

New media, Space and Marginality: Control and Regulation of Cybercafe Use in Small and Medium Towns in Asia

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This paper is about how cybercafés in small and medium Asian towns highlight new aspects of modernity. Especially in the context of Asian modernity, the introduction of ICT-shaped social spaces in the form of cybercafés leads to multiple conflicting rhetoric of empowerment and progress on the one hand, and risk and moral degeneration on the other. Through an ethnographic study carried out in twelve small or medium towns in six Asian countries, the research explores how new media technologies influence the contexts of reimagining Asia's encounter with modernity. The paper is based on a study drawing from secondary materials and primary information gathered through extensive field work in six developing countries in Asia: Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia and the Philippines in South East Asia, and India and Bangladesh in South Asia. In this paper we set out to argue that the continuities, ruptures and innovations that constitute the Asian modernity, as well as their social impacts, are mirrored in the discourses surrounding the various technologies that embody this modernity, negotiating a new phase in its mediation and legitimization in Asia. In particular, new media technologies and social media are involved in multiple discourses of risk, opportunity and adaptation. In the case of the cybercafés in Asia, we argue that the situated nature of technological access gives rise to new dimensions of adaptation at individual and collective levels. Discourses emanating from representatives of civil society, State and various other stakeholders converge on cybercafés, and their attention on this particular space emerges as an indication of its complexity as a zone of mediated access to the worlds—both desired and undesired—that computers make possible. The complexity of defining an essential set of Asian values and a regionally unique trajectory of modernity notwithstanding, cybercafé users in small towns across the six countries studied faced similar pressures and options that motivated the calibration of access to multiple worlds. Global technologies are shaped by local realities as civil society stakeholders struggle to redefine boundaries of morality, safety and privacy, balancing these against necessity and opportunity.

Keywords: Heterotopias, modernity, youth, cybercafés, moral transgressions

Originally coined by Foucault (1986), the concept of heterotopias talks of spatial division in isolation from temporal elements which leads to the formation of real spaces that stand outside of the known places. It is argued that spaces that are neither public nor private are heterotopias, and that they are necessarily collective or shared spaces (Dehaene, and De

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Cauter 2008). While the notion of heterotopia has been viewed as overly structuralist (Saldanha, 2008), the semi-public character of heterotopia runs counter to the dominant treatment of the concept within architectural circles. The processes that shape and sustain heterotopias differ drastically in varied cultural and socio-political contexts. Due to its wide theoretical application, the concept has been used to describe spaces that range from the subliminal to the eccentric, to the most normal to the extremely aberrant ranging from museums, hotels and theme malls (Soja, 1995), holiday resorts and gated communities (Low 2008), festival markets, labour camps (Petti 2008) so on and so forth. Heterotopias can inform the records of transient and informal organizations as well as fleeting strategies of archiving, like alternate 'fugitive art' (Cooke 2006), or has been used as an idea to theorize the ordering of spaces rather than the geopolitical meaning, (Barnes, 2004), and has even got applied to the representational spaces of research practices themselves (Gonick & Hladki, 2005). The spatio-temporal mode of heterotopias as ordering of 'difference' has been used to interpret the everyday of social lives (McNamee, 2000) and in technological spaces (Pertierra, 2005). This paper discusses the emerging moral geographies of cybercafés in the small and medium towns of developing Asia applying Foucault's notion of heterotopia as a set of institutions and habitations that challenge the continuity and normality of the production of ordinary everyday space (Lefebvre, 1991; Jansson, 2009). The moral concerns associated with the diverse uses of cybercafés by youth and children in Asian cities have resulted in the emergence of a set of socio-legal mechanisms to regulate, control and contain the youth's engagement with new media technologies.

Cybercafés are public places where one can buy Internet time for emailing, online gaming, MUD engagements, entertainment or offline PC based applications. They operate on the basis of scale economies as the number of users increase. Initial supply side impediments regarding operational technologies have been partially eliminated as cafés have moved from dial-up connections in the late 1990s to broadband in the new millennium. While the literature on cybercafés as well as on youth technoculture in Asia has attempted to understand the phenomenon in terms of the classical moral panic perspective, focusing on the role of the mass media (Lagerkvist, 2010, p.45), the cultural and political dimensions of the emerging moral regimes of the 'institution' and 'place' of cyberspace require deeper sociological analysis and discussion (Morozov, 2011).

This paper is an attempt to provide an alternative perspective based on an exploratory framework that takes into account the role of local values, norms and politico-religious ideologies of users and cybercafé owners in Asian cities in generating a strategic discourse on ethically bounded appropriation of new media technologies and production of unstable cyber heterotopias in the intermediate spaces of small and medium towns in developing Asia. Taking note of the deep contestations of what constitutes moral transgressions and what molds reactions to digressions from moral standards (Cohen, S. 2002), we argue that the cybercafé, as an embodiment of technological complexity, shares a space with the family and the public sphere, closer to both and informed by both, providing a source for engaging with new objects and imaginations while negotiating an ethically mediated notion of privacy and collectively recognized delimitation of individual freedom.

