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# Using Blogs to Create Cybernetic Space

Examples from People of Indian Origin

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**Abstract** / This article examines the phenomenon of blogging as a way to create a cybernetic space that is defined by the digital/virtual space of the blog discourse and the real space where the blogger is located. By examining several blogs it is argued that for people who have to move from place to place and undergo the diasporic experience, the anxieties of movement and placelessness produced by diaspora can be partly managed by entry into the cybernetic space produced by bloggers. Specifically, this article examines blogs maintained by people of Indian origin who produce a sense of spatial identity through their blogs.

**Key Words** / blogs / cybernetic space / diaspora / India

One of the fastest growing phenomena on the internet at the beginning of the 21st century has been blogging (Blood, 2002). The term blog is an abbreviation for a web log. It refers to a process where people write their personal, and sometimes intimate, thoughts and 'post' that writing to a web space that is accessible by all. In some ways the blog is similar to the journal or diary that many people maintain. However, unlike the private diary that is often not viewed by anyone other than the author and a permitted few, the blog, like a web page, is usually available to be viewed by all with access to the internet and the web. Yet, the blog is as distinctly different from a traditional web page as it is from the traditional private diary.

This study examines many of the characteristics of a blog to draw the connection between blogs, voice, identity, space and movement. In particular, I argue that the blog represents a unique form of discourse that represents the voice of bodies in space. Using a method of discursive analysis it is possible to understand the way in which the person who writes a blog produces a specific identity narrative that is rooted in real space while at the same time expressing the voice in cyberspace, eventually using the blog to carve out a synthetic cybernetic space. The argument is supported by providing evidence from blogs selected to represent the different ways in which people use discourse to produce

their identity in cybernetic space. Understanding this process would help to explain the reason why blogs have become popular as well as explore the way in which the new technologies are allowing the creation of new identities.

The blog, like other components of the internet, offers the opportunity for people to use their own voice, through the texts and discourse they create, to produce the identity of the blogger who is located in a specific and unique place. Eventually, the readers of blogs move into the space created by the blogger when they read a blog. To many readers, finding this space is particularly critical because the spaces created by the blogs could be ones that the reader was once familiar with but has perhaps become distant from, for instance, through a process of migration. Thus, I would argue that blogs can play a crucial role in the diasporic experience where people find themselves moving away from familiar places and having to live in new places. In such cases, blogs can help to recreate the space that has been relinquished.

In the first part my goal is to lay out the way in which the internet can be considered as a synthetic space made up of the real and the virtual where people are able to voice themselves. Thereafter it is possible to place the blog within the spatial and discursive framework of the internet.

## Internet as a Discursive Virtual Place

To begin with it is important to consider the internet not just as a technological innovation but as a discursive<sup>1</sup> formation that has taken on a global scale. It is possible to claim that much of the internet is made up of texts, images and artifacts which all combine to make up its discursive backbone. Thus an analysis of the internet needs to consider the way in which the texts and discourses function. To begin with, it is important to recognize that the internet can be considered as a discursive 'space' which is composed of numerous discourses that are strung together with the use of a rhizomatic network of computers that are constantly being scaled up. As a result, there are millions of web pages that contain an almost infinite number of texts, and they remain hyperlinked together creating a discursive infrastructure whose physical location is nearly impossible to pinpoint and map, but whose presence is felt the moment one accesses the discourse using a networked computer. This is not a space that has any tangible existence as in the case of the traditional spaces that can be felt using all the senses; instead the internet can only be experienced discursively where its composition is the product of the way in which numerous texts are connected together.

