Understanding Users: The Extensions of Expectant Systems

AMIR-POUYAN SHIVA
University of Minnesota – Twin Cities

This paper provides an ethnographic understanding of users in the Persian blogosphere through the framework of the carnivalesque. The repertoire of concepts provided by the carnivalesque draws attention to (1) the significance of the material, (2) the dynamic, transforming nature of things, and (3) the possibility of upsetting hierarchies. Drawing upon these insights, ethnographic evidence in this paper suggests that in the Persian blogosphere the material expression of thoughts at times precedes thoughts themselves. The same thoughts may then in turn be used by bloggers in transforming selves. The materiality of the tools bloggers use also contributes to self-fashioning in the Persian blogosphere as the formal properties of blogging services turn users into the instruments of their functionality. Blogs in this sense are expectant systems that demand specific intervention from users so they can function. As such, this paper in the tradition of the carnivalesque playfully turns McLuhan's famous formulation of media as the "extension of man" on its head by arguing that users can likewise be understood as extensions of expectant systems.

INTRODUCTION

As one of the most active blogging communities in the world, since its inception in 2001, the Persian blogosphere has attracted attention both inside and outside of academia, amounting to a body of research that largely conceives of blogging as a transparent means for reflecting Iranian bloggers' inner selves. The dominant narrative (Alavi 2005; Loewenstein 2008; Parker 2007) suggests that Iranians became interested in this technology of online writing because they had been historically denied opportunities to publicly and freely communicate their thoughts and opinions. In other words, the prevalent view states that Iranians, eager to share their opinions with the public, flocked to the Persian blogosphere and later other social media platforms, because they were desperate to be heard but were left with no alternative ways of expressing themselves due to the government's strict control over conventional media. It is presumed that because centrally-controlled media, such as national television and radio networks, as well as closely monitored ones, like print media, did not reflect the voices and values of their audience, Iranians welcomed the new participatory Web 2.0-based media so they could publicly express their real selves and freely reflect their true identities. The dominant accounts therefore tend to scrutinize the Persian blogosphere to learn about the identities that are supposedly mirrored in the content—identities that otherwise had little possibility to be expressed. Although scholars in the field of internet studies have approached the Persian blogosphere differently by using big data methodologies (Kelly and Etling 2008), they also still share the same understanding as the dominant accounts. Although big-data-based studies are successful in providing a big picture of the diverse identities represented in the Persian blogosphere, they do not bring depth and texture to the topic and also fail to explain how these identities are fashioned in the first place.

Based on extensive ethnographic fieldwork in the Persian blogosphere, my study problematizes the idea of blogging as a simple reflection of the blogger's inner self and

argues that unlike its portrayal in the majority of studies, the Persian blogosphere is not a 'theater' where bloggers simply stage their already-formed inner selves. On the contrary, it is a 'factory' whereby bloggers constantly fashion selves. The factory metaphor may also be helpful in understanding blogging, because it underlines the technological and material dimensions of this practice of writing. In the Persian blogosphere, bloggers create selves in interaction with not only their fellow bloggers but also the blogging interface and software. Nevertheless, despite what it may suggest, the factory metaphor must not be taken to imply an exclusively goal-oriented approach to self-fashioning informed by a means-end schema. In using technological systems, purposefulness, intentionality, and having plans are usually taken for granted. However, as I will show here the assumptions about the relationship between purpose and practice embedded in the technological systems and beliefs about the relationship between intentionality and materiality innate in cultural understandings of writing fail to account for people's actual experiences.

In this paper, I look at the relationship between users and systems in the Persian blogosphere through the lens of the carnivalesque. Since the carnivalesque draws attention to material, ongoing, and subversive practices suppressed by an obsession for meaning, purpose, order, and hierarchy, the repertoire of analytic tools it provides will help us better understand the Persian blogosphere.

