistic) disappears the existence of diverse communities of production and practice—in geographical locations where the histories, economics, and politics of community and nation have thus far permitted the (albeit sometimes illegitimate) parallel existence of so-called premodern modes of production with the postmodern.

However, there exists a body of work at the intersection of postcolonial science studies, feminist science studies, postcolonial cyberfeminisms, and development studies that critiques narratives of a linear notion of Progress and Development (see for instance Harding 1998; Escobar 1999). It is here that we find possible ways to enter academic dialogues.

Annapurna writes:

> *When people have access to the outside, there seems to be a slackness in their grounding to the local. So a lot of people doing very engaging things are doing them now physically here, but virtually outside—which means that the effort may not have roots or forum or accountability here.*
>
> *I don't know that I can theorize on this, but I will try. In terms of my objection to the Internet, it is as a system that is elitist and does not finally feed into my own work place. I will myself become an object in your system if what I say does not have legitimacy beyond the novelty value of my location. Lines*

> *are being drawn down new 'classes' and now one way to obtain access to western resources is through the Internet, by being visible on it. It can be used as a spring-board to fill personal-individual agendas. But what is worse is if the location itself is 'objectified' in a way that takes away legitimacy. I will continue to write on the Internet as long as I am rooted in my work. As long as I am aware that I am creating a space that is legitimate and a dialogue that is 'real,' I chose to speak for my community. This is valid as long as my community allows me to be a spokesperson or I hold accountability for my words in a real sense here, because you on the other side of a phone line have no access that I don't give you.*

Thus our struggle for articulation is not framed just by a professional requirement for disciplinarity, but also by the epistemologies and ontology of knowledge-production.

[MOO-Poetic Interlude: Cyberdiva ponders on layered epistemologies and ontologies . . .
Questions of translation, looping postcoloniality relational object (ivitie)s . . .]

Date: Sun, 20 Apr 2003 22:31:07 -0400
To: sa-cyborgs@lists.village.virginia.edu
From: radhika gajjala <radhika@cyberdiva.org>
Sender: owner-sa-cyborgs@lists.village.virginia.edu
Reply-To: sa-cyborgs@lists.village.virginia.edu

I have such stories to tell . . .
how will I tell them to you?

what will I weave them into
weaving in and out
talking in code

which code will you understand
will you understand why
why i use code?

is the code I use what you can read in between?

what are you reading in the code I write today?

why are you understanding this and not that

that and not this
i will sit under my virtual tree and tell you the stories
sentencesrunningintoeachotherstoriesrunningagainsteachot
heryoursandmineaswespeakandweaveweaveandspeak and
listen . . .
and interweave. . . .

what story does my coding say to you today?

what raaga is my tune falling into?

Denise's mobile home
Denise's aura lives here . . . the stain of her thoughts . . .
left behind
with diva . . . the shadows . . . the echoes. . . . You think
you see

Our Lady of Guadalupe in a corner . . . sometimes she
possesses you . . .
sometimes Denise possesses you . . . sometime Denise
possesses her . . .
sometimes you possess Denise . . . Sometimes our lady
turns in to
Saraswathi (who is also dwelling on another moo . . . (type
ways to look for
exits))
You see watcher here.
out
The details are kinda hazy but you are no longer where
once you had
been.
Diva's_cloud
a cloud of course! type junk to go to junction. You
sometimes see
Gayathri spivak and Linda alcoff in conference here—you
sometimes
see dipti naval and dimple kapadia chatting—or even cher
dropping
by and chanting the gayathri mantram—

maybe even. . . .
You see diva's tent, stephanie's project, perhaps it's melissa's

metaphor?, Robert's Banyan tree, ekalavyudu, and Denise's mobile
home here.
enter perhaps
The details are kinda hazy but you are no longer where once you had
been.

perhaps it's melissa's metaphor?
Seems multiplicitous and freeing, and yet in a way it is inescapable . . . permission denied to get out of melissa's own world
view, no matter how open she sees her world view as . . . no matter how
nonconcrete she thinks it is. [Type ways to find exits out of here].
You see crone's fish, saussure, derrida, bhartrhari, kalidasa, humpty-dumpty, observing the metaphor, dome's cracked mirror . . . , and
aura here.
aura | cyborgwati teleports in.
aura | cyborgwati enters the room somehow.

look

perhaps it's melissa's metaphor?
Seems multiplicitous and freeing, and yet in a way it is inescapable . . . permission denied to get out of melissa's own world
view, no matter how open she sees her world view as . . . no matter how
non-concrete she thinks it is. [Type ways to find exits out of here].
You see crone's fish, saussure, derrida, bhartrhari, kalidasa, humpty-dumpty, observing the metaphor, dome's cracked mirror . . . , and
aura here.
ghosts_of_sages (#11345) recycled.