Thinking of the internet as a space is a deliberate metaphoric intent. Indeed, this has been a part of the internet lexicon from its early days when it was described as 'cyber-space' and the 'information superhighway'. Both of these popular terms embraced the spatial metaphor without necessarily detailing what was specifically spatial about the internet (Baym, 1995; Chi, 1995; Hyde and Mitra, 2000; Landow, 1992; Mitra, 1997, 2006; Mitra and Cohen, 1999; Mitra and Swartz, 2001). That specificity is obtained when we remind ourselves that the internet is composed of discourses, and that interconnected discourses can produce a 'sense' of place that has no characteristics of traditional tangible places. Thus the discourses create a virtual place whose texture is the product of the quality of those discourses. In other words, a web page about a particular physical place can be so detailed and nuanced that readers can feel that they have visited the place in

reality, whereas the experience has been restricted to the two-dimensional experience of consuming a discourse on the computer screen. What is important to note, however, is that the virtual experience of visiting the place would not have been possible without the real opportunity of using a networked computer located in a real space.

## Real and Virtual Making it a Cybernetic Space

In this section my intention is to destabilize the importance that the concept cyberspace has obtained by arguing for the importance of real space as a corollary of cyberspace. The combination of the real and the virtual is critical to understanding the way in which the internet has evolved since its inception. In the beginning there was significant emphasis placed on the notion of cyberspace, which was almost constructed to be an entity distinct from life as we knew it. Interestingly, however, cyberspace remained yet another space that was created from the discourse that resided in the digital realm, but was created by real people living in real spaces from where they were speaking. This conjunction of the real and the virtual actually ended up producing a synthetic new space whose existence is predicated by the presence of the voices of real people operating within the virtual (Mitra and Swartz, 2001). This place where the real and the virtual come together can be thought of as a cybernetic space, which would cease to exist if either the real people disappeared or if the digital technology became non-existent.

It is important to place the idea of the blog within the context of cybernetic space because bloggers indeed live in the synthetic congruence of the real and the virtual. The voices of bloggers are produced from real places and are implicated by the location of the bloggers, but the discourses that make up the voices reside in cyberspace, which is fundamentally place-less since there are no clear boundaries that can be placed on the reach of cyberspace. The moment the real person is able to produce a blog a voice has been placed in the cybernetic space where the traditional limits of real life could be irrelevant. The voices of bloggers are thus able to travel seamlessly across large distances and the readers of the blogs are also able to reside in cybernetic space and be a part of the discursive space and thus feel a sense of belonging in the 'blogspheres' that are discursively produced. The internet in general, and blogs in particular, are thus able to draw a unique connection between voice and place that would not have been possible until the new technologies produced cybernetic space.

## Voice and Place

There has always been an intimate connection between voice and place since the speaking body is always rooted in real space and this section examines this relationship in view of the new spaces being created by the digital technologies. The traditional relationship between voice and place gets contested when bodies speak in cybernetic space because a paradoxical situation is produced that is implicated by the new technologies. While the speakers in cybernetic space transcend the boundaries of analogic space, what they say could remain undeniably embedded to the space they are speaking from. Bakhtin (1981) makes this point quite eloquently in reminding us that the voice of an author is already and always implicated by the space where the speaker is located. A fundamental aspect of Bakhtin's notion of dialog and heteroglossia is implicated by the

fact that the speakers are placed in a specific space and what they say and how they say it is thus a product of the space they occupy.<sup>2</sup> In drawing together the various aspects of the notion of voice, Watts (2001) makes the point that voice can be considered a form of agency and the speaker, or agent, operates within a social milieu which implicates what the speaker may say and how something may be articulated. Evidence of this process can be seen in the case of speakers who speak of specific issues that relate to the space or place they occupy. The way the voice of a speaker is influenced by the location of the speaker in physical and ideological space can be seen in a diverse set of circumstances from mediated communication to interpersonal communication (e.g. Morris, 1999; Natarajan and Xiaoming, 2003). Eventually most speakers tend to represent the space they are speaking from in their voice.

In the case of the new technology of the web, however, the relationship between voice and space is further complicated by an intricate relationship between the two constructs. First, the speaker often speaks in a way that demonstrates the cybernetic location of the speaker in real and virtual space, which could be mutually exclusive from each other. In other words, the speaker could be physically located in one place but when they are on the internet they choose to dwell in a place different from where they are physically (Mitra, 2005). However, as they speak from this cybernetic space they produce a discursive space. A reader entering this discursive space may find it a comforting place because it produces a safe place where the reader, who in the interactive space of the internet, can enter into a dialog and thus accentuate the nuances of the place. Eventually this interactive and cyclical process produces the synthetic dwelling place where the significance of physical location is constantly challenged, problematized and eventually diluted. Evidence of this process is drawn from the way in which certain blogs operate in the discursive space of the web.

