The Virtual Other: Thinking about virtuality and the future of ethics

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hello... my name is john... picked up your name on a blog... wondered if you had any thoughts on ...

Agenda for the lecture

- **Introduction**
  - The traditional view
  - My argument…
- **Levinasian Ethics: The encounter with the Other**
- **Digital virtuality and the virtual stranger**
  - Virtuality and human agency
  - Virtuality and the virtual stranger
- **Ethical proximity, community and the virtual stranger**
- **Some conclusions**

INTRODUCTION

- The traditional view

- My argument…

The traditional view…

That our sense of community, and the moral reciprocity it implies, comes from a sustained and situated engagement where mutual commitments and obligations are secured in proximity of embodied co-presence—or as they may say, in the "thickness" of flesh rather than the "thinness" of the virtual

My argument...

- Virtuality might be a site for the sacred in ways that face-to-face communities may not be

- Levinas: the sacred and the holy

- Virtuality and the limits of human agency

- The digital virtual stranger

- The potential paradox:
  - The defacing of the familiar
  - The facing of the virtual stranger

- The little fragment of experience...

LEVINASIAN ETHICS: THE ENCOUNTER WITH THE OTHER

The ethics of Levinas..

- *This being-together as separation* [as utter strangers] precedes or exceeds society, collectivity, community. … It opens ethics.

  (Derrida, 1978, 96)

Ethics *<--->* *Justice*
(Other)   *(the third)*

- *Aporia – undecidability*
- *Urgency*
- *Responsibility*
- *Otherness/singularity*

DIGITAL VIRTUALITY AND THE VIRTUAL STRANGER

-Virtuality and human agency

-Virtuality and the virtual stranger

Virtuality and human agency

On the origins of virtuality

- Limits of human agency

- The use of intermediaries - tools, language, writing, telephone, etc. (telephone advertisement, 1933)

- Disemebdding / reembedding

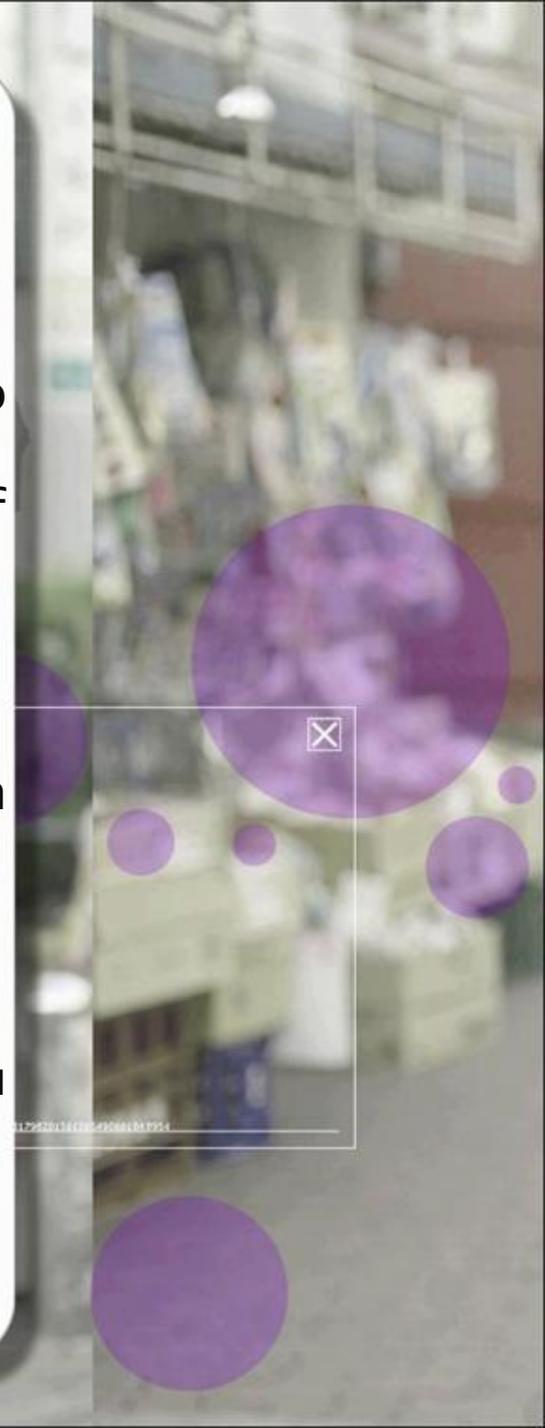- Being/becoming cyborgs

Intermediaries not neutral

- Transport – translate / transform

- Necessary conditions (choice?)

Double structure

- What is lost and what is gained?

Virtuality and human agency

Your telephone is you. In a moment it multiplies and projects your personality to many different places and many different people, near or far. Part of your very self is in every telephone message – your thoughts, your voice, your smile, your words of welcome, the manner that is you. You use the telephone as you use the power of speech itself, to play your full part in the world of people. *With it in your grasp, you are master of space and time.* You are equal to emergency, ready of opportunity, receptive to ideas, equipped for action. The extraordinary fact is that the more you use your telephone, the more it extends your power and personality. (AT&T print advertisement, July 1933)

Virtuality and the virtual stranger

Global information technology infrastructure

- Fundamentally Open – IP address

- Successive generations (text, messaging, interaction, social networking, second life, web 2.0, etc.)

The emergence of the digital virtual stranger

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Fragment

Respected Teacher. My name is Saddam Hussain Rahim & I am doing PhD in Management Sciences from Institute of Management Studies, University of Peshawar, Pakistan…. Sir, I have completed the course work of PhD as well as the Advance Research Committee of University has been approved my proposal. Currently, I am doing research on my thesis under the supervision of Associate Professor Dr. Tanveer Abdullah. My Synopsis title is "Emotional Intelligence & Organizational Performance: An Analytical Study of retail banking in Pakistan".

Dear Sir, due to broad exploration & gaining foreign teacher supervision in my research activities, I would like to get an admission as a Visiting Scholar in your university for six month. Please note that, this opportunity will be fully sponsored by Higher Education Commission of Pakistan in which every thing will be included, i.e. Admission Fees, Accommodation, living expenses etc.

Therefore I requested that please consider my application favorably & give me a chance to got admission in your university as a Visiting Scholar.

ETHICAL PROXIMITY, COMMUNITY AND THE VIRTUAL STRANGER

-The defacing of the face to face

-The facing of the stranger

Ethical proximity, community and the virtual stranger

Physical proximity / ethical proximity

Face-to-face communities and the familiar

- Social categories – default pre-judgments (good for transactions)
- Become taken for granted (epistemological becomes ontological)
- Constitute the outsider as the 'enemy'
- Not necessarily so…

Ethical proximity, community and the virtual stranger

Ethical proximity and the virtual stranger

- Virtual stranger – pops up on our screens (uninvited / unexpected)

- In the face of the virtual stranger I am faced with the ethical question as such… How do I respond.

- I could 'delete' him/her

- It is my suggestion that the virtual stranger, as a *complete stranger*, intensifies, brings into strong relief, the fact that our responsibility in face-to-face communities is often based on reciprocity—it is transactional.

The virtual stranger...

hello... my name is john... picked up your name on a blog... wondered if you had any thoughts on becoming a cyborg? Would you want to be one...