perhaps it's melissa's metaphor?
Seems multiplicitous and freeing, and yet in a way it is inescapable . . . permission denied to get out of melissa's

own world
view, no matter how open she sees her world view as . . .
no matter how
nonconcrete she thinks it is. [Type ways to find exits out of
here].
You see crone's fish, saussure, derrida, bhartrhari, kalidasa,
humpty-dumpty, observing the metaphor, dome's cracked
mirror . . . , and
aura here.
@create aura called ghosts_of_sages
You now have ghosts_of_sages with object number #4244
and parent aura
(#4217).

perhaps it's melissa's metaphor?
Seems multiplicitous and freeing, and yet in a way it is
inescapable . . . permission denied to get out of melissa's
own world
view, no matter how open she sees her world view as . . .
no matter how
nonconcrete she thinks it is. [Type ways to find exits out of
here].
You see crone's fish, saussure, derrida, bhartrhari, kalidasa,
humpty-dumpty, observing the metaphor, dome's cracked
mirror . . . , and
aura here.
out
The details are kinda hazy but you are no longer where
once you had
been.
aura | cyborgwati teleports out.
Diva's_cloud
a cloud of course! type junk to go to junction. You
sometimes see
Gayathri spivak and Linda alcoff in conference here—you
sometimes
see dipti naval and dimple kapadia chatting—or even cher
dropping
by and chanting the gayathri mantram—maybe even You
see diva's tent, stephanie's project, perhaps it's melissa's

metaphor?, Robert's Banyan tree, ekalavyudu, and Denise's mobile
home here.
aura | cyborgwati seems to have left the room without saying goodbye.

drop saraswathi
Saraswathi | Diva's_cloud
Saraswathi | a cloud of course! type junk to go to junction. You
sometimes see Gayathri spivak and Linda alcoff in conference here—
you sometimes see dipti naval and dimple kapadia chatting—or even
cher dropping by and chanting the gayathri mantram—maybe even . . .
Saraswathi | You see diva's tent, stephanie's project, perhaps it's
melissa's metaphor?, Robert's Banyan tree, ekalavyudu, and Denise's
mobile home here.
Saraswathi | cyborgwati is drowning in sorrows.
Dropped.
Saraswathi | cyborgwati dropped Saraswathi.
aura | Saraswathi teleports in.
Saraswathi |
Saraswathi | perhaps it's melissa's metaphor?
Saraswathi | Seems multiplicitous and freeing, and yet in a way it
is inescapable . . . permission denied to get out of melissa's own
world view, no matter how open she sees her world view as . . . no
matter how non-concrete she thinks it is. [Type ways to find exits
out of here].
Saraswathi | You see crone's fish, saussure, derrida, bhartrhari,
kalidasa, humpty-dumpty, observing the metaphor, dome's cracked

mirror . . . , and aura here.
Saraswathi teleports out.
aura | Saraswathi teleports in.

Diva's_cloud
a cloud of course! type junk to go to junction. You sometimes see
Gayathri spivak and Linda alcoff in conference here —you sometimes
see dipti naval and dimple kapadia chatting—or even cher dropping
by and chanting the gayathri mantram—

maybe even. . . .

You see diva's tent, stephanie's project, perhaps it's melissa's metaphor?, Robert's Banyan tree, ekalavyudu, and Denise's mobile
home here.
enter diva's
The details are kinda hazy but you are no longer where once you had
been.

Diva's tent
a large tent
You see sitting_down_thing, panopticon, and
mystery_object here.
drop ghosts
ghosts_of_sages | ghosts_of_sages teleports in.
ghosts_of_sages |
ghosts_of_sages | diva's tent
ghosts_of_sages | a large tent
ghosts_of_sages | You see sitting_down_thing, panopticon, and
mystery_object here.
ghosts_of_sages | cyborgwati is drowning in sorrows.
Dropped.
ghosts_of_sages | cyborgwati dropped ghosts_of_sages.
aura | ghosts_of_sages teleports in.
Saraswathi | ghosts_of_sages teleports in.
ghosts_of_sages | ghosts_of_sages teleports in.

ghosts_of_sages |
ghosts_of_sages | perhaps it's melissa's metaphor?
ghosts_of_sages | Seems multiplicitous and freeing, and yet in a way
it is inescapable . . . permission denied to get out of melissa's own
world view, no matter how open she sees her world view as . . . no
matter how nonconcrete she thinks it is. [Type ways to find exits
out of here].
ghosts_of_sages | You see crone's fish, saussure, derrida, bhartrhari, kalidasa, humpty-dumpty, observing the metaphor, dome's
cracked mirror . . . , aura, and Saraswathi here.
Ghosts_of_sages leaves for the her_metaphor.
aura | Ghosts_of_sages has arrived.
Saraswathi | Ghosts_of_sages has arrived.

