

MANIFESTATION OF CYBER POSITIVISM IN TIMONS ESAIAS AND BRUCE BOSTON'S SELECT CYBER SONNETS

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Cyberspace, an internet space, serves as the site of computer-mediated communications. The origin of the term 'Cyberspace' can be traced to a Greek word 'kubernetikos' which means 'pilot, ruler or government' and an Old French word 'espace' meaning 'period of time, interval or stretch of time'. As a stand-alone noun, 'cyber' is extensively used in Greek language to signify 'the gift of governance' and is found in the Greek translation of the *New Testament*: "And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, ... then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance (κυβερνήσεως), and of different kinds of tongues" (1 Cor. 12:28). This word, 'cyber', of Greek origin is morphed in French as 'cybernetique' to mean 'the art of governing'. Later, in 1990s, its usage turned transdisciplinary, to mean all the innovative ideas related to internet.

The arrival of Pop Culture in early 1990s, aided by the intricate interweaving of culture with technological and digital advancements, has brought the prefix 'cyber' to the limelight. According to Thomas Nagel, an American linguist, 104 words are formed by having 'cyber' as its prefix. One of the earliest neologisms formed with the prefix, 'cyber' is 'cyberspace'. The term Cyberspace was first coined by William Gibson, an American - Canadian science fiction writer. He combined the two words 'Cyber' and 'Space' to form 'Cyberspace' and introduced it as a noun in his short story collection named *Burning Chrome*, published in 1982. Gibson, in his cyberpunk novel, *Neuromancer*, developed this coinage and defines cyberspace as,

A consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation, by children being taught mathematical concepts... A graphic representation of data abstracted from banks of every computer in the human system. Unthinkable complexity. Lines of light ranged in the non-space of the mind, clusters and constellations of data. (51)

Gibson radiates the same in all his artistic endeavours that include numerous science fictions. He has borrowed this concept from Norbert Wiener's notion of 'Cybernetics', which is described as the science of control or communication, in the animal and the machine.

'Cyberspace', as a notion, connotes multifaceted meanings and references. The National Institute of Standards and Technology defines Cyberspace as, "The complex environment resulting from the interaction of people, software and services on the Internet by means of technology devices and networks connected to it, which does not exist in any physical form" (2). Don Slater, an American Sociologist uses this term as a metaphor to represent a sense of a social setting that exists purely within a "space of representation and communication ... it exists entirely within a computer space, distributed across increasingly complex and fluid networks" (533). Nicholas Negroponte, a Greek American architect and the founder of Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Media Lab, outlines the infinity of cyberspace as the beginning that has no limits.

Michael Bruce Sterling, an American Fiction writer describes Cyberspace in his work *The Hacker Crackdown* as,

The 'place' where a telephone conversation appears to occur. Not inside your actual phone ...but a vast flowering electronic landscape. Since the 1960s, the world of the telephone has cross-bred itself with computers and television, and though there is still no substance to cyberspace, ... it has a strange kind of physicality now. It makes good sense today to talk of cyberspace as a place all its own. (23)

The profound metamorphosis of this e-phase has led to the evolution of various studies based on cyberspace. Each of such studies has provided an array of research projects, articles and writings on cyber. One such new area of specialisation is Cyber Positivism Theory.

Cyber Positivism is a new theoretical framework of the cyberspace. As suggestive of its nomenclature, it focusses on the positive side of the multifaceted cyberspace, including cyber socialisation and online communication. Amidst the negativity clouding cyberspace, this theoretical framework lays emphasis on its abundant advantages. It highlights on the rewards of cyberspace in connecting distances over geographical, political and societal barriers. It illuminates on the comprehensiveness of cyberspace in connecting people together, irrespective of their physical distance.

Cyber Positivism, as a theory, traces its origin to the late 1990s and early 2000s. Cyber Positivism theory is modelled on the Positivism theory of sociology. Positivism is a sociological theory founded by Auguste Comte, a French sociologist. He explains the difference between various cultures, communities and societies to promote science as the supreme aspect of the society. He considers that scientific research and facts are the reliable sources of knowledge. Thereby, he identifies the discipline of sociology to be scientific. In the same way, Cyber Positivism theory tries to promote cyberspace as the supreme power of the technology-affiliated world.

Cyber Positivism sheds light on the advantages of cyberspace that facilitates humans to connect over geographical barriers, attain self-identity and promote social change. This paper attempts to highlight the themes and features of cyber positivism theory. It aims to analyse its ability to connect over barriers, inclusiveness, identification of self and exposure of positive aspects through the study of two sonnets, “Cyber Sonnet 29” and “Sonnet: From the Electronic Frontier” penned by Timons Esaias and Bruce Boston respectively. The paper also attempts to promote the positive aspects of cyberspace through the selected cyber sonnets.

