

The Final Fantasy: Ethic in Cyberspace in Psychoanalysis Terms

Hongjohn Lin, Ph.D.

Abstract

The paper discusses the relation of technology and ethics in the cyberspace. Cyberspace, as it may seem today, become a new battle ground of contested ideas and thoughts, but we no longer bear the vision that cyberspace is the site of subversion as properly noted by American scholar Danna Haraway in her A Cyborg manifesto. The author has described the function of fantasy, the ordering of desire, as the sheer force in pair them together by exemplifying the TV commercial of cellule phone. Using Lacanian methodology, the author has identified the process of the fantasy operated in the symbolic order of relation of subject and object petit a—whatever close the subject can attain the object, there is still a distance between them. It would be better to be seen this perfect pair, technology and humanity, is a simulacrum that the holistic picture of it is impaired, therefore more desirable than ever. Taking Tamnagochi as a point of entry, the author offers a critique to the over optimism of cyberspace and returns to psychoanalysis terms to examine what follows:

1. From Interactivity to interpassivity, how a subject inscribe itself in the symbolic network of desire.
2. How can technology be the big Other of today's culture?
- 3 *Humanity is represented in cyberspace in the form of fantasy.*

By way of a simple reflections on the past decade of fast growing community in cyberspace, we find that what we have been aware as ethics is subject to change, and have compelled to accept the status quo of technology leading our everyday life whether we are voluntary or not. For forming and reforming of new community based on newly founded technological relations-- be they social, cultural, or economic-- have shaken the basis of ethics, anthropocentrism that rooted in Western philosophy. Precisely because of a community invoking another set of human interactions that need to be revalidated in ethics, the standard of ethic thus becomes a relative term. Therefore "what is right," an age-old ethical question, becomes nullified. It is not even mentioned that the contested power relations in cyberspace where communication is ordered by those who have social and economic, political, and even military advantage. Ethics, proposed by American positivist John Dewey, is based on its relativity on democratic society. Yet paradoxically enough, his idea still hold ethic(together with morality) as priori which is contradicted to the current situation of technology constantly growing, expanding , regrouping, and deploying its network, as in modern life most man can feel the idea of technology has more or less become the capitalized "T" that almost goes along with the notion of Truth or the God, those which hold the idea of transcendental value. But can the notion of Technology be transcendental?

The answer can be found in a television commercial of Nokia cellule phone, in which the opening shot shows a image of an Asian man after his receiving of a cellule phone call he starts running out from his office and then taking his shirt off. What has been sequenced are a list of surrealistic images: a marriage in the bus, a meditation on the hood of a smoking car, erotic dancing in the elevator, and writing in the back of a female body. At the end the hero jumps into water and the picture dissolved into black letters: "Technology Comes From Humanity". Where is Humanity? Does any of these images show any sign of humanity? To the opposite the commercial precisely shows how technology begets inhumanity, a paranoiac hysteria and thereafter a symptom of hallucination, which costs this poor Asian man running out of his secure office job and

making a futile attempt to regain his reason by jumping to water. We have been quite familiar with the operation of commercials, which always aims at desire in order to promote products. In addition, we are also long aware of how technology has destroyed humanity in war, in ecological and environmental condition, bio-chemical industry, and etc.. But neither of these awareness can stop the role of the big Other (*Autre*) belongs to Technology. According to Jacques Lacan, the big Other designate radical alterity because it cannot be assimilated through imaginary identification and therefore the Big Other equates to language, law, and God, i.e. the impossibility. Henceforth, the big Other is in the order of symbolic. Technology is the locus of how we orient the world to which we cannot step beyond.

The psychological condition of the hero, hysteria, can be a result of anxiety that has been caused by a strong fantasy of trying put together humanity and technology. In this case, the representation of Technology, cellule phone, become the object to desire, to which Lacan has used the term *object petit a* to designate the object that "you can never get what you want." In 1957, Lacan proposed the concept of object petit a, which is the imagination project of the subject and also the extension of the real body of that subject. Returning to the commercial, why does this hero need to hastily escape from his office and never return? Is this escaping from the interiority a symptom of hallucination? We know that the mad people can never escape from the madness-- by escaping, he only shows his madness, or better yet, escaping is the evidence of madness. The reason for such escape is let unsaid as like the Big other always lurk behind the scene.

Tamagochi, a Japanese invented electronic toy, can be a suitable culture sign of this kind of symbolizing process, for the operation of the toy has detoured from the traditional mode of playthings, e.g. teddy bears, matchbox cars, battered operated robots, and those which bear with formal resemblance to the real things. A small plastic flat container with an LCD monitor cannot be what we has been acknowledged about eggs, hens, and any other concepts that we can related to chicken. In other words, the toy get rid of the aesthetic pleasure and formal equivalence, and takes the procession of simulacrum, the copy that bears without any relation to the real subject, precisely because in tamagochi, the object offers the rhetoric apparatus of self-commentary to regulate the trajectory of desire as noted by Slavoj Zizek. Thus the notion of interactivity indeed interpassively controlled the process of symbolification and regulates desire of players.

In cyberspace as well as in the contemporary practice of art, the notion of interactivity cannot be over emphasized. The reason can be seen in that to form a new community new set of ethics needs to be evoked, and therefore, its power structure. Danna Haraway has proposed in her A Cyborg Manifesto that to be the radical other can be the option in resisting the inhumanity of technology development by turning fantasy against Fantasy. The points of a stack is to examine technological advance has become one of our collective fantasy in our times, and how we react upon it....

Reference

- [1] Elizabeth Wright and Edmond Wright, edit., *The Zizek Reader*, Blackwell, New York, 1999.
- [2] *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis: the Seminar of Jacques Lacan*, W.W. Norton Co., New York, 1986.