—Radhika Gajjala,
http://www.cyberdiva.org[5]

Rewind: Woman as Theater? Gender and Development

> Yet, unless the mainstream feminist hears responsible critique, the feminist status quo will continue to provide an alibi for exploitation.
>
> —Spivak 1996

Time: Sometime in late 1998 R's office in XX university.
R sits facing her Mac with multiple windows active (Eudora, Netscape, Word, Telnet . . .). R can be seen pottering around the Spoon Collective server and her accumulated archival "data" in the form of lists founded and maintained by her—or maybe she was building on her MOO home at MediaMoo or LinguaMoo . . .

[MOO-Poetic Interlude: Cyborgwati invokes the goddess of learning]

fetch saraswathi
Saraswathi is already at perhaps it's melissa's metaphor?

aura | Saraswathi's eyes light up as it focuses on Saraswathi.
(chitraguptini) Saraswathi's eyes light up as it focuses on Saraswathi.
Saraswathi | Saraswathi's eyes light up as it focuses on Saraswathi.
Saraswathi's eyes light up as it focuses on Saraswathi.
Saraswathi | Saraswathi lunges at you.
aura | Saraswathi lunges at Saraswathi but misses.
(chitraguptini) Saraswathi lunges at Saraswathi but misses.
Saraswathi | Saraswathi lunges at Saraswathi but misses.
Saraswathi lunges at Saraswathi but misses.
aura | Saraswathi looks quizzically at Saraswathi.
(chitraguptini) Saraswathi looks quizzically at Saraswathi.
Saraswathi | Saraswathi looks quizzically at Saraswathi.
Saraswathi looks quizzically at Saraswathi.
aura | Saraswathi gets confused and gives up.
(chitraguptini) Saraswathi gets confused and gives up.
Saraswathi | Saraswathi gets confused and gives up.
Saraswathi gets confused and gives up.
Saraswathi is already at perhaps it's melissa's metaphor?.
Saraswathi | You fail to retrieve saraswathi.
aura | aura's eyes light up as it focuses on aura.
(chitraguptini) aura's eyes light up as it focuses on aura.
Saraswathi | aura's eyes light up as it focuses on aura.
Aura's eyes light up as it focuses on aura.
aura | aura lunges at you.
aura | aura lunges at aura but misses.
(chitraguptini) aura lunges at aura but misses.
Saraswathi | aura lunges at aura but misses.
aura lunges at aura but misses.
aura | aura looks quizzically at aura.
(chitraguptini) aura looks quizzically at aura.
Saraswathi | aura looks quizzically at aura.
aura looks quizzically at aura.
aura | aura gets confused and gives up.
(chitraguptini) aura gets confused and gives up.
Saraswathi | aura gets confused and gives up.
aura gets confused and gives up.
aura | You fail to retrieve aura

CHAPTER SEVEN

At the back of her mind is the constant nagging fear and knowledge of her impending "third year review." Having barely surfaced from, among other things, defending and completing a fairly unusual dissertation,[6] and not knowing how she should package her work in relation to the "disciplinarity" continually being emphasized around her. . . .

Nevertheless, she composes an e-mail announcement in her continuing efforts to create dialogue (squabble?) spaces online and hits send.

> "Third-World" Critique(s) of Cyberfeminism?
> The purpose of this discussion will be to explore various political, social, and cultural implications and possibilities of "virtuality" in relation to technoscience, Third-World/black feminisms, and theory/practice of cyber culture as well as accountability to embodied ways of being (viewing online interactions as material/discursive practices . . .).
> Discussions related to this were started on the postcolonial list, Third-World women list and in the graduate seminar on "Communication, Technoscience, and Cyberculture" (Fall 1998, Bowling Green State University)
> http://ernie.bgsu.edu/~radhik/courses/courses/mcom780.html.
> One of the central questions we ask is "What kind of subject/agent is implicit in cyberfeminist narratives?"
> Also problematizing the notion of a Third-World feminist critique that comes from Net and First-World spaces. . . . etc etc etc. . . .
> My e-mail is radhik@bgnet.bgsu.edu
> Messages to the list should be sent to seminar-13@lists.village.virginia.edu
> To subscribe to seminar-13, send a message to majordomo@lists.village.virginia.edu
> with the message:
> subscribe seminar-13.
> The subject header should be blank.
> Note: Rude, sexist, racist etcetera posts will not be tolerated.
> Looking forward to a great discussion!
> Thank you,
> Radhika Gajjala
> (comoderator postcolonial,

comoderator technology
moderator sa-cyborgs
moderator women-writing-culture
moderator Third-World women)