## **Blogs as Voice**

This section demonstrates how blogs can be considered to be voices. There are many characteristics to the process of blogging, but among them, the one that is of greatest importance for the current analysis is that individuals are able to voice themselves through a blog and that that voice has the potential of being heard by the entire community of people who are on the web. While there is sufficient discussion on the reason that people blog, without a clear consensus on the motive, it is the case that blogging is certainly a popular phenomenon (see e.g. Cayzer, 2004; Gordon-Murnane, 2006; Mongkolwat et. al., 2005; Nardi et. al., 2004). The process of maintaining a personal 'home' page is similar to blogging and there is evidence to suggest that personal pages on the web also offer the opportunity of voicing oneself (Mitra, 2004). However, unlike the home page which is often a more 'static' construct and could be more 'formal' in structure, the blog remains far more dynamic and is often updated more frequently and thus offers a sense of immediacy and intimacy that the personal home page might not. Also, in most cases, the computer programs used to maintain blogs offer a greater degree of interactivity than a personal home page does. In other words, one could have a home page where the reader can learn quite bit about the author of the page, but there would be minimal opportunities for feedback, whereas in the blog, there is often ample options for writing comments or responding directly to the blog. Finally, in most cases, the process of creating

a blog is no more complicated than typing out some text sitting at any computer connected to the internet, whereas the process of creating a home page could require higher levels of computer skill and access.

The blog thus offers a specific opportunity to find a place where one can voice oneself on a large variety of issues. The discursive process creates a sense of space and those reading blogs often enter this discursive space that is created by the network of blogs that are available. In most cases, the blogs, although written by many different people, are clubbed together and thus reading one blog can easily lead to finding other similar blogs. Eventually multiple blogs end up producing a collective voice that can create a discursive space which is populated by those who create the blogs as well as by those who read them.

What is interesting about this space is that the discourses are produced by people who might occupy many different real spaces and their voices are tainted by the place they are writing from. Thus a blog carries traces of a real space while it produces the virtual discursive space. Those who interact with blogs, either by reading them or by writing them, thus occupy a cybernetic space that offers the opportunity to dwell in a virtual space that is discursively produced while living in a real place very distant from the virtual space. This distance is produced by the fact that a blog represents the virtual convergence of people who are in reality distant from each other. Yet in the cybernetic space of the blog, the bloggers can reproduce the real spaces they inhabit – the places they are writing from. This is evident in a variety of blogs, and for the purpose of the current analysis, I focus on blogs that are produced by people of Indian origin to demonstrate how the real space is inscribed in the discourse of the bloggers.

## A Word on Method

An analysis that focuses on discourses is often critically dependant on the specific discourses that are selected for analysis. There are several reasons for selecting to work with people of Indian origin. First, in most cases, people from India who are blogging are most likely to use the lingua franca of the internet – English. This is related to the fact that after 200 years of British domination, educated people in India are generally conversant with English. This is certainly related to the colonial history of India and is also related to the fact that a large portion of people of Indian origin who have left India now live in English-speaking countries and thus continue to blog in English. Secondly, India as a nation offers a political and cultural landscape that has minimal restrictions on the use of the internet. Even though availability of the internet is concentrated in the urban areas, those who do have access to the internet are usually unfettered in their ability to voice themselves unlike in many other countries.<sup>3</sup> Thirdly, like many other developing countries, India is witnessing an increasing warming of relationship with the West. This has resulted in larger numbers of people from India traveling globally. Some travel away as immigrants albeit with close ties with India, while others could be sojourners who are only away for long enough to develop a yearning for home and the desire to remain connected to India during their time away.<sup>4</sup> Finally, like other developing nations, there is an existing and emergent generation in India who lives within a hybridized culture which incorporates many of the popular cultural practices of the West and blogging is increasingly a rage in India as it is globally. Thus there are good reasons to use blogs of

people of Indian origin as a focus of attention not only to explore the substance of what the blogs are saying but also to expand upon the premise – blogs represent spatially nuanced voices that create a peculiar and synthetic sense of space and place for their readers.

