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# CRBTs, LMAOs, ROFLs: Curtailing emotions through cyber-acronyms

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## Abstract

Cultural symbols- such as arts, music, literature, movies, novels, history- when shared by the members of a particular culture, remain as dormant in them until and unless they get in contact with a different culture. The exposure to a different culture gives a scope to distinguish between one's own culture and another. Similarly the technological advancement (basically in the field of communication) has gradually created two types of culture within a particular community/nation/group: a 'real' culture which is the embodied experience of a particular group of people or a community and the 'cyber' culture which is the result (or experience) of extensive consumption of computer mediated communication (CMC). This exposure in the computer-mediated area (basically known as cyberspace) creates a different level of behavioural pattern in human. By inviting the body and the senses into our dance with our tools, it has extended the landscape of interaction, to new topologies of pleasure, emotion and passion. Thus the current paper tries to discuss the rechanneled emotions through *technossories* and investigate if it is making us techno-bodies or *tech-nobodies*. The study is about differentiating emotions at two levels: the embodied emotion and the disembodied emotion. The paper deals with the issue that how far the technological adherence marks the alienation of long nurtured social bond that we used to know.

## Emotion or e-motion?

*Our passionate response to VR [virtual reality] mirrors the nature of the medium itself. By inviting the body and the senses into our dance with our tools, it has extended the landscape of interaction, to new topologies of pleasure, emotion and passion (Laurel, 1993).*

-Brenda Laurel, *Computers as Theatre*

The proximity between *technosorries* (technological accessories) and human marked a new epoch in the language system. Besides oral and written form of language, a third type has evolved with its revolutionary image: electronic or computer-mediated language. Computer-mediated communication systems are believed to have powerful implications on social life. This system of communication transgresses what is collective and what is individual. Hence, a tension is created with identity: an offline identity and an online identity. The confusion, tension, imbalance whatever we like to tag it with the focus supposedly remains in the arena of how we are dealing with this self-anticipated duality.

### Repudiated Self?

Marshall McLuhan in his book *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (McLuhan 1994) gives an interesting idea about technology. He shows how we are becoming maimed while superficially being extended by the boon of technology. And my current paper somehow follows McLuhan's idea of amputation of human agencies while there is propinquity between technology and human. Interestingly we think ourselves as technobodies while there is a chance of being *tech-nobodies* in dealing with the items we are bestowed with. Every extensions of mankind, especially the technological extensions, have also the flipping side of amputating or modifying some other extensions. Just as the development of gunpowder maimed or curtailed the skill of archery or the invention of telephone extends the voice but maimed the penmanship, similarly the overwhelming usage of cyber technology curtailing our emotional expressions. Let us consider the chat history below:

*Rachel: Dude m got fished up*

*Macklin: sup*

*Rachel: Moms gonna ban my going to gaming zone*

*Macklin: LOL*

*Rachel: CID*

*Macklin: Let's see wat happens...FC Dude*

*Rachel: CRBT ☹*

Definitely one would get confused after going through above chat history. Yes, this is the case when we are too much accustomed to online behaviour. Let me clarify some of the above acronyms: CRBT means Crying Real Big Tears; CID means Crying in Disgrace; FC means Finger crossed and I hope LOL need not to be abbreviated!

Let us try some theoretic consideration in depicting the relationship between human and technology. As structuralism tends to bind us in a structure we human habitually try to breach it and this is the result of breaching: avoiding the structured grammatical rules and way of addressing. The psychoanalytical explanation seems more interesting. Why do we think this virtual entity seems to be more exciting for us? What if I say this is the way of personality formation: an introvert turning out to be an extrovert and vice versa. The outcome of this online interaction is a formation of an e-identity, a virtual whole which is greater than its part and that not being real, is full of life and vitality. In seeking impunity from the age old norms and rules, the "self" gets its virtual identity as unrestrained, less accountable, a little bit on the dark side and unknowingly sexier. This e-personality can act as a liberating force for the real life individual, allowing the person to transcend debilitating shyness, let go of the stultifying and suffocating inhibition and forge him/her into new arena of expression which in real life would seem impossible. It is in many cases complements the real life persona and acts as an extension serving him with vitality, promptness and efficiency. It covers the instant *hi hello* area to the more vigorous forces that culminates in Revolution 2.0 in Egypt. Disdaining the implicit inertia it helps breaking ice with the significant other over e-mail and also let go of an awkward situation just by blocking and hiding which in real life seems

embarrassing. And to sum up we can say having a virtual persona can be like having a proverbial third hand.