Through ether, the message traveled—and ended up somewhere on another network—a network focused on issues relating to gender and development. R was then contacted by the editor of the Oxfam journal (still not within the "communication discipline" as defined by a U.S.-centered Academy) Gender and Development and invited to write on the potential of the Internet as an empowering tool for women in India. Recognizing that she was once again being accessed as a "native informant" based on her own visibility in online feminist spaces and identity as someone of Indian origin (in spite of the fact that it was now about nine years since she had resided full-time in India), R felt uncomfortable agreeing to writing such an article. R's research prior to 1998 focused on South Asian women in diaspora. Further, in her research, she had pointed to the fact that South Asian women in diaspora often served as easily available "native informants" for policy makers in western world. This invitation posed a dilemma for R. Two main issues weighed on her mind:

1. *Being close to third-year review time, she knew that at this stage a publication in a journal (even if not in a mainstream communication journal) would help her retain her job.*
2. *If she said no—that would not ensure that "the subaltern," who's voice she was worried about appropriating, would be allowed to speak in her stead. Someone else would write that article anyway. So why not use this as an opportunity to insert critique?*

"Yet, unless the mainstream feminist hears responsible critique, the feminist status quo will continue to provide an alibi for exploitation." —Spivak 1996

"As you note, failing to speak is a cop-out. Thus, I think the question that needs to be raised at the end of your paper is not 'From what position of authority would we speak?' BUT, rather—the position of authority we HAVE been given to speak comes from a very particular map, and at the expense of the female Subaltern who is OUR Other. If we remain silent, that is not going to make the female subaltern

> *HEARD. So I have always been a little bothered by the question of 'our authority to speak.' The question about 'what is OUR right to speak?' while it LOOKS like a question that places the Subaltern/Other on the map, doesn't after all produce the spaces FROM which the Subaltern COULD speak.*
> *So I'd end by changing the Question a little. Instead of ending with: 'From what position of authority would WE speak?' I'd phrase the question more explicitly as 'Who is paying the PRICE for this authority and WHOM am I taken to speak FOR?' AND THEN, the next semantic question that follows 'logically' becomes, if you follow this—not whether we speak and what our authority to speak is, but instead—WHAT did we SAY when we were given/took up the authority to speak? And, HOW did we say it?"* (C[7] in Gajjala 1998)

Having known A most of her life, and being quite sure that this might be an opportunity to juxtapose A's work context with R's in an effort at productive dialogue, R asked A to join her in the writing of this article. They wondered—would the editor agree?

As it turned out, the editor[8] not only agreed, she actually worked with both R and A in trying make their juxtaposition possible.

> *r:*
>
> *On the researcher's side, complicity in a sense is strategic and necessary —while it is about gaining access individually, it is also about creating more diverse speaking positions that will make the discipline accessible to people who continue to engage in thus far marginalized discursive and material practices. How do I negotiate this individual investment and necessity? On the activist's side what are the issues faced?*
>
> *a:*
>
> *I am of course pessimistic and nervous of our ambitions . . . but raring to go. In future work, I want a stronger context. I will be fighting you more. The other article [Gajjala and Mamidipudi 1999] has clarified for me the position I speak from. I also liked the fact that there we are talking to a group that seems to be concerned about the phenomena that is the Internet in a "real" sense.*
>
> *A genuine concern and a genuine need for solutions is something I can participate in. As a technologist who is somewhat experienced in in-*

tegrating technology and people, I am clear that on any effort, community needs to be built to create space for discussion. I can be part of such a community. I refuse to be a lone "rebel." I therefore object to feminism as it is exclusionist in its definition, as I understand it. If it is not so, the fact that it is perceived to be so is bad enough for me. We are divided enough without defining spaces that are divided (in a real sense or in a virtual one). It is the separation of real life from the virtual one, whether on line or as a feminist that disturbs me. Your articulation of your work as a feminist excludes me; at times your articulation as a third world woman excludes me. Sometimes just the fact that you are speaking only online and not offline excludes me the most.

r:

I recognize that in my professional/personal negotiations and in an odd privileged way in trying to maintain my own positions to speak from within the U.S. Academy, what I have at stake in trying to put out pieces of writing such as this are slightly different than yours. I also realize that I am compelling you to perform within frameworks I have laid out, thus most definitely shaping our dialogue to conform to power structures that are probably more oppressive than empowering to the contexts within which you work. This is indeed a difficult dialogue. And quite clearly, in this dialogue there is a struggle with form and a struggle to maintain our own voices. We must believe that this is something possible at some level, or we would not be attempting it?