Further, we also argue that it is important to understand the interlocking interests of market, state and civil society arbitrations involving the family, local capital and institutions such as law enforcement, schools, religious bodies and local governments in shaping the diverse moral geographies of Asian cybercafés. The specific civil mechanisms of control and regulations, and implementation of the regularities of order within cybercafés

across Asia, offer a wide spectrum of systems and practices, rooted in the interplay of local institutional forces and indigenous structures of power. The reading of heterotopias as central, 'eccentric', institutions of the polis (Dehaene, and De Cauter 2008 p.4), which try to realize the good life via equilibrium between oikos (private sphere, household, hence economy) and agora (public sphere, the place of politics) is limited and conditional as exemplified in the ambivalent moral and institutional positioning of the cybercafé in Asia's small and medium towns. While it has been noted that in the postcivil society heterotopias resurface as a strategy to reclaim places of 'otherness' on the inside of an economized public life, (Dehaene, and De Cauter 2008 p.4), we find that the othering of the spaces is also perpetuated through their inclusion into post capitalist societies.

This paper is based on a study that draws from secondary materials and primary information gathered through extensive field work in six developing countries in Asia: Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia and the Philippines in South East Asia, and India and Bangladesh in South Asia. The study is part of a larger exploration which looks at the conditions and modes of appropriation of new media technologies by young people in the age group 15-34 in small and medium towns in South and Southeast Asia. The study is based on a structured survey questionnaire and ethnographic interviews of young people in the towns of Jessore and Syhlet in Bangladesh, Coimbatore and Lonavala in India, Celigon and Sukabumi in Indonesia, Tacloban and Santa Rosa in the Philippines, Ratchburi and Chiang Mai in Thailand, and Dalat and Bac Ninh in Vietnam. Exploration of a wide range of Internet and new media usage patterns among young people, identified as being between the ages of 15 and 34 was attempted. The usage patterns covered browsing, chatting, social networking, gaming, social/political activism, social/entertainment, education and communication. Apart from computers, usage of mobile phones, MP3 players and digital cameras was also included. Over 120 in-depth interviews (about 10 per town) were conducted with cybercafé users and owners/managers. Each in-depth interview lasted from anywhere between 45 to 90 minutes. The in-depth interviews focused specifically on 'above average' users, as these users would be most likely to be frequent users of the cybercafés.

Multiple Spaces of Cybercafés: Heterotopias

The effect that the arrangement of space has on social relations is a concept that has been applied to many settings such as classrooms (Bernstein 2000; McGregor 2004), public spaces (Atkinson 2003; Allen 2006), and homes (Taylor 1999), among others. Graham (1998) lists numerous examples of how spatial metaphors have not only been built into information and communication technologies, but have also constituted them. He cautions against an over-reliance on such metaphors because of their obfuscating effect on the conceptualisation of the relations between ICTs on the one hand, and space, place and society on the other. The cybercafé is complex for two reasons: (1) cyberspace as the *raison d'être* of the cybercafé is itself a problematically conceptualised spatial metaphor (Graham 1998); and (2) the cybercafé constitutes a heterotopia, where multiple spaces exist simultaneously (Saldanha, 2008).

The approach based on understanding cybercafés as enabling heterotopias, brings new complexity to the spatial metaphor problematized by Graham (1998), and helps understand how new media technologies reveal new dimensions of socially embedded evolutions. The notion of heterotopias may be drawn upon to explain how, in the face of moral concerns, a set of socio-legal mechanisms has emerged to regulate, control and

contain youth engagement with new media technologies. In contrast to 'utopias', heterotopias are real places that exist, but serve as 'counter sites' – a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites and all the other real sites that can be found within the culture are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted. Heterotopias stand in an ambivalent, mostly oppositional, relation to a society's mainstream. That is why both brothel and amusement parks or cemeteries and schools become heterotopias (Foucault, 1986). Thus heterotopias can be seen as sites of reordering, sites that make given orders legible (Topinka 2010, p. 55). Borges (1962) presents such a fictional heterotopia of legibility in his "Funes, the Memorious" through the memory of Funes that functions like a programmed reservoir of seemingly unrelated but individually intensified contexts (Topinka 2010).