But are we so sure of the fact that this cyber world not creating an anarchy itself? Are we not *fetishized* by its enticing ingredients? So, if we flip the other side of the coin we find desperation, confusion, pain, disorientation in real life. That is because the online persona is dangerous and irresponsible; making the “self” rough and reckless in its move and encourage attaining unrealistic and unhealthy goals. It nourishes selfishness and creates a sense of isolation yet lingering in a community. The other day I came across a facebook status and that provoked my thought. Here is the status:

*Life is like Facebook... people will like your problems and comment on it.. but no one gonna solve them..coz everyone is busy updating their own*

This status reminds me of the famous poem *Leisure* by William Henry Davies. We are too busy and indulged in maintaining “self” that we almost forgot we are in close tie with our surroundings. Wordsworth tripartite relationship seems to dissolve amidst this technocratic modification of us. We rely on technology to fill up our fellow-feeling and texting, chatting, messaging are a good source of marking our presence when needed. We just let our sympathy or empathy limited to *GWS Bro* (Get well soon brother), *It's K* (it's Okay), *CRBT* (Crying real big tears) etc. The online arena serves double edged effect here: I) It makes easier to cooperate II) It also make easier to behave selfishly; and not acknowledging our gradual transformation we deliberately lenient of the latter one. The reason behind this let go attitude, what I presume, is that the disembodied interaction does not allow us to get the gesture and posture of the person we are interacting and hence neglecting is easier. We are also in a constant better to say IM communication that allows us to meet more than one person at a time. We tend to forget what we have interacted a moment ago. I have named it as overshadowing effect: the previous condition or interaction is being over shadowed by the present one and it is in a perpetual state of changing, impeding us to focus on a single issue which is possible in real life interaction.

Will it be too illogical if I say sedative has been replaced by Instant Messenger? Has not this become a place for our taking refuge? It sounds enigmatic but it is true that a *real* human is longing for peace from an unreal grid. Logging on to the internet or losing ourselves in a texting exchange makes us a different individual. It is different in a sense that we tend to lose the balance of id and ego when we are unharnessed in a virtual space. The online persona opens the game of id vs. Ego by giving him/her a refuge which is not restrained by our ego. This is like having a *kit-kat break* from the real life of inhibitions, responsibility, masquerading etc. Ironically through escaping from the different faces we have to make in the real life we are hiring a complete different face in the virtual world; the face which is not splashed by agony of real life. Then again, are we not curtailing our sense of reaction? It is more like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde who took a certain kind of potion and turned his dual personality on. In our case the potion is the technological embracement through which we are being incorporated with the duality of life: A *wanna be* Dr. Jekyll of reality to a shaded maniac Mr. Hyde of virtual world or vice versa.

### **Behaviours and (N)etiquettes: The psychology of impression formation**

We are quite concerned about how we are being encoded by the party we interact. There are also consultancy firms and advisory council that shows the way how one should act in different scenario; for e.g. “show confidence with a strong handshake” or “show confidence in your eye contact”. But when we enter cyberspace we give little thought to the formation of our persona mostly because we with whom we are going to interact. This is the place I think, we should maintain proper way of creating a first impression. Besides relatives and friends, it seems that we are fixing dates, meetings, interviews and so on over email with the person(s) we never had a bodily interaction. In this case our keyboard is the main ingredient of forming an impression that is to say our email conveys what we are and what we mean to do. For some other relationships communication starts on net and later branches out in other environment and for some their relationship never strays away from net, not even with a phone call, so the online persona is the whole story.

The formation of impression is a notoriously susceptible to misperception or misunderstanding. Our impression (real life) mostly decided by the non verbal messages we convey: our gesture, posture, eye contact, idiosyncrasies etc. The person we are interacting gets a glimpse of our “self” through his first impression. While in the corner of internet words take the centre stage of our impression formation whether it is *Calibri* or *Times New Roman*. We try hard to express ourselves in a way which is similar to reality and out of this effort smiley(s) are evolved. A simple ☺ or ☹ can determine a person’s state and here we have created lots of other emoticons that meet our need. In a lazy hour we just reply through clicking on our emoticons which in real life might be resulted in a verbal explanation of our lethargy. This has extended so far that in Facebook we just “like” someone just by clicking like in his/her photos or status. This remains benign until we confuse this with our real life behaviour. Online traits can be incorporated in our offline activity too. There are some relations that are to be considered as formal ones: academic, professional and official. The harm that this online interaction does is disrupting the formal attitude among the conversationalist. Let us regard a chat history between a professor and his TA (Teacher Assistant):

*Macklin: Hows lyf Sir?*

*Professor: ☺*

*Macklin: Sir, how can I approach for my methodology of the thesis?*

*Professor: Rnt u suppose to attend class regarding this?*

*Macklin: Ooops! Sory!*

*Professor: ☺*

The above chat history definitely breaches the departmental relationship between a student and a professor. The student is made aware about the situation and context. In an informal way he enquires about a formal topic. But the funny part is the teacher himself replied in an informal way of written language. That is how we are being entangled in a noose of confusing boundaries.