For the time being—the curtain falls and you no longer see the stage. Backstage, the struggles continue. The camera pans the audience—and yes, there is definitely a diversity of audience there . . .

Faith Wilding writes: "On the internet, feminism has a new transnational audience which needs to be educated in its history and its contemporary conditions as they prevail in different countries" (http://www.obn.org/cfundef/faith_def.html).

Our rejoinder:

In the present global information society, it is important that feminisms recognize their historical complicity and their location within an ontology and epistemology that does not always understand the complexity of its audience. As feminists in a global society, it is important that we honestly examine contextual gendering processes and the hierarchies we reproduce by imposing frameworks situated in only certain contexts and

thus permit ourselves to be educated in the multiple histories of how gendering processes and other (economic, social, and cultural) hierarchies have developed elsewhere. We as situated feminists, activists and academics need to be educated by our transnational audiences.

Notes

1. Personal e-mail from R to A: Here's a frame to start with—I have been immersing myself in reading material published within my "discipline"—"communication studies" because of repeated (even if well-meaning) concerns expressed by people mentoring me for tenure and promotion, that I publish within "disciplinary" journals (and in this case that means journals sponsored by the National Communication Association and the International Communication Association). My question to you is this—do you find any point of entry here that might be useful to you in your efforts to articulate the concerns from your location? I'm wondering—how do we work in your concerns and then getting past that layer, work in the weaver's concerns—how shall we articulate your discomfort with the frameworks I am quite literally luring you into? [How shall we articulate *my* discomfort? (Does it matter?)]

2. Here we invoke Lisa McLaughlin's definition of "disciplinarity," and "refer to the theories, practices, and institutional arrangements that discriminate among forms of knowledge, specify knowledge and knowledge relationships that coalesce around 'objects of study,' and demarcate boundaries within which knowledges may take on the appearance of coherence" (1995: 145).

3. Previous publications in relation to these conversations (Gajjala and Mamidipudi 1999, 2002, 2003, 2004; Gajjala 1999 and 2000) have already done so in a variety of ways.

4. Rather than using categories such as "westernized," we extend Aihwa Ong's discussion of the flexible citizen to refer to the person of privilege who is upwardly and transnationally mobile—one who has accumulated the required cultural and material capital to be able to be a "nomadic subject" and contributes to (at the same time negotiating) transnational practices and imaginings that shape hegemonic economic and cultural discourses in today's world. The term westernization does not adequately describe what we would like to describe in this chapter, for, as Grossberg suggests, it "opens a problematic which could only be resolved by the search for or construction of a self-enclosed, isolated identity" and for which reasons scholars such as Amin (1989) reject "any politics in which modernization is treated as westernization and opposed by the search for an alternative cultural identity" (Grossberg 1993:1).

5. There are different ways to perceive, to speak, to translate—the subtle nuances of the multiple layers of realities we inhabit in mind/body, thought/emotion, imagined, and real spaces. This interlude performs repetition, recoding, and dwelling—through multiple metaphors—in pursuit of dialogue. MOO-Poetry Interludes in this chapter are based in cybercultural creative juxtapositions of programmed "objects" that interact with the MOO user to produce texts. I have named existing programmable objects and modified some in an attempt to produce a computer-enabled form of "poetry," in efforts to make visible the multiple negotiations we make with existing social worlds and epistemologies in an attempt to "speak." The objective nature of situated language—language as situated code/artificial intelligence the "out there-ness" of meanings associated with socioculturally named objects . . . all these are explored in my continuing MOO-poetic programming/writing online. Go to telnet://pmcmoo.org:7777. You may find me on PMC2 -moo [feel free to sign on as guest and when you get there, type @go perhaps; @go denise . . . Indeed, as James Elkins's book title announces, the Object *does* stare back.

6. Radhika, Gajjala, The SAWnet Refusal: An Interrupted Cyberethnography, Doctoral diss., University of Pittsburgh, Dissertation Abstracts International, 99-00131, 1998.

7. "C" is one of the members the South Asian Women's network (SAWnet) who responded to one of my early dissertation drafts.

8. We will always be grateful to Caroline Sweetman for allowing that collaboration in print—for if we had not worked on a concrete print product at that time, we may not have continued to investigate these issues in collaborations, and each of us would be doing our own thing in separate public spaces even though our thought processes would always be shaped by our interaction with each other.