The concept of heterotopias has been applied in a range of contexts within the milieu of media technologies. Liff and Steward (2003) and Lui (2009) have specifically explored cybercafés as heterotopias in the UK and Chinese settings respectively, invoking both their real and imagined potential to transform the utopia into reality. As social sites, cybercafés provide a unique form of access where access is influenced on the one hand and users and user contexts are shaped on the other. While these studies focused on actual spaces, Poster (2005) analysed the use of new media technologies – particularly mobile phones – as heterotopias. Heterotopias have been presented as boundary-spanning and glocal spaces (Liff and Steward 2003; Liu 2009; Poster 2005) that allow a social shaping of technology, and as spaces that juxtapose the real and the virtual. Where the virtual was treated as a space that works like an illusion and a compensation, cyberspace was often conjured up as a heterotopic space in terms of the new social spheres generated by Internet Relay Chat, or games like *Vice City* (McKenzie, 2006) in virtual communities (Young 1988) and discussion lists (Warschauer 1995). The studies on cyber kiosks, carried out particularly in the western contexts, have emphasized the spatial significance of the institution in mediating the transgressions of space that the Internet offers. Basing herself on the sociology of place and space, Wakeford (2003) analyzed how internet kiosks translate the experience of communication technologies, making visible interconnections between the global and local processes. Invoking Appadurai's concept of "technoscapes" (Appadurai, 1996), Wakeford (2003) attempts to show that Internet kiosks are "embedded in repertoires, both imagined and experienced, of the urban and global mobility" making them part of the movement of technologies and technological experience across spatial and temporal boundaries. This perspective is a revision of an earlier conceptualization of internet cafés as "landscapes for computing" (Wakeford 1999). Stewart (1999) had also noted that internet kiosks, while playing a key role in the general development of multimedia knowledge and consumption emerge not just as sites of technical access but as spaces of physical, community and cultural articulation. Viewing cyber cafés as an evolution and extension of the traditional western institution of the café, Stewart's study pointed to the kiosk as a gateway or portal between the local and the global. The study emphasized the role of internet café as cultural spaces other than a technical or commercial place.

Defining Internet café as a space configured in the intersection of trans-local images and local circumstances, Laegran and Stewart (2003) considered the production of such techno-spatial spaces as embedded in local practices, a problematic shared by a spectrum of theories belonging to the broad social shaping tradition. Following Miller and Slater (2000), they pointed out that the internet kiosks are far from being places and are better understood in their specific local contexts. Boase et al. (2002) for example, while emphasizing the connection between instrumental use and a sense of online community and kinship, nonetheless noted that the variables associated with community bonding were substantially related to the places where people access the Internet.

Liff and Steward (2003) views cybercafes as heterotopias, invoking both its real and imagined potential to transform the utopia into reality. As social sites, cybercafés provide a unique form of e-access influencing access on the one hand and shaping users profiles on the other. The heterotopias nature offer opportunities for e-access by spanning the boundaries between different social networks. In other words, it patterns a specific type of sociality, in which a sense of community and shared identity is reinforced through networking involving weak and strong ties. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why cyber space of the 'digital city' is not necessarily identified as existing "solely in opposition to the physical, social city of cultural, social and physical places and spaces" (Powell 2004, p. 23).

The questions of local/global interconnectedness, community bonding, identity and heterotopias assume new political and social significance in the context of developing countries. In order to understand the Asian experience with public e-access centres, such as cybercafés, these issues have to be theorized and interpreted on the basis of the empirical foundations of the differential experience of Asian users (Sreekumar & Vadrevu, 2013). Rubinstein-Avila (2013) discusses these issues in the South American context where she conducted systematic research on Internet cafe use by young people. Moreover, it is important to recognize the fact that Asia's youth are the major consumers of new media technology through cyber cafes and that this has a tremendous influence on youth culture in Asia.

Cybercafés in Asia have been implicated in numerous debates on the impact of new media technologies in different social and cultural settings. Whether triggered by reports of abusive and addictive uses of gaming, scandals, cybercrimes or security concerns, responses to the use of cybercafés have taken on the characteristics of a moral panic (Lagerkvist, 2010). These responses provide insight into the tensions and pressures of the emerging social dynamics of cybercafé use. Thus while moral panics have been seen as linked to the media, the power relations and contestations that underlie media use arguably owe their complexity to the spaces across in which these dynamics are distributed and in which they are enacted (. Perceptions of ownership, empowerment, moral obligation, normative ideals and resistance are embedded in the discourses of cybercafé owners who carry a burden, imposed by society as well as taken on by themselves, to uphold fluid societal values and act as guardians against moral transgressions

