



VOLITION OF MEDIATORS IN ALICIA POLLARD'S "GHOST"

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Abstract: The widespread development of technology has brought laurels to various fields which includes the medical field. The present world keeps changing and the innovations brought about in the medical field have also an equal and upcoming competition in the black markets where ethics are put to question. The demand has made human beings put oneself first in most of the cases. Transhumanism dedicates its knowledge to the improvement of humans on three basic pillars with the notion of improving the intelligence, longevity and wellbeing. The Ghost is a short story written by Alicia Pollard which has the protagonist Eve living in a mining ship with multiple cabins designed just as if living on land. Her foster brother Simon has been with them for only three months. Just as it can be easy to put someone away from a crime, Eve takes a decision that alters a consistent network. This short story has various layers with stern determination that humans have indeed progressed. The interventions in the natural human body of Simon, has him in a state that is between a mechanical robot and a human. Using Latour's Actor Network Theory, this paper will unfold the actants' choices and also the indispensable actor that influences the choice. The equally important functioning actors are the crux of a system in the Actor Network Theory (ANT). The ethical state of the choices is debated with only a few moments to spare the transhuman. The paper also tests the human action based on the existing hybridity in reality and fiction.

Index Terms - Human enhancement, Choice, Actor-Network Theory, Mediators, Bioethics, Bioregeneration, Outcome

INTRODUCTION

Human enhancement is correspondent to human genetic engineering which has received accolades for the exceptional improvements in the fields of biotechnology, nanotechnology and cognitive science, for the purpose of human improvement in performance. A great instance would be prosthetic arms and legs for the amputees. It is a revolutionary invention that has enabled people with prosthetics to indulge in the daily activities normally. "Breakthroughs are currently taking place with synthetic organs. Further advancements in research and technology could allow for our vital organs to be replaced with more durable and stronger technological versions, allowing for humans to live longer and healthier lives" (Ramanauskas). The prosthetics are tried to be made with mechanisms that look normal and the progress in the field continues. Despite the stares of people to those wearing prosthetics on a daily basis, it is with swelling appreciation that it is generally welcomed. The same cannot be said for body modifications taken to the extreme levels. Some of these are plastic surgeries, tongue splitting, lobe stretching, scleral tattooing, lip plates, tooth filing, cheek gauges, elfin ears, neck stretching, corset piercings, bone lengthening, waist training, synthol injections, scarification and pearling. Though most of these modifications are brought about by an individual's apotemnophilia, some can be traced back to tribal practices. These practices have raised the question as to which part of being oneself is best suited -the modified body for their own happiness or the one where people modify because they want to be perceived in a certain way by others.

DISCUSSION

It is common for people to wish to live a better life with or without medical aid and this is made possible with human enhancement, which is sought after by many to transform themselves so that they would be accepted or to have healthy organs that are technically engineered for better functioning bodies. "... transhumanists also apply the latest technologies to their daily lives to both overcome biological limitations and to enhance individual performance and efficiency." (Dvorsky). A disruption in the existing social network will definitely be caused due to the disproportion of availability of access to treatment, if the network is formed based on the financial or class hierarchies. The cost of treatment cannot be afforded by all and only the wealthy can achieve the enhancements. This is seen as a crime in the short story, "Ghost" written by Alicia Pollard.

Alicia Pollard, the author of this short story, graduated with a Master's degree in Theology and the Arts. Her passion for story telling has brought about the publication of many compelling stories and her blog deeply resonates her yearnings. Pollard was inspired to write from a young age, as early as four years old. With a vivid imagination, Pollard's themes mainly focus on her faith, travel and storytelling. The short story "Ghost" was published in An Unexpected Journal on June 8, 2020. The story is set in the distant future where technology is well developed but also controlled by the government. Any message that the government needs to send to the people are directly sent to their minds. People have started to live in ships as they do on land. The natural minerals of the oceans are in great demand. This led to people digging up the sea beds, aggressively mining with bulldozers and disturbing the

ecosystem owing to human greed. The protagonist's parents are considerate about the ecosystem and use technology to mine for minerals using robots that masqueraded as the sea creatures and harvested manganese without changing the ecosystem. The short story is analysed using the Actor- Network Theory (ANT), the power relations, the actors as mediators and intermediators are explored. In addition to this, the entities' choice of action as influenced by the mediators is studied to show how it brings about a reverse change to the existing family and interrelation network.