The digital fabrications of cyberspace have not only improvised the lives of humans but also their artform. Ezra Pound describes literature as a news that always stays new. In line with it, the artistic works when explored are found to go hand-in-hand with the live-scenario. According to C.S Lewis, “Literature add to reality, it does not simply describe it. It enriches the necessary competencies that daily life requires and provides; and it irrigates the deserts that our lives have already become” (qtd. in O’Flaherty 28). This digital wave of cyberspace has been reflected in literature ever since the birth of the cyber world.

Cyberspace, in literature, is deeply rooted in science fiction that evolved as early as 8th century AD. Some of the ancient works of sci-fi include the ancient Mesopotamian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, Old English heroic poem *Beowulf* and Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. The gradual development in sci-fi is facilitated by the technological advancements in the contemporary world. Gibson is considered the pioneer of incorporating ‘cyberspace’ in fictions. His style is well adopted by his contemporaries like Erin Belie, Brian Bilston, Timons Esaias and Bruce Boston. Timons Esaias and Bruce Boston outstand other contemporaries with their innovative contribution to literature in their unique artforms.

Timons Esaias is an American satirist and a noted poet who calls himself a science ‘fictionator’. Esaias is a multi-talented personality, who excels in all the roles he played. Despite being well-educated, his interests for renovation transformed him into a carpenter. Esaias in an interview has revealed that his life as a carpenter taught him the “... importance of the people who do the real work, who keep the whole enterprise of civilization running, and the people who pay the real price of historical events and breakthroughs” (Esaias). Endowed with the skills of carpentry, Esaias started carving reality into fictions that embody his experiences.

Esaias’s works such as *Why Elephants No Longer Communicate in Greek, The Influence of Pigeons on Architecture* are translated and read in twenty-two languages. The enticing writing style of Esaias has fetched the famous **Asimov’s Readers Award**, twice. His voracious writing skill topped him as the finalist of the British Science Fiction Award. He is also much known for the integration of scientific and mathematical concepts into his literary writings. He was lauded with the prestigious **Louis-Award** for his masterpiece *Why Elephants No Longer Communicate in Greek*. Apart from his literary career, Esaias has also served as an Adjunct Faculty at Seton Hill University in the Writing Popular Fiction M.F.A. Program. Esaias’s works resonates with that of Bruce Boston’s innovative incorporation of themes and ideas.

Bruce Boston is an American science fiction writer and poet. Boston was born and brought up in California, an exceptive land of fulfilled dreams. This has inspired him to present his ideas about the utopian world that Americans were fond of. His first collection of poetry titled *The Transformation of Wednesday* was published in the year 1976. Boston is a proud recipient of various significant awards including **Pushcart Prize**, **Bram Stoker Awards** for his solo poetry collection. He is the seven times winner of both **Rhysling Award** for Speculative Poetry and **Asimov's Readers' Award**. It is to be highlighted that he was the first **Grand Master Award** winner of Science Fiction Poetry Association in 1999.

Bruce Boston is a multitasking person who has served multiple positions in diverse fields. He has been a computer programmer, college professor, furniture mover, gardener, technical writer and a movie projectionist. He has authored more than fifty poems. His publications include 58 books including 2 novels, 2 novelettes, 3 short story collection and 10 non-fictions such as *Stained Glass Rain*, *Sacrificial Nights and Visions of the Mutant Rain Forest*. Boston in review of his own works states that "... my writing stretches from humor to surrealism, with many stops along the way for science fiction, fantasy, horror and noir" (2). Most of his works echo the themes of science and technology. The plots of most of his short fictions revolve around science and technology.

Esaias and Boston stand distinct from other writers with their publication of exceptional form of poetry called, 'Cyber Sonnet'. Cyber sonnet is a new rendition where the conventional poetic genre 'sonnet' meets the digital cyberspace. There are many interpretations on cyber sonnet in comparison to AI generated poetry. While AI generated poetry is auto-generated, cyber sonnets are written by humans, imbibing the themes of science and technology adhering to the original structure of the traditional sonnet. Cyber Sonnets, follow the structure of either Shakespearean Sonnets or modern sonnets.

One of the notable Cyber Sonnets is Timons Esaias's poem titled, "Cyber Sonnet 29". This poem embellishes on the interactionism between technology and people; technology and emotion; convention and modernity and cyberspace and positivity. The poem "Cyber Sonnet 29" was first published in a literary magazine, *Tin House* in the year 2001 and was later included in the anthologies like *The Best American Poetry 2022* and *The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror: Fifteenth Annual Collection*. Esaias's creative expertise in carpentry gets mirrored in his passion to renovate the old art form and to take it to the modern world and its users through his works.

Esaias's poem "Cyber Sonnet 29" is a fourteen lined sonnet with three quatrains and a couplet. The traditionality of thought and form is intertwined with the digital world in the poem. The poem finds an abode in the cyberspace, whilst the narrator finds his safest 'space' in cyberspace making it an optimistic medium. The narrator entails on a new hope that he has found through the cyberspace. He details on the positivity of the cyberspace and welcomes the new digital era. The very first stanza of the sonnet lays emphasis on the new path provided by the cyberspace.