Cybercafés and Moral Panics

Recent theoretical studies on moral panic provide critical reassessments of the paradigms underlying varied approaches to the phenomenon (Critcher, 2009, 2011; Rohloff and Wright, 2010; Young, 2011; Lundström, 2011; Pearce, and Charman, 2011) while empirical works focus primarily on the political and ideological implications of media complicity in its construction (Breanne, Dudy and Stage, 2013; Cossins, 2015; King, 2015; Krinsky, 2013; Lim, 2013; Nicholas and O'Malley, 2013; Puri and Rudy 2012; Rohloff, 2011; Thiel-Stern, 2014). Wallis (2011) examines the dynamics of new media in China with an emphasis on youth uses and practices, and finds that within a highly commercialized and more liberalized socio-cultural environment, new media technologies have opened up new spaces for multiple modes of expression, and as such, they are constitutive of complex processes of social change in China. Also, the regulation of Chinese cafés, following a tragic fire in an illegal café at Beijing had aroused nationwide concern. (Shao, 2010). Ironically the café incident took place because internet cafés in China worked at night by locking the front doors to avoid inspections. Korea has been a focus of similar studies that attempt to shed

light on youth practices of navigating the techno-sphere of new media (Ok, 2011).

Szablewicz (2010) argues that the emphasis on moral culture provides particularly fertile breeding ground for panics over Internet addiction. As a result, contemporary problems tend to be situated within an extended narrative about the struggle to establish a 'civilised' but uniquely Chinese modern state. Across Asia, cybercafés have become important access points for Internet users. The diffusion of new media technologies in Asia, particularly in the less affluent countries of the region, has been marked by the proliferation of cyber kiosks or cafés. Reports of death related to extended gaming in cybercafés in South Korea (BBC News, 2005; McCurry, 2010) have fed moral panics about the dangers of cybercafé gaming in other Asian countries. Fears of access to pornography and its adverse impact on the moral compass of the young have also led to widespread opprobrium, bolstered by actual incidents that locate the source of risk in the physical space of the cybercafé.

Two cybercafé incidents that led to moral panics took place in Rawalpindi (Pakistan) and Guntur (India) respectively. In Rawalpindi, the owner of a cybercafé placed computers in small cabins that he had constructed, and provided a level of privacy that was rare for the conservative city when he equipped each cabin with lockable doors. Young couples taking advantage of this privacy to view pornographic websites together were filmed doing so without their knowledge by cameras that the owner had also installed in each cabin. Their viewing of the websites as well as their activities while doing so were recorded onto CDs and widely distributed around the world. The incident reached tragic proportions when some of the girls captured on film committed suicide, one was killed by her father and two were divorced by their husbands (Rajak, 2011). In Guntur, a similar incident followed the same trajectory, with filming of activity within the cybercafé leading to distribution of CDs and shame-induced suicide. The police said that the owner of the cybercafé had been arrested for attempting to blackmail a girl he had allegedly filmed. The police reported that they had framed a set of rules for the proper operation of a cybercafé but the rules were still pending approval by the government:

"The Internet café cubicle was turning into a cheap mode for spending an hour of privacy. To reduce that we had suggested transparent partitions beyond a height of four feet, maintaining a log book of visitors, making production of photo identity cards compulsory, to cancel the municipal licence if found guilty, levying heavy monetary penalty" (Susarla, 2007)

The specific mechanisms of control and regulations and implementation of the regularities of order within cybercafés across Asia offer a wide spectrum of systems and practices, rooted in the interplay of local institutional forces and indigenous structures of power. While the mainstream moral panic perspective focuses on the role of the media, the issue of how cybercafés are discursively positioned and thence regulated and contested requires greater focus on cultural and political dimensions of the emerging moral regimes of the 'institution' and 'place' of cyberspace.

Space, Marginality and Control

Interviews with cybercafé owners suggest that the cybercafé, as an embodiment of technological complexity shares a space with the family and the public sphere, providing a source for engaging with new objects and imaginations, as well as negotiating an ethically

mediated notion of privacy and collectively recognized delimitation of individual freedom. Owners differed on their stand on violations, with some more focused on their role as entrepreneurs, whose chief aim was to make an income and others taking on a more parental role in their desire to protect the young people who use their café. Not all owners saw it as within their ability to take any form of preventive or corrective action. Yet all were aware of their position in the maelstrom of discourses that pitted the potential of cybercafés against their pitfalls.

Moral policing of cybercafés is effected through various mechanisms. Entry barriers include disallowing schoolchildren or students from entering cybercafés during school days, school hours, and/or class hours; spatial barriers include specifying the distance of a cybercafé from a school/university, and banning private rooms in cybercafés; physical barriers include the prohibition of all types of pornographic materials (i.e. CDs and DVDs) and the viewing of pornography online, banning of alcohol and drugs in the cybercafés, and banning of gaming; technological barriers include software for filtering pornography and for surveillance and control of users; and direct state monitoring involves police and municipal authorities' inspections. What is in effect, therefore, is a strong role taken in the moral policing of cybercafés by both the state and civil society, as evinced by the following excerpt from an interview with a cybercafé owner in Bangladesh:

"There is a Rapid Action Battalion and they called a meeting of cybercafé owners of Sylhet and asked them to not allow young people in the cybercafé. Anyone under 16 should not be admitted.