As in the case of much research on the internet, there is never a particularly good place to start. With thousands of blogs being available globally it is nearly impossible to come up with a specific sampling criterion to select them. Any selection would have certain biases. However, by applying some of the criteria pointed out by Mitra and Cohen (1999), it is possible to claim that the site called 'Desipundit: The Best of Indian Blogosphere' (henceforth referred to as 'Desi') offers a good starting point since it provides a large compilation of blogs maintained by people of Indian origin and these blogs offer examples of the ways in which the spatial location of the authors temper their voices (blog [desipundit.com](http://desipundit.com), continuous date).<sup>5</sup> This particular website presents a compilation of blogs maintained by Indians and people who might have an interest in India. To be sure, there are numerous other such portals that offer a starting point for the exploration of Indian blogs by listing numerous bloggers. Perhaps, one of the others could also be used as a starting point. The important thing to note is that the starting point is merely just that – a point from where mouse clicks take the reader to different degrees of separation from the starting point but could well open up further blogs that help to illustrate the way in which blogs remain spatially influenced.

It is also important to note that unlike the analysis of web pages, the analysis of blogs needs to be sensitive to when the blog is being produced. One of the key differences between the relatively static personal home page and the much more dynamic blog is that the latter is often updated every day, sometimes several times a day and the discursive analysis needs to know when the blog was authored. Specific moments can generate blogs that have similar themes. Thus, people blogging during the end of December and early in January might all have the common theme of resolutions for a new year. This is important to note because such themes could be spatially nuanced and the discourses could demonstrate how the spatial location influences how specific themes are voiced. Additionally, blogs represent a level of interactivity that is more elaborate than in the case of the web page. As mentioned earlier, blogs often provide the opportunity for readers to respond to the blogger, and those responses could well be a part of the blog discourse and in the totality of the voice of the blogger, and the voice of the respondents is a peculiar discursive space produced by a blog and all that surrounds it. Finally, much like on web pages, bloggers refer to each other and any blog could become the portal for numerous other blogs or similar virtual discourses which all connect up to create a sense of space. The current analysis remains faithful to all these nuances, and beginning with the compilation of blogs it is possible to trace certain ways in which the voices of the bloggers create a sense of space and place. The next three sections lay out the major findings about the way in which space is inscribed in the discourse.

## Finding 1: Self-Disclosed Space

Perhaps the most obvious way in which a blogger's spatial identity is revealed is by self-disclosure where the blogger clearly states the location. In the case of Desi the first page offers a series of links to many different blogs. When navigating into Desi the reader is

provided with a list of blogs that have been posted most recently (Figure 1), but there is no indication of where the blogger is located. The opening screen only serves as a portal for numerous blogs and the only organizing principle is temporal. Desi constantly updates itself and lists the most recent posts in chronological order. That order is frequently independent of any thematic similarity unless the time of the postings coincides with some important event. Typically, the blogs appear disconnected from each other.

One would have to move one degree of separation away from this page and actually open up a particular blog to find an indication of the location of the blogger. If one were to click on an appropriate link, the reader is transported to the specific blog and there it might be the case that the author explicitly states the location of place from where he or she is writing. For instance in some cases, as shown in Figure 2, there is specific spatial reference where the author states that the person's location is in Mumbai and Pune. This is a trend that can be seen in numerous blogs that can be reached from the Desi page where the place is explicitly mentioned. However, there is also a large number of blogs where the first mouse click would not necessarily reveal the location, but would only offer the content of the most recent blog posting. The reader then either has to actively look for explicit location information or has to enter the blog space without having a clear notion where the speaker is and thus having to construct the 'author's location by looking for other spatial markers. Consider the blog shown in Figure 3 where there is no explicit

**FIGURE 1**  
The opening page of Desi



FIGURE 2  
Blog with specific location information



indicator of location. It is in such cases that the issue of discursive construction of space becomes particularly important and it becomes necessary to tease out the spatial location of the blogger through an interpretive process where the discourse contains clues about the speaker's location. Eventually those clues help to place the blogger in a specific location as well as construct the space the reader is able to enter.