The narrator parallels his search for meaning with that of the ancient sonneteers who lived their lives through the poetic works and its magical existence across ages. He accepts his loss in the plentitude of cyberspace and states how he is still positive about it. The narrator seeks for a guide through it and proclaims the importance of truth and believes in the fact that truth shall be claimed through poetry. His lament on the 'lost' self in this wide cyberspace and his quest for identity are underscored in this cyber sonnet. He tries to find his space in the cyberspace through this sonnet.

Esaias is much aware of the dearth of positivity in cyberspace, yet he is optimistic too optimistic. He uses the sonnet as a medium to balance his unbalanced life in this mechanised world. He elicits on the reality of the life through this sonnet on cyberspace with its typical technical jargons and considers cyberspace as a haven that would help him retrieve his glorious identity and peace. He reiterates the importance of exploring cyber landscape and gaining personal meaning from it. He also underscores the idea of seeking out new and varied experiences from cyberspace.

Bruce Boston in his sonnet titled, "Sonnet: From the Electronic Frontier" published in 1993, articulates similar message and his fascination towards cyberspace. His cyber sonnet an encomium of traditional art form with its refined outlook of modern digital theme. This sonnet twines the theme of science with technology in connection to human existence. The drastic digitalisation of the world is

echoed in this sonnet. Boston meditates on the advantages of the digital innovations in cyberspace and their positive impact on the users. He uses his cyber sonnet as an instrument to rejuvenate humans' life that is beyond cyberspace.

Boston begins his sonnet with an applause to the digital world that makes this virtual reality- cyberspace, a new 'space'. The publicity of 'everything' by the cyberspace is highlighted in the very beginning. Boston cherishes the opportunity it has provided by saving time, energy and distance. He prompts on the advantages of cyberspace and its nuances, which brings the news of the world to the mobile phone in 'lightning speed'. Boston considers cyberspace as a tool to find human contacts. He specifies that he has crossed over all the electronic frontiers like satellite, modem and wire, to find a human interface as his host.

Boston assures that he would get human interactions from cyberspace and believes that his soul would relish with such interactions introduced by cyberspace. Despite tasting all the goodness of cyberspace, he asserts that he is more than the creature of net. He also plans to inspire the human minds, whom he had acquainted from cyberspace, with images and words. Eventually, he wishes to relish his human relations beyond the screen and would like to rejoice it with flesh and bone. Both Esaias and Boston exuberate on the goodness provided by the cyberspace as they emphasise on the theme of Cyber Positivism in their cyber sonnets.

Cyber Positivism, from a theoretical point of view, includes a variety of perspectives on how the digital technology affects and impacts societal norms, cultural practices and personal experiences. It highlights on the potential advantages of digital technology by highlighting its transformative power and capacity to increase individual agency of independence, social change and involvement. The key features of cyber positivism theory are its inclusiveness, ability to connect over barriers, making meaningful connections and promoting social change. John Suler, Sherry Turkle, Annette Markham and Berry Wellman are the main proponents of this theory.

John Suler in his notable work, *Cyber Psychology and Behavior* specifies on the importance of internet and cyberspace in providing immediate social empathy and attention. He says that "The Internet is not a technology, it's a conversation. Its people talking to each other, sharing their experiences and perspectives, and creating a community" (32). He believes in the power of internet, that creates an inclusive community (space), which provides warmth and communion. Suler's idea of creating such a community is resonated in the works of other proponents.

Jason Whittaker, one of the pioneers of cyber positivism, defines cyberspace in his book *The Cyberspace Handbook* as "the fabric of our lives" (29), likewise it wholly completes all our lives. This digital fabrication of the cyberspace has not only influenced the lives of the living beings but also their artforms and it is evident through literature. Literature is an enchanting space that acts as a voice of the muffled world. Similarly, the features of cyber positivism are reverberated in the cyber sonnets of Esaias and Boston.

The most important feature of cyber positivism theory is its **ability to connect** over geographic and societal barriers. Cyber and social interactionism are the influential features of this theory. Jason Whittaker in his work *The Cyberspace Handbook* focusses on the infinite interaction that is made possible through this space: "At present, cyberspace does not consist of one homogenous space; it is a myriad of rapidly expanding cyberspaces, each providing a different form of digital interaction and communication" (23). This book details on the evolution of cyberspace and traces its origin to post world war innovation. Whittaker considers telecommunication as a fundamental factor of cyberspace and "literally its communication over distance" (23). Esaias and Boston throw limelight on this feature in their cyber sonnets.

Esaias decodes the cyber operations and undoes its encrypted network, laying bare its positive impacts. He pens it as, "So let me surf the web, and let me roam, / And find in code and data a new home" (lines 13-14). The poet personifies cyberspace with humane values and highlights on the benefits of social interaction. The proponents of social interactionism like B Thompson, Manuel Castells, Jürgen Habermas and Pierre Bourdieu term the world that is connected by cyberspace as the 'Global Village'. They combine the theories of mass communication and mass community to analyse the impact created by cyberspace. James Selvin, an American historian describes it as,