We were told that we had to register all the users of the café because there is a lot of email abuse done through email, plus youngsters are watching pornography online. So we were told not to allow youngsters to come. Adults have to register when they come into the cybercafé."

—in Sylhet, Bangladesh. (Male owner, 28)

The involvement of the Rapid Action Battalion – an elite anti-terrorism unit of the Bangladesh Police Force – in the policing of cybercafés in Bangladesh is an indication of the seriousness with which these cafés are viewed as threats. The RAB has been identified in human rights abuse cases, and the level of its influence would suggest that cybercafé owners do not have much autonomy in questioning its directives (Buerk, 2005).

The focus on the moral panic and therefore policing activity on the young is clear. If the young are not completely excluded, their usage of the cybercafé is conditional upon parental permission, as in the case of the following excerpt from an interview with a cybercafé owner in India. Again, stringent registration procedures are indicative of the policing that is associated with the cybercafé:

"The Tamil Nadu police have indicated that if underage children come to the cybercafé, the first time the parents have to come and indicate that they have no problem with the child playing games or browsing. This applies to children up to 12 years of age...

They also indicated that the height of the stalls for the cybercafés. If the stall is completely closed, boys and girls cannot be in one together...

A register also has to be maintained of who uses the cybercafé. Each customer must show an ID card, regardless of age."

– in Coimbatore, India (Female owner, 30)

Most cybercafés keep a register/ledger of users, as well as registration forms, in which customers have to enter information such as their full name, their father's/husband's/guardian's name, their date of birth and gender, address, contact number, e-mail address, photo ID, and even blood group. The negotiation is difficult for cafe owners who sometimes defy the rules:

"I have filtering for pornography. I filter for everyone—children and adults. I don't have any age restrictions. It's only legal to access IT services if one has an ID card. The government wants all cybercafe owners to keep a log of who uses the cybercafe. But I don't. The first time the police catches you they give you a warning. The second time, they give you a fine of up to one million dong. I don't do it because customers are uncomfortable. They won't use the service and go somewhere else, where the owner doesn't require the ID. I've been caught once and got a warning... the latest visit, I kept the customer information in my computer and the police didn't give me a fine. I lost a lot of customers when I checked the ID, so I stopped.

-in Dalat, Vietnam (Male, Owner, 28)

He also added that since people resent the requirement what most cybercafe owners do is to keep a fake list in case the police come to check. The cybercafe owners are asked to use filters for very direct political reasons also:

I have a filtering program for pornography and for political issues. The local government tells me what to filter politically. They tell me the keywords to enter and the system searches for them. When someone uses search words in the engine, the computer gets flagged and I then have to give the person a warning. I've never had a case where that has happened. People know that I filter for these two things. This is required for all cybercafe owners. The police checks on the logs and also the filters—they go together.

—in Dalat, Vietnam (Female, owner, 27)

While prohibition of entry to certain age groups or controlling access via conditions of entry are seen as necessary, they are clearly not seen as sufficient in policing the use of the cybercafé. Thus space and other physical barriers may also be manipulated to create conditions for socially approved modes of use. In the above excerpt, the cybercafé owner was directed by the state police to construct stalls only of a certain height. This policing of physical space can be seen also in the following excerpt from an interview with the cybercafé owner in Bangladesh:

"There is a rule that stalls cannot be above a certain height. There can be no doors to the stalls. They cannot be closed.

Younger people can use the cybercafé for schoolwork but they have to be in the open area.

After the meeting, the cybercafé owners' association sent an email to all the cybercafé owners in Sylhet with these three main rules."

- in Sylhet, Bangladesh. (Male owner, 28)

The cybercafé owners' association disseminated the rules to all cybercafé owners. Significantly, the demarcation of personal zones around individual computers while not affording complete privacy is common across cybercafés in many of the small towns in Asia. In the following photograph, taken in Indonesia each computer is situated on a desk

that has raised sides, such that users cannot see each other's screens without visible effort, and consensual sharing of screens will be obvious to the owner. Users' feet are clearly visible, creating an impression of privacy for users even as their movements are available for surveillance by owners.

Policing can also be done through the types of platforms, programmes and services offered. This layers one form of control over another – for example in the following excerpt from an interview with an Indian cybercafé owner, games and privacy are both restricted:

“We don't offer violent games, mostly sports and racing games. I don't want to offer violent games for children. We have open stalls so we can monitor what the kids are doing.”