THE MATERIAL BASIS OF MEANING

"You really don't want to hear this," said Nooshin and mirthlessly laughed. We were about to conclude our conversation for the night (or, for me, the morning, as Nooshin and I resided in time zones 10½ hours apart) when I asked "What do you want to write next in your blog? Do you already have an idea in mind?" I asked this question as a preface to a request that I had planned to bring up afterwards so I could set our next meeting's agenda. I expected a quick affirmative response and a brief description of her next post and had planned to follow up my initial question by asking whether she would let me observe her while she writes the idea down and edits, publishes, and shares the write-up as a blogpost. However, her unexpected response and the brief conversation it triggered did not let me bring up my request as planned.

When she said I would not want to know if she had an idea in mind for her next blogpost, I surmised the worst and thought she might want to close her blog—something she had done a few times in the past. In addition to the anxiety caused by her unexpected response, I was doubly worried because I was running out of time. I had to go to my class shortly and did not have enough time to discuss what I imagined was her decision to close the blog. Trying not to display my nervousness, I asked why she thought I would not like to hear her answer. Nooshin responded in a more serious tone that because she wanted to be honest with me; but at the same time she did not want to disappoint me and embarrass herself by talking about her lousy, inelegant (*zāye*) method of blogging. I felt somewhat relieved since her explanation did not necessarily indicate that she wanted to discontinue her blog. But she next discounted her blogging skills some more. Her tone and choice of words now gave me the impression that maybe she wanted to confess that she was plagiarizing and stealing her blogposts' ideas from others—a fairly common practice in the Persian blogosphere. But she then immediately said in a slow voice that maybe she was not the right person with whom I should work for my research. I now wondered if she was simply

priming me to announce that she was opting out of my study. Thinking that it was one of those fieldwork tag-you-are-it moments when the informant politely puts the ethnographer in touch with a supposedly more knowledgeable and possibly elder person in the community to take the burden off herself, I inaudibly blamed myself: "You should have known better. She guessed you want to observe her writing. It was too soon to bring this request up." To control the damage, I tried to assure Nooshin that her participation had been very helpful to my research: "I have read many blogs and honestly I do not see anything lousy about yours. You have been a great help."

Fortunately, she sensed my anxiety and soon put me out of my worries by mentioning that she in fact was happy to help. But she quickly added that I was not aware of her behind-the-scenes practices of blogging and that I would also admit her blogging practices were lousy if I learned it often happened that she did not have a specific idea in mind, but she nonetheless wrote: "Sometimes I have a good idea; sometimes I don't. But when I don't have an idea, I still blog. Isn't it very lousy (*xeylī zāye nīst*)?" Surprised by her answer, I promised Nooshin that it, quite the opposite of what she thought, sounded very fascinating to me and I was in fact extremely interested to learn about and if possible observe her blog's 'backstage'. Apologizing that I must leave our conversation to run to my class, I hurriedly asked one last question so it would not sound as if I was abandoning a conversation that I just described as fascinating. I asked what she wrote about, when she did not have an idea in mind. Nooshin responded that "it is hard to say, because the topic itself comes" (*moz̄ū' xodeš mīyād*).

Nooshin was not the only person who made such a statement during my fieldwork. However, she probably more than any other informant considered the practice of writing without a preplanned idea to be mortifying and discrediting. It does not mean though that other bloggers valued highly the blogposts produced through comparable practices. For other bloggers, although such blogposts were not necessarily mortifying and disqualifying, they were considered to be playful rather than serious pieces which did not deserve one's full attention. When bloggers did not know what to write, but wanted to write something nonetheless, they casually *played* with their keyboards and did some trials and errors until an idea developed. "It is like doodling (*xatxatī kardan*)," said a long-time blogger and added "it is why there are so many blogs whose names include 'doodles' (*xatxatī-hā*)"—e.g., The Doodles of a Manic Boy *(xatxatī-hā-ye yek pesar-e ravāni)*, The Doodles of a Young Seminary Student (*xatxatī-hā-ye yek talabe-ye javān*), and The Doodles of a Menstrual Mind (*xatxatī-hā-ye yek perīyod-e maqzī*), to name a few. Another blogger whose blog's name in fact included the word "doodles," said that all she was doing when blogging was essentially doodle. She characterized her blogposts as such to draw a distinction between the well-contemplated and serious pieces she wrote as a journalist and her "for-no-reason" (*haminjūrī*) blogposts. It is worth noting, in passing, that the Iranian bloggers' use of a drawing-related term (i.e., doodling, whose Persian translation includes the word for line, *xat*) for describing their practice of writing in the Persian blogosphere hints at an understanding of writing that is not fully separable from drawing (Gray 1971:; cited in Ingold (2007:129)). It is important to my argument, because it indicates an understanding that highlights the significance of the materiality of writing as it holds that written meaningful words, first and foremost, are formed by material, *meaningless* lines. This is to say that, following Heidegger (1971; 1977),