The formation of behaviour is also interesting and we will see how the *netizens* are different from the citizens. We seem to be in a constant rush and hurry while dealing

with online interaction. Hence, we incline to shortcuts and acronyms to deliver our expression. As mentioned earlier we incorporate the mood of switching constantly from one matter to another we tend not to budget maximum time for one person or matter. Social psychologist Susan Fiske and Shelly Taylor coined the term *Cognitive Miser* to describe our interest in conserving energy and reduce load (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). We compensate the gesture posture of real life through different images and username so that one can have a quick idea of the person interacting. Let us consider few usernames: *Tufdude90*, *Cold-hearted*, *devil\_boy666*, *flyin.butterfly*. Whether fake or intended, the usernames convey an impression how the user might be in real life. In case of images or profile pictures a person's idiosyncrasies gets caught through the pensive, shaded or *photoshoped* image. Whether melancholic or exalted, skimming statuses or stalking profile pictures are the ways to get an idea about the person's mood.

### **Jacking into Fantasy : Freud in the cyberspace**

'Cyberspace' is the term popularised by Gibson's novel *Neuromancer* where he described it as 'a consensual hallucination... A graphic representation of data abstracted from the bank of every computer in the human system...' (Gibson, 1984, p. 31). Cyberspace is a term used to describe the space created through the confluence of electronic communications networks such as the Internet which enables computer mediated communication (CMC) between any numbers of people who may be geographically dispersed around the globe. It is a public space where individuals can meet, exchange ideas, share information, provide social support, conduct business, create artistic media, play simulation games or engage in political discussion. Such human interaction does not require a shared physical or bodily co-presence, but is rather characterized by the interconnection of millions of people throughout the world communicating by email, *Usenet newsgroups*, *bulletin board systems*, and *chat rooms* (Bell, 2004, p. 41). Cyberspace plays along with fantasy through offering a space which is more real than the 'reality' itself. Cyberspace is a 'simulacra': '...the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal...' (Baudrillard, 1995, p. 3). This fantasy opens a window to get rid of the inhibitions of 'reality'. The standard fantasy about the new worlds opened up by computer technologies considers them as new spaces where all the old limits might be transcended (Holmes, 2001, p. 77). This surrogate reality helps us attaining what is cannot be achieved in our familiar 'real' world. From a Freudian viewpoint this wish fulfilling power of cyberspace acts as an incepted fantasy of hallucination. What we fail to achieve in real life, we give a try to explore it in the fantasy screen. Thus, cyberspace proposes a utopic, ideal world.

A dystopic viewpoint makes cyberspace a place of disorientation, a titillating tool that drags human into a space of illusion. From the Freudian vantage point questions must pop out to differentiate between reality and illusion. Sherry Turkle (an internet psychoanalyst), in her 2002 Freud Lecture at the Sigmund Freud Society in Vienna, describes cyberspace as a 'psycho social moratorium.' Cyberspace offers a 'time out' from reality, and can have an 'online experimentation' of their identity (Turkle, 2002, p. 4). It is quietly akin to Freud's idea of fantasizing as a 'time out' from the repulsion of recollection. In light of Turkle's remark it can be said that cyberspace is not only a mere fantasy provider but also a 'tickling' object of desire, the desire to testify the kind of objects respond to that desire of the users. But Freudian fantasy also suggests an

existing ontology of a real world (modifying Descartes: I fantasize, therefore I am). For Freud the hallucinatory experience is the re-instigation of the earlier. In the case of breast feeding by a mother, the child loses the actual object (the breast); fantasy tries to recover this lost object and creates an alternative experience of the satisfaction. Although Freud uses fantasy as an 'illusory' function that does not take reality into account, we can already recognise a constitutional function in fantasy, because it is the recovery of the lost, real object that prompts us to stand in front of our external reality. Then fantasy is not solely the opposite of reality but also the (libidinal) motivation of our odyssey through reality.

Freudian fantasy pervades in the subjects of desire through situating the unconscious mind into consumption of products which can be called as foundational fantasies. This fantasy is engaged throughout the human history and is being expressed in commodities we fall for. The primordial lack of (m)other paves the way to desire the original or to imitate the original. This suggests that we tend to get ourselves stuck in the limbo of *transhistorical fantasies*.