– in Coimbatore, India. (Male owner, 35, Office bearer in-charge of Coimbatore area, Cybercafé Association of India)

This owner takes an almost paternal view towards the children who use his cybercafé, conveying a sense of personal choice and responsibility in protecting the young from violence, and keeping them safe while they are in his zone of control. Again, the pseudo-parental role is one that is replicated in other countries even as it is manifested differently, as in the case of the following owner in Bangladesh who does not offer games at all. Gaming and schooling are seen as potentially mutually exclusive activities, and a premium is placed on the latter. This is presented as a personal choice rather than a state-imposed directive. Importantly, he also prioritises his role as a business owner who is vulnerable in the face of complaints by parents if he does not pre-empt these complaints:

“If I were to offer gaming it would make things chaotic and the kids would skip school to play games. So it's a personal decision for me... I am also concerned that parents will complain about me or my business.”

– in Jessore, Bangladesh. (Male owner, 40)

Not only in South Asia, but also in Southeast Asia, there is concern about the perceived conflict between cybercafé use and education. In some cases the action taken is not the banning of gaming altogether or of certain genres of games, but in regulation of hours of use to exclude school hours, or even hours that are deemed too late for young children to be engaged in such activity:

“We have our own rules prohibiting students from coming during school hours... We've had this rule since 1998.”

– in Cilegon, Indonesia (Male, manager, 25)

“I won't let kids younger than 18 play in the shop after 10 p.m. I allow kids to come after 4 p.m. If they come during school hours, we turn them away.”

– in Chiang Mai, Thailand (Male owner, 42)

The decisions that owners have to make as they navigate the moral obligations that they have taken on as guardians of access suggests that they frequently calibrate their access based on perceived necessities. There are risks as well as opportunities involved in this monitoring. For instance, owners as guardians do both- moral policing as well as provide targeted help. In order to do this they regulate the access of each person visiting the cafe by watching the monitors of each user in their master computer through specific software so that they can shut down the monitors of the users as and when they transgress.

There are risks as well as opportunities involved in this monitoring. For instance, owners as guardians do both- moral policing as well as provide targeted help. In order to do this they calibrate the access of each person visiting the café by watching the monitors of each user in their master computer through specific software so that they can shut down the monitors of the users as and when they transgress. The following owner portrays this as a personal decision that he has taken upon himself to make. It is not just a matter of allowing or disallowing entry, but at certain times, entry is allowed and certain activities are disallowed. Thus on school days, after school hours, gaming is not allowed, but the computers can be used for school work. This personal and pseudo-parental decision on the part of the owner is benevolently motivated, but arguably involves deeper levels of surveillance and control:

“We don’t let kids come in during the weekday when they are supposed to be in school. We do this as a personal decision.

We let them come in only on weekends. During the week, even after school hours, we don’t allow them to play. But we do let them come in and do schoolwork during the week if they need to have access.”

—in Coimbatore, India (Male owner, 35)

The use of actual software to control cybercafé use is another mechanism that spans multiple countries, and is clearly identified as being implemented for the sake of protecting the young. Personal decisions on the part of owners are again significant, based on varying value sets and perceived dangers:

“I have an advanced level of filtering. I can even block social networking, but I only use it if there is any abuse. I reserve the right to control what people browse for the sake of protecting children and other minors. K9 protection software... [It] scans the whole Internet and blocks things like social networking, specific sex sites, etc. We can decide the level of protection we want to implement. It’s a free software, so anyone can use it... It’s a matter of your values and whether you want to protect young people from certain things.”

—in Coimbatore, (Male owner, 35)

“When I see a big/older boy watching porno, I don’t say anything. But if the big boy has a young one next to him and opens a porno site, I will send him a message and I will ask him to move away. I won’t let him show the young one the porno.”

—in Chiang Mai, Thailand (Male owner, 42)

“From the beginning of the cybercafé, we always filtered pornography. It was part of our policy to have a server filtering pornography because our population is mostly school children... If the customer is an adult, I say nothing. But if it’s a student, I will tell them to turn off the site; if they continue, I shut down the computer.”

– in Sukabumi, Indonesia (Male owner, 30)

“I don’t use filters and I think it is normal for kids to seek [pornographic material], but it should not be done in an open place, where everyone can

see. I would love to teach kids to do the right thing – just look at the pictures and that's it."

—in Ratchburi, Thailand (Male owner, 26)

"I follow all regulations and don't allow [young children] to come alone. I keep track of personal customers. I require ID. This affects my business. They go to other places, but I feel I have to do this; it's the law, so I don't mind."