the meaningful written words are the disclosed 'world' brought forth out from the 'earthly' material lines, in an act of *poiesis*.

The poiesis of technology (or techne-as-poiesis, in the Heideggerian terminology) is in fact what is overlooked in the dominant assumptions about blogging—and technology in general. Blogging is a factory, not because it is simply a means helping bloggers achieve their planned ends (e.g., fashioning an identity), but because it turns the virtuality of the *not-yet* into actuality—just like the *meaningful* words that are revealed from the *meaningless* doodles. As we shall see, the bloggers' digital doodles are places where meaning, sometimes unknown to the blogger, is brought forth as the blogger *plays* with words. Playful doodles are not usually based on previously-contemplated ideas and take and change form as they are being scribbled. In other words, the meaning and purpose of what one doodles or, in Nooshin's words, the topic (*mozū'*), if any, usually follows its material expression. Contrary to one's commonsense expectation of a topic as directive and intentional, it sometimes non-intentionally comes after the fact of its writing. Borrowing the concept from Laidlaw and Humphrey's (2008:277) ritual terminology developed out of their ethnography of the Jain rite of worship (Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994), "non-intentional" best describes Nooshin's practice of blogging. It is in contrast to both intentional and unintentional. In other words, as I will show, although her blogposts were not the result of an unintentional writing, as she was aware of what she did, the material expression of words on the computer display evoked some implications that in return non-intentionally determined the meaning of the written words—words that may have an actual effect on her real life. But more importantly, it seems that a deviation from the commonsense expectation of a topic as directive and planned is at the root of Nooshin's embarrassment at confessing to the absence of a previously-thought topic in a number of her blogposts. There is a parallel between bloggers' actual practice of blogging and the carnivalesque as both defy the dominance of meaning, purpose, and order. Similar to the carnivalesque, actual practices of blogging highlight the materiality (in contrast to meaning) and creativity (in contrast to pre-determination) of written words. The dominance of order and meaning also explains other bloggers' descriptions of blogposts produced comparably that suggest a lack of seriousness when in fact their doodles sometimes have real-life ramifications. In other words, when one's actual practice does not fit the dominant view of writing as a planned movement from ideas in the mind to words on the computer display (see, for example, Figure 1, an illustration in the Department of Education's Writing Skills book for all Iranian students in the seventh grade), bloggers label it at worst an embarrassment and at best playful and unserious—in any case not precisely 'valuable'.

Thinking she was engaged in doing something not valuable, Nooshin was embarrassed by her practice of blogging because she thought of her written words as insincere. Sincerity is an account of a certain relationship between one's words and interiority (Trilling 1972). In the dominant commonsense view of writing, the precedence of the material expression of words—i.e., the physical appearance of the written words on one's computer display—over the immaterial thoughts and meaning that are supposed to initiate from one's interiority and be represented by the exterior words indicates insincerity (Keane 1997). Therefore, when the words do not reflect what the writer means or intends, since as I shortly show there is in fact no specific intention before writing these blogposts, the individual's writing is thought to be insincere. Also, in this view the notions of intention and meaning are closely connected for intentionality is defined as the ability of the mind of a thinking and perceiving subject to be

about something (Duranti 1999:134). Meaning is therefore the result of an act of intentionality and is placed in the individual's heart and mind, the seats of all feelings and thoughts.