There are several ways in which the discourse produces a sense of place and origin and most of the strategies are produced by reference to peculiar practices, events and situations that are specifically based in a place. Reading the discourse thus provides a glimpse of the practices of the place and eventually a notion of the place from which the blogger is speaking. For example, a couple of degrees of separation from the first page of Desi takes the reader to a blog where 'Terri' posts about the experience of watching a mature Indian film with children (blog terrisampat.blogspot, 2006). The post has a certain comic appeal but there is no clear indicator of the location of the author. The text rotates around the perils of watching movies in the company of children and reflects on the embarrassment and awkwardness of having to sit and watch a movie in the privacy of a home while children could be asking difficult questions about the content of the movie. While this could be a universal phenomenon, the post from Terri, does provide an indicator of the place where the author is writing from by saying:

FIGURE 3

## Blog with no specific location information



Anu: Can I watch Salaam Namaste with you? Please?

Mom: Why?

Anu: I like Safely (an ABCD pronunciation of Saif Ali), and you said there was no violence in the movie.

The term that is of interest is 'ABCD' since it can be assumed that many readers would recognize that to be the abbreviation that stands for 'America Born Confused Desi': a pejorative epitaph attached to the generation of children of Indian immigrants born and brought up in the USA. In using that term, the author displays a sense of the place from which the blog is produced. The term itself becomes an indicator of a specific material practice that is peculiarly place-specific and reference to that practice produces the location information for the blogger, placing the blogger within the context of the place where the blog is written. There are many instances of this phenomenon where the blogger does not disclose the location in an explicit statement but location is etched in the discourse through the use of specific terms.

The spatial location of the author can also be inscribed in self-disclosure that can be tucked somewhere in the discourse and the reader would eventually stumble on it. Consider, for instance, the post from 'Arun' who presents an amusing example of the vagaries of securing employment after being educated at a premier institute of

management in India (blog arun-p-anand.blogspot, 2006). The blogger presents a hypothetical situation without necessarily inscribing in the text the location from which the blog is written. It is clear that the blog refers to a place of higher education in India but only at the end of the lengthy blog does Arun say, 'Its just a hypothetical-next-to-door Student that i depicted here. Let me get placed next year same time (1/1/07) to see there is any correlation.' In this statement, the blogger reports the location of the writer. Indeed, there are several examples of this phenomenon where the spatial inscription is eventually disclosed by the author within the text of the blog, even though the specific topic of the blog does not directly relate to the issue of space. Thus 'Manoramabai' writes, 'Every time I have met a fellow Ag in Seattle, without fail, once we discovered we were both Aggies, it was as though we'd recovered long lost family or a best friend, regardless of the fact that until that moment we'd been strangers' (blog wondrousbeauty.livejournal, continuous date). While much of the content posted by this particular blogger deals with issues of society and culture from the perspective of a person of South-Asian origin, it is only in an indirect way that the blogger indicates location. No doubt, that knowledge helps to contextualize the voice and the discursive space that the blog produces. Eventually, that information also allows the reader to enter the space that the blogger creates by a mutual appreciation of the 'where the blogger is coming from'.