—in Dalat, Vietnam (Female, owner, 27)

The juxtaposition of the real (i.e. playing with offline friends watching friends play) and the virtual (i.e. communicating with friends online, playing with virtual friends) in one space would seem to represent a heterotopia. Previous studies have shown how the cybercafé allows users to experience both at the same time, being in a real, offline environment and yet immersed in unreal, virtual connections. Based on our findings, however, we add a layer of complexity to this virtual and real distinction. Interviews show that instead, the engagement with technology in the cybercafé can distort the boundaries of presence and co-presence, virtual and real. With actual experiences of technological engagement in cybercafés, concepts of "presence" and "co-presence" blur, and the "real" and "unreal" is rethought. For example, cybercafé respondents mention being able to discuss personal and school problems more deeply with virtual than offline friends, or spend more time gaming with virtual friends. This shows instances of how virtual friends replace or complement physically present friends. Respondents who played with online gaming friends were found to feel comparatively more satisfied with cybercafé use than people who play alone and with offline gaming friends. Conversely, those who play with offline gaming friends are less satisfied than those who play alone and with online gaming friends.

Some young people mention full engagement with their online interactions, driven by hours of use and immersion with the virtual environment, causing them to experience a loss of sense of time, and sometimes forget real world responsibilities (i.e. having to study and attend classes; having to do household chores). And yet for others, the virtual and real move from being a dichotomy to a continuum as people engage with a variety of media (mobile, computer, mp3 players) simultaneously to connect to both virtual and real friends. More interestingly, other users extend the virtual and cybercafé world to their homes, into their imaginations,

"When I was 13, I felt I was addicted because I would not be able to sleep. I would lay awake recounting my tactical errors in game playing, thinking about my gaming strategies"

—in Tacloban, Philippines (Male, user, 16)

Further, the illusion of co-presence in a virtual world that cybercafés promote also alters the dynamics of family. In certain instances, the cybercafé becomes a site for affirming one's capabilities, for developing a sense of "fulfilment" and recognition by others that one normally gets from the strong connections in the family:

When we were at the peak of our game, maybe I was 15 years old then, we played actively and others bet on me and my friends. Sometimes 30 or 35 people would watch us play -even those that didn't gamble would still watch. They would clap, tease the losing group, etc. The café would become very noisy, with people cheering. People would know who I was because of my

game -people would say hello to me and use my handle so I knew they have watched me play. Because we usually go to the same shop to play, they get to know the gamers and the owners. Sometimes I would be known by the name of the shop where I played. Some teams will adopt the name of their shop, sometimes the shop will have its own team, so they will sponsor them. For the World Cyber Game competition, there would be a lot of attention for gamers.

—in Tacloban, Philippines (Male user, 16)

In contrast to being a space for affirming oneself and gaining a feeling of recognition, the cybercafé is not without its tensions. Aside from being feared by some respondents due to group infighting and possible trouble inside the café, the cybercafé is also a site for competition, where status markers are not negated but still very much in place. Among cybercafé gamers, there seems to be status difference operating as well, with professional and slow (“bobo”) users being identified based on capacity to play and number of gamers in one’s network:

There were “bobo” charts for kids who didn’t do well in the games and in the café s it would be displayed. The “bobo” charts were meant to tease the boys who were not so good. The names listed were not their real names, but the handles. They were the poor, bad players for the month. So I began to think of strategies so I would avoid being listed as a bobo.... If you are a bobo you don’t deserve to play. It’s an unspoken rule. So I practiced. To get better I played against the computer and got much better.

—in Tacloban, Philippines (Male, user, 16)

Earlier in the conversation, the same respondent mentioned how, in the earlier days of gaming, he would feel the pressure of “being called a bobo” and this worry would also cause him to lose sleep. Moreover, some respondents expressed concerns about frequent cybercafé visits and about chatting with strangers online. They would exercise care in divulging personal information and pictures to others. Although chatting online assumes a virtual presence, the concern and discomfort expressed by some of the users and young parents interviewed (towards their children) were real. The fear of a virtual encounter having actual effects on young people highlights the reality and interconnectedness of virtual and real worlds. Due to moral panics surrounding cybercafé use that have reached local communities, cybercafé users seem aware of, and concerned about, the possible consequences of cybercafé use. This serves a purpose in terms of making them more conscious of their online interactions. Some of the respondents are young graduates who do not live with their families. They remain connected with their families and friends through cybercafé internet services. And yet, others expressed resentment over this “constant connectedness” that the Internet has allowed. Some expressed the burden of having to meet family and friends’ expectations of immediate response to their emails and reported that their families would get worried if they did not reply. Finally, cybercafés are considered as extensions of the learning environment for some, as they would use the space to conduct educational or work-related research. However, others reported that they are burdened at having to spend time to learn how to use the different technologies in the cybercafé in order to cope with their peers or teachers’ expectations.