The Actor-Network Theory was first introduced by Bruno Latour. It is considered as a social theory school, placed mostly under Science and Technology in Society (STS) group. ANT was developed as a methodology, attempting to redefine actors and to avoid generalizations. The "society" as defined by sociologists was a general term as it did not include any of the nonhuman agents. Latour also includes how mediators and intermediators are defined. "An intermediary, in my vocabulary, is what transports meaning or force without transformation: defining its inputs is enough to define its outputs... Mediators transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry" (Latour 39).

The short story begins with a mining ship, MV Ghost in Hawaii seen treading the Pacific Ocean. The night sky is filled with red and blue lights radiating off of drones and satellites, revealing that there is some kind of surveillance always on. The interior of the ship has various cabins, one of which is a green cabin for plants and herbs to grow on various modified surfaces. The cabin allows sunlight through hurricane-proof glasses. This single cabin can itself be seen as a network. The whereabouts of the foster kids are known to the family by marking them over a map hung up in the room. Eve's sister was doing a Luna internship on the moon. This denotes that the world has made much progress in the technology enabling people to go to the moon as they would to a university. Here, another dynamic network of the foster kids who were fostered by Eve's parents is set up. Overall, the establishment and maintenance of the social order, functions on social ties and performance. Society cannot be formed loosely based on human interaction alone. It is not that only humans are part of societal network but with transhumanism coming in waves, the inanimate objects are also part of the network. They contribute to the power of society too and hold duties as part of the network. As Latour mentions, "what sociologists mean by the 'power of society' is not society itself—that would be magical indeed—but some sort of summary for all the entities already mobilized to render asymmetries longer lasting." (Latour 68). Eve is definitely a mediator as she brings about a change, distorting the order of the existing network.

The recent foster kid the family has taken, is Simon an eighteen-year-old teenager. Simon's face is covered with a mask and his vocal cords make sounds like a machine. He has one normal arm and another a prosthetic. Initially, the author does not reveal why these modifications are made to his body. He is half human and half machine. Yet he is also considered a mediator. Simon seems to be frantically trying to fix a robot and protect all those who are in the ship. Eve is confident that there is nothing wrong as there were two false alarms created by Simon earlier. This shows that Simon maybe out of place, trying to fit in or even that his nervousness around the new family is making him seem weary of trusting them. Foster kids have been seen not to trust anyone immediately due to the previous actions which had been against them. Simon being a foster kid is also assumed to be so with his stealthy motives to protect himself and in the later part of the story, to protect the new family. Eve is nonchalant about all of it as Simon trusts her and tries to inform them that the Arctic raiders are after them. The Arctic Sea raiders are members of an unlawful group. For the purpose of hunting down Simon and similar Regenerites, the Navy of British Columbia and Canadian Federation had contracted together. "The message came with a link to a Google page of headlines:

*British Columbian military contracts with Arctic sea raiders.
Canadian Federation joins Arctic sea raiders to hunt Iron Order fugitives."* (Pollard)

The power structure is altered and to eradicate illegal activities, the dominant actor has to involve the illegal sea raiders, merging to become dominant actors. The earlier dominant actors or mediators who alter the network are the British Columbian Navy and the Canadian Federation creating the new network that will in turn set forth a chain reaction.

An Iron Order has been issued against Simon. "Calling the S.S. Ghost. Iron Order. The fugitive is an 18-year-old male wearing a mask." (Pollard). Eve is indeed shocked to learn this about her foster brother. She wonders who this Simon really was. Simon himself answers this question, that he is a Regenerite. He did not ask for him to be fixed but it was his uncle who had paid millions and got him a biomechanist to fix artificial lungs and heart, helping him stay alive. The boy who was supposed to be dead is brought alive by his uncle. There were no other survivors left and his uncle had already spent most of his fortune on him. Simon's parents are not on the scene and it was his uncle who is his guardian. Simon is a living ghost after becoming a regenerite. Eve had made it clear in her Bioethics essay that though bioregeneration is a 'fascinating ingenuity' of mankind, it is also foolishness to seek immortality as it will lead only to disaster. She is indeed shocked to learn these new things about her foster brother. Eve, who fought academically against such horrors that were committed by the so called rich, seemed to find herself locked in a situation. Eve knows it was not Simon's choice nevertheless he was also trying to escape the Law who have joined hands with the unlawful. As a result, Eve is put on a threshold.