## Finding 2: Referential Space

While space could be inscribed within the text by reference to practices and by spatial self-disclosure, another way in which spatial information can be provided is through statements to what the blogger does and it can be assumed that specific things can only be done in certain spaces. Consider the post by 'The Comic Project', who does not disclose location or refer to specific practices but refers to a movie at the end of the post saying, 'And I am also planning to watch *Rang De Basanti* tonight. So me and IP going. The local theatre advertised a special PREVIEW and the theaterwalla said that it is the full movie (when I asked). If so, it will be my first FDFS (First day first show) in a long long long time.' The reference to 'theaterwalla,' 'full movie' and the specific abbreviation of 'FDFS' suggests that the author is most probably located in India. In this case, the author has presented this information not with the purpose of disclosing location and information about himself but space has been created simply through the description of what the author does. Similarly, consider for instance a blog by 'mitokondrion' who does not claim a spatial location in the opening page of the blog, but on 2 February 2006 posts a blog that states: 'Sneaked out of lab today to listen to the President of India His Excellency APJ Abdul Kalam. He's in Singapore this week, and spoke today on the Evolution of Enlightened Societies on our Planet, at the 27th Singapore Lecture' (blog mitokondrion.blogspot, 2006). There are some other indicators on the page that the author of this blog resides in Singapore, but that information is not made explicit. Indeed, in this case the same blogger had a post where he or she posted a personal send off for a co-worker leaving the workplace. That particular blog does not disclose anything about the place of work, and the reader would have to deduce that the blogger has some connection with Singapore because there is a link about Singapore (mitokondrion.blogspot, 2005). These are thus instances of situations where location is disclosed almost inadvertently.

### Finding 3: Absent Space

Finally, there are instances where the spatial location is completely absent within the text of the blog, and the reader must go past the first few degrees of freedom in order to get a sense of where the speaker is located and thus be able to contextualize what is being said. For instance in a series of posts about the value of introducing a large multi-national chain store in India a blogger says:

*I just came back from Wal-Mart and if it were not for Wal-Mart I'd be paying at least twice as much shopping at mom and pop stores on the main street. My parents in India would go to shop at Wal-Mart in the blink of an eye because I know they are tired of the neighborhood 'kirana' store who sells everything at MRP [Maximum Retail Price] keeping a fat profit for himself and his inefficiencies. And the last time I saw the 'kirana' guy donating money was in a temple asking god for forgiveness for he had not paid his income tax again that year. (blog arthshastra, no date)*

There are some indicators to suggest that the author is not in India but there is not much more information in the entire post to clarify the geographic location of the author.

In most cases, however, the authors are willing to disclose their spatial locations or it is relatively simple to find the location. What is important in the case of the blogging process is to note that the spatial indicator, either explicit or implicit, positions the author in the real component of cybernetic space, but the authors often create unique virtual spaces that eventually produce the cybernetic virtual space that the readers enter as they read the blogs. The voices of many bloggers when collated together in a site like Desi thus produce the cybernetic blogosphere, where the notion of space takes on an open-ended characteristic produced by people located across the globe who write about themselves and offer the reader the opportunity to dwell in many different places while in the blogosphere.

## Implications

### *Creating Spaces in Blogosphere*

There are three primary ways in which space becomes relevant and critical with respect to blogs. First, space is produced by each author in the way they disclose it in the blog, secondly space is created in the substance of the discourse as authors present personal perspectives in their blogs. Readers of the blog glean spatial information from both these textual components and readers of blogs enter spaces created in the congruence of the real location of the author and the discursively produced virtual space. It is thus useful to understand how bloggers create spaces through their specific discourses.

One of the ways in which space is produced is by writing blogs that are about real spaces. Thus there are those who maintain travel blogs and within Desi there are instances of authors whose blogs refer specifically to travels in different places. Independent of the place where the author is writing from, these blogs can produce a discursive sense of space and those readers who enter this space are able to visit the specific places described in the blogs. Consider for instance the blogs by Rahul who claims to live in India and almost every blog has a reference to a place where the author is at any moment (blog greenchannel, 2004). Reading a blog such as this or the ones maintained by others such as 'Emma' (blog albernagedanken, 2006) or 'lily b' (blog thatdamndog, 2006), take

readers to specific places and, assuming that the bloggers are able to be eloquent, the entry into the spaces can vary from being just informative to being a literary experience. In some ways these blogs mimic the more traditional genre of the travel writers who have chronicled their travels across the globe. Yet, the blogs often are far more intimate and current than the best of travel writers. Since bloggers often produce their posts as they are traveling and report their experiences immediately there emerges a sense of realism that is unique to the blogging phenomenon. At the same time, blogs often generate immediate responses from the readers who present their own narratives about the same topic. Eventually the network of texts creates a discursive space that can become palpable in cybernetic space as the reader is able to negotiate the texts to get a sense of the place being described. In many ways this experience remains more intimate and involved than the process of reading one or more travel guide, which could be informative documents but might not create the palpable space that is produced by travel blogs.