Discussion and Conclusions

Cybercafés create complex experiences for youths: they are spaces in which young people maintain and create new social relationships, express themselves, feel an affiliation with others, and gain affirmation of their capacities. At the same time, they are spaces of tension, danger, and competition. Cybercafés are spaces where the concepts of home, school, and community spaces intersect even as they can completely alter one's notion of "family" 'friendship', and 'learning'. The findings suggest that various mechanisms are used by cybercafé owners to control access to the technologies that they are in the business of supplying. As a source of income, they are aware that their profits would be maximised if they did not have to enforce such control. Following a discourse of modernization, they provide a service that opens up new spaces of information, opportunity and progress for the young. However the specific cultural nuances of Asian modernity discourses position them as guardians of youth's morality and safety. Hence for the young, cybercafé s remain mostly as a non-normative space that repeats the regulatory patterns of normal spaces like family or school in much more intensified ways. In fact, every cybercafé makes legible those realms of young life that are brought under the strictest forms of regulation. In spite of not being understood as 'dangerous', these spaces become a locale of risk and vulnerability for the young through the moral controls effected on their use of these spaces. Posited against the society's mainstream acceptance of digitality and communication technologies, especially in the academia and in curriculum designing, the ambivalence toward cybercafé s look curious. The very semiotic of acceptance that defines computer laboratories in campuses and schools and the myth of risk associated with café s, if scrutinized further should definitely reveal where, how, and for whom theses differences flare up and maintain themselves. In the wider contexts of the debates about the multiple modernities of Asian region that are significantly different from the monolithic Western modernity and in the anxieties about the role of technology in the constitution of modernities (Sreekumar 2016) the heterotopic positioning of cybercafé should present a weighty case.

A key mechanism of control is rooted in the spatial order of the interior of the cybercafé, with the arrangement of furniture reflecting social concerns about the dangers of privacy. Local, regional and national codes of entry and use also frame choices made by cybercafé owners. These legal mechanisms are enforced with varying levels of severity, and power relations between the state, civil society and cybercafé owners are implicated in the configurations of enforcement. Depending on location, civil society actors such as religious bodies, schools, parent-teacher associations, local wings of political parties, cyber societies and cybercafé owners' associations enjoy varying amounts of power. Even in the area of the establishment of national and local regulatory regimes, multiple state and civil society institutions are involved.

The codes of ethics used to negotiate the intensity and actual practice of moral monitoring vary widely. Cybercafés are not entirely locally embedded, but the deep contestations of what constitutes moral transgressions and what moulds reactions to digressions in cybercafés are locally mediated and interpreted. The cybercafé is a space of othering, in multiple ways, and it is both revered and feared. For its users, it offers a way to surpass the limitations of a physical place and presents itself as a social space for socialization, interaction, and networking. The level of scrutiny in small towns is not likely to exist in large cities, where cybercafés are likely to be larger. Also, in urban places, cybercafé s are deeply relational to the space integrating several aspects of the urban living (Powell 2004). The othering of the space is a process of 'mediation' that occurs overtime by various representational machineries, resulting in sedimented normative

structures for the everyday mapping of sense, morals, taste etc that makes the boundaries between cosmopolitization and mediation very thin (Jansson 2009). It has been noted that technology usage is largely shaped by the socioeconomic location of the user, especially in places like India in regards to categories like gender and caste (Sreekumar 2011, Sreekumar, 2016). In the present study located in the fringes of cosmopolitan spaces, the semi-urban small towns, we find that a moral control of spaces that cut across this awareness of global processes contribute to the othering of these spaces. The level of control exercised by cybercafé owners in small and medium towns impacts the freedom that youths have when going online, creating a divide between youths in large cities and those who reside in small and medium towns.

We find that like the Foucauldian heterotopias, cybercafés exist in varied geographical, economic and cultural locales, but are yoked together by identifiable similarities in contexts of their constitution. The processes that shape and sustain cybercafés remain varied as well as unifying. The moral milieu at once set these cubicle spaces apart from the normalcy of the 'public' places. Their semi-secretive and exposed condition renders them as unstable regions where, in a way, both secrecy and exposure are regulated as social categories. As heterotopias cybercafés inverse and contest the normalcy of the relations between distributors and consumers of content. The owners of café, even as they are the determining agencies, are themselves regulated by governmental and provincial social actors. As such the role of the cyber café owners remain very fluid and intermediating. One important sense that Foucault's heterotopia brings is its inclusiveness of every other site in order that these sites are both represented and contested. In our enquiry we find that Cybercafés as heterotopias contain the moral tensions of the sites of normality like family, educational and regulatory institutions and that of cyberspace itself, bring these tensions into legible visibility and by remaining as places of interest for the young, renders a domain of transgression for the moral codes. By its very illusory and permeating role in South Asian young life, cybercafés mirror every other space that mould the techno cultural life of the young. They mirror those multiple spaces of techno cultural life of the semi-urban and reveal the larger schema of spaces and their inherent orders. More important than this perhaps are the ways in which cybercafés are also being led into a system of illegitimated control from both the governmental agencies and the operators themselves.

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