Freudian fantasy rules our perception of the world and it is the technology that incarnates our psychological level. Lacanian fantasy depicts two distinct English terms: 'aim' and 'goal'. 'Aim' can be related to the partial or instant fulfilment of a desire which circles around a particular object of fantasy and 'Goal' is the ultimate satisfaction derived from the consumption of that object of fantasy. Technologies are engaged in fulfilling our partial 'aim' time and again. With the help of media and new media our world of fantasy is shaped and constructed accordingly. The cell phone, for instance, sustains the construction of a reality of mobile communication. And it is obvious that it does so by providing pleasure (of chatting) and enjoyment (of contemplating the beauty of the latest gadgets). Cyberspace itself would not be worth bothering about without the functioning of fantasy. Online virtual world is also a space of fantasy. Far from being considered it as illusion the avatars or the users love them and live in them. Deborah Lupton in her essay "The Embodied Computer/User" says that human can form an emotional relationship with machines especially with their personal computer. She further renders the idea of inherent antagonism between user and his/her personal computer which suggests that the love affair between human and computer likely to develop a fantasy of screen. In her essay Deborah further illustrates that the relationship between users and computer is akin to the relationship of lovers or close friend. They expect things from each other, wait for each other, can resist passing time with each other and finally indulge in an absolute dependency.

### **S(t)imulating Self**

Let us consider two imaginary characters Jean and Samantha They got each other at a social site and became friends first. Gradually they crawled towards the emotional state of mind and became *e-motionally* intimate which ultimately resulted in falling in love. Days were going good with no other complexities and they became sure about the fact that "S/he is my type". But their relationship suddenly demanded a real meeting. They decided to meet and surprisingly instead of making the relationship more committed they lost interest in each other after their very first meeting. It was a gradual process and they realised it ultimately. The final result came out was the blocking and deleting each

other IDs from the Instant Messenger and social site. Now, why they become so lethargic after their first date?? According to me they were habituated in taking the virtual as real and subsequently the real became eroded and appeared as prosaic. This is exactly what Jean Baudrillard mention in his work *Simulacra and Simulation* (Baudrillard, 1995). The theory of simulation is a theory about how our images, our communications and our media have usurped the role of reality, and a history of how reality fades. Though it speaks at length of our mediated world, at its heart simulation is a philosophy of reality and our changing relations with it. The conflict of RL (Real Life) and VL (Virtual Life) is gradually getting a new shape: the blurring down of reality which Baudrillard tagged as the perversion stage of reality (the second step of *Simulacra and Simulation*: breaking down sign-order). According to the idea of simulation our sense of what is “real” is being progressively eroded. We are being titillated and seduced by the ecstasy of *hyperreality*: the space or arena where the distinction between real and imagined, surface and depth, or reality and illusion is no longer valid. Computers have introduced new forms of simulation, furthering the precession of simulacra by producing virtual realities, artificial life-forms, and by converting reality to code. Hence, there is no root, no original ‘thingy’, rather, the copy becomes the real and representation is replaced by simulation. Hence, Jean and Samantha are the figures that represent (or simulates) us.

### **Cyber-interaction: A new form of subculture?**

Subcultures have been seen as spaces for deviant cultures to renegotiate their position or to ‘win space’ for themselves. In this sense the online users are more likely to subvert the customary practices of routine life and nurture their subterranean values such as ‘the search for risks, excitement which serve to underpin rather than undermine the day-time ethos of production’ (Hebdige, 1979). They form a subculture because they are trying the alternatives. Cohen sees subculture as a ‘compromise solution between two contradictory needs: the need to create and express autonomy and difference from parents... and the need to maintain the parental identifications’ (Cohen, 1972a). The cyber-interaction bestows the online users to try the unresolved conflict between ‘real’ life interaction and the virtual one. They are creating their spaces amidst the PC monitor which suggests either a transgression or a resistance against embodied interaction. As stated earlier this group of *netizen* though curtail or limit their emotion only in *smileys*, they are unbiased in case of mediating information. For example, there are lots of facebook pages which are indulged in circulating live news and events. These pages are not state or any company authorized but are self-driven in their action. Their news and information seem to be more unbiased and reliable from an ethical point of view. The irony lies within: the space is an unreal one, then how come it is to be depended upon? Hence, in this way like other subcultures, the *netizens* are also not properly acknowledged by the mainstream media. But this does not enfeeble their stance; it rather allows them to compete with a full phase in the news arena. The *Mig33Community* (a chatting site) organise their party and get together without even stepping outside the home! Their level of emotion is very much influence by e-motion and cannot be categorised according to our ‘real’ life idiosyncrasies. Like the former Mods, Punks, Teddy boys and Goths the online users also share their common interests, values and ritualistic pastimes. Their attitude is more covert and less expressed and their status is more *translocative* than being subordinated.



## Conclusion

The decision is ours: whether being subconsciously prone to the erasure of reality or consciously being an active user to maintain a domain of space. The confusion must be outperformed and this can only be possible if we have the ability to differentiate what is extension and what is amputation. It is high time we defined our existence, better to say, an embodied existence to clarify our stance of interacting with others. I am afraid our oblivion might bring any unintentional disorder in the everyday life we are habituated with.

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