A second way in which space is produced by bloggers is through the process of spatial commentary. In such cases the focus is not on describing a particular travel experience but on describing in detail the dwelling place of the blogger. In many cases there is a specific nostalgic element to this form of spatial description where the bloggers are often able to reference places in a manner that can carry emotional traces and thus produce a place in very idiosyncratic ways that can become culturally and historically charged. There are many examples of such blogs, but these commentaries often take on a particular vibrancy when there are multiple bloggers who write about the same space. Consider for instance the discussion initiated by the blogger 'Preshaan' who writes about Delhi in India and others engage in a dialog creating a more variegated sense of the place for the reader (blog *desipundit*, 2006). In a similar vein another blogger, 'ash' writes about the city of Kolkata in India. In this particular case, the location of the author is not disclosed but space is created primarily by the description of the place visited by the author (blog *vsequeira*, 2005). These are a few of the numerous examples on Desi where the very objective of maintaining a blog is to describe and comment on a specific real space that is carefully discursively constructed so that readers can comfortably enter and dwell in the blog's space.

A third way in which space is produced is by mere reference to a place to accentuate an argument the blogger is making. In such cases the focus is often not on place at all, but the issue, phenomenon or idea that the blogger is describing requires specific spatial reference. In these cases the spatial reference is not only geographic, but often ideologically inscribed as the reader is able to enter a political and cultural space referred to by the author. This is witnessed in cultural and political commentary about issues that remain peculiarly spatial and it becomes important to have an appreciation of the place in order to follow the particular argument. Among many such blogs on Desi, an example is the one from 'sloganmurugam', who describes examples of prejudice in Indian hotels. The particular piece and the accompanying comments from other bloggers refer to a process that is essentially spatially bound, and a reader of this particular post will necessarily have to enter a specific space to understand what the blog wants to say (blog *spaces.msn*, no date). In similar ways, others also create space as in the chilling description of an assault on a woman in India where the author describes her experience and has to necessarily place it in a spatial context thus allowing the reader to enter the specific place where a particular incident might have happened (blog *egosleeve*, no date).

Finally, there are blogs where there is no attempt to create a space at all and there are no references to spatial elements in the blog's content. Yet in such cases a blog can create space by the use of language and the images used to create it. These inadvertently create space, which nevertheless needs to be recognized to be able to interpret and enjoy the blog.

### *Implications for Diaspora*

The key issue is to be able to place the understanding of blogs within the context of diaspora. As discussed earlier, the notion of diaspora is closely related to the process of loss of one real space and the gain of a new place. Contemporarily, the examination of diaspora has increasingly focused on people who have chosen to be diasporic through the process of migration. These are people who have left a place of origin, such as India, and moved to a new place. This movement is accompanied by many different anxieties and crises, among which the desire to rediscover the lost 'old' space is often critical. There is a fair amount of scholarship that considers the different strategies of finding the place of origin, but in this case, I would argue that the process of entering a blogosphere such as Desi, for the diasporic Indian, can help to recreate, in cybernetic space, the original real space left behind. Curiously, for those who are not diasporic in reality and are still in India, the blogosphere also helps to create a virtual space that is foreign, and through which those Indians can gain a sense of being virtually diasporic, particularly if they spend a significant amount of time in blogospheres such as Desi. These blogs thus become a portal to places different from that occupied by the reader, and bloggers use many different overt and inadvertent strategies to allow readers to enter these spaces.