The uncle is a wealthy man being the Chancellor of British. The Arctic raiders and Simon's uncle had an intense rivalry which made them blow up a school. The enmity has hardened the hearts of the law abusers, who did not even mind innocent blood being shed. This heartless act of the raiders confirms that they have resolved to terrorism to get back at Simon's uncle. After fixing Simon, spending millions, not being mindful of the after effects, Simon's uncle puts him up for adoption by bribing the foster agency. The social difference is witnessed here. If Simon's uncle was not an affluent person, Simon would not exist in the first place. His uncle had abused his power by resurrecting his nephew. Simon is now on the run for ethical reasons as NATO had outlawed the practice of getting enhanced organs owing to the misdistribution of resources since this kind of resource distribution would bring inequality. Eradicating inequality by destroying or having the Regenerites captive, the dominant actors have sent the sea raiders like hell hounds, chasing the Regenerites by tracing them. Eve is put in a distraught situation due to this. "Eve took a deep breath and let it go. *Regenerites*: humans who were wealthy enough to pay for artificial organs that extended their lifetimes

by years, even decades. NATO had outlawed the practice because it directed resources away from programs that served everyone, rich or poor.” (Pollard).

Eve’s foster brother is now before her as a fugitive with the raiders holding on to an Iron order. What choice does Eve have? What choice of hers will save her family? Hiding Simon would mean that they would be exiled to the Baranof Island implying that it is akin to a prison. Her moral compass was oscillating and her stand on Regenerites becomes unsure here. Simon understands the dilemma in which Eve is unable to make a decision. He makes a choice for her by pleading for just a few minutes and that she can report him once he leaves. Simon knew that his foster sister like everyone else had to hate him for being alive as a Regenerite, though he himself did not want to be alive, prompting that he is also had survivor’s guilt. As the decisions were reeling in each one’s mind, a submarine sent a message to Eve’s "consciousness without her consent"(Pollard). It was the British Columbian Navy with a Caput Lupinem on Simon which claims that a criminal can be killed without a judicial inquiry.

Eve had little time but she was able to give the necessary information to help Simon who was getting ready to escape to Mexico on a drone bike. The raiders were getting closer with raised voices arguing with the Night Watch, the loyal crewmen. At that moment, Eve heard a gentle whisper of a scripture, "And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh". (Ezekiel 36:26) This verse moved Eve to work swiftly, instructing Simon to stop and rest at the Morgana Base where one of her foster brothers was staying. The words of Scripture could not have come out of the blue and it was not the government which usually streams messages to a citizen’s mind. Anyone who has had such a divine interaction would point out that it was God who spoke in Eve’s heart through the Holy Spirit. This would also mean that Eve was always in touch with the Holy Bible which contains the Word of God. Religion is put on display as an intermedator here. Bruno Latour in his text, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* says, “Religion does not have to be ‘accounted for’ by social forces because in its very definition—indeed, in its very name— it links together entities which are not part of the social order” (7). Religion is not an entity on its own and there are arguments if God can be considered an actant in the ANT. This is because some sociologists take into account only the visible entities as actors and mediators. In religion, a social construct, God is the dominant actor through the Scripture as it has definitely changed Eve’s mind. So, God becomes the indispensable actor and mediator setting up a new chain of reaction in the stable network. They both bid farewell hastily with Eve erasing all the records of Simon who was already on his way.

“Bye.” Eve gave him a last squeeze, then pulled away. “Go.”

Simon keyed the drone to life and launched out into the night. Shouts rang out on the deck as he fell towards the water, and then rose and sped off like a dragon over the sea.

Eve watched him disappear, then touched the scanner on the wall with her index finger. She closed her eyes and mentally clicked through the ship’s mainframe. In a few minutes, she erased Simon’s records from the system. Opening her eyes, she watched as the blue flicker of Simon’s drone faded in the dark sea and sky. All she had left was his ghost. (Pollard)

CONCLUSION

Eve was not worried about the retribution that the Government would impose upon her if they knew that she had helped the fugitive run away and aided him with information on where to stay. She even went to the extent of erasing his records of ever being there, making it difficult for the captors to get his current information. Eve as another mediator in the network has taken the decision, to become the dominant actor by displacing the mediators of the familial network. The output is not initially predicted by the readers and thereby achieving the role of a mediator, according to ANT.

As long as they are treated as causes simply transported through intermediaries, nothing will be added by the vehicles chosen to carry their effect forward. Causes, in such a strange and very archaic theology, are supposed to create things ex nihilo. But if vehicles are treated as mediators triggering other mediators, then a lot of new and unpredictable situations will ensue (they make things do other things than what was expected). (Latour 59)

The cause will have effects and the volition of action by the mediator sets the dice rolling, producing various outcomes of which the readers are left to ponder until the network becomes stable again.

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