This process is particularly critical since it is no longer the case that people stay in one place for long periods of time. For a large cross-section of a 'middle-class' socio-economic group, movement is a part of the lived experience. Such movement, domestically within a nation or across borders in international migration, is wrought with challenges. Often technologies such as the blog can help to alleviate some of those challenges by offering a cybernetic space where people can find the voices of others who either represent similar anxieties or offer tales of a familiar real place that can often be comforting. The new technology has made this peculiarly possible because collections such as Desi offer a centralized location where many different blogs are found, many of which allow people to 'travel' to and 'dwell' in the space discursively created by the blog.

The technological aspect is important to note, because blogs present a technology that remains unique within the different technologies available on the internet. Unlike web pages that are often institutionally maintained, blogs represent a personal voice of people who are speaking for themselves as opposed to speaking for others. Thus the voices that create the spaces are accentuated with personal and ideological overtones that can provide a very special image of a place, which the readers might never find in web pages or other forums. Furthermore, the blogs not only represent the voices of the speakers who are creating the discourse of the blog, but these voices often are connected with many other voices that appear together as in the case of Desi with its numerous bloggers. Indeed it is this network of voices, made up of many bloggers, as well as those who respond to blogs, that eventually creates the sense of place that the readers can enter. These voices are also unlike emails and instant messages since blogs send the

personal message to a large and anonymous audience unlike the personal message systems that have a limited and known audience. In other words, there is a large difference between sending emails about one's travels to friends and family and maintaining a travel blog that many different people can read.

Finally, it would be incorrect to assume that blogs by themselves can fulfill all the needs of the diasporic. Without a doubt, the diasporic will need much more than the cybernetic space of the blog to negotiate the complex identity that is produced as a result of movement. However, blogs and the space they create, can offer a sense of comfort and security that the real space might not provide. At the same time, the blogs, like much of the internet, offer an opportunity for the individual to gain a voice where the determinate moment of empowerment comes when someone can sit down in front of the computer and, using their voice, create a space that many others can inhabit.

## Conclusion

In the end what remains important to note is that there were nearly 150 million bloggers in 2006 and the number has grown since then. At the same time the blog is a completely portable application. The location of the author becomes irrelevant in this process which has allowed people to maintain blogs from anywhere in the world. Yet the updated information becomes immediately available to the global audience. For example, a person who is traveling internationally can update a blog from any public computer that is connected to the internet as in the case of subscribers to the website called 'TravelBlog' which says on its main web page: 'Designed for travellers, this site includes features that allow you to update friends and family on your adventures.' This aspatial aspect of the blog makes it a particularly effective way for people to create an identity that is a product of the person's voice in cybernetic space without any necessary tethering in real space. As this study demonstrates, it is important to attend to the discourse that makes up the blog to understand the role the blog plays in the life of an individual, and collectively the role blogs play for specific sub-cultures that could be dealing with the angst of spatial movement.

## Notes

- 1 The term discursive is used as a derivative of the term discourse where discourse refers to socially situated and motivated text. The meaning of the combination of texts that make up a discourse is produced by their social location within a cultural milieu (Fiske, 1987). When discourses congeal to create a specific cultural space, that space is considered a discursive formation and the texts are open to discourse analysis to examine the way in which the combination of texts produce meaning.
- 2 To be sure, part of the relationship between voice and place hinges on the way in which place is conceptualized. It is possible to demonstrate that on one hand geographic place can have a specific effect on voice and language just as ideological space, defined by vectors of difference based on gender, race, and nationality, can have an effect on what is said.
- 3 There are many ways in which governments attempt to control blogs and bloggers. In countries such as China there are mechanisms in place that would not allow major internet companies to provide blogging forums or would require private corporations to divulge personal information about bloggers if a blogger was deemed to be saying things counter to the government's policy (see e.g. Morphy, 2006).
- 4 There is increasing evidence of the various forms of travel where some would be leaving a country for ever with no intention of returning while others come into a new country for a short time only. There

are many examples in the case of people of Indian origin, who stay in a place such as the USA for a short time on a fixed work assignment, while others might be there for long periods of time, eventually becoming residents of the new country.

5 URLs of blog websites are listed in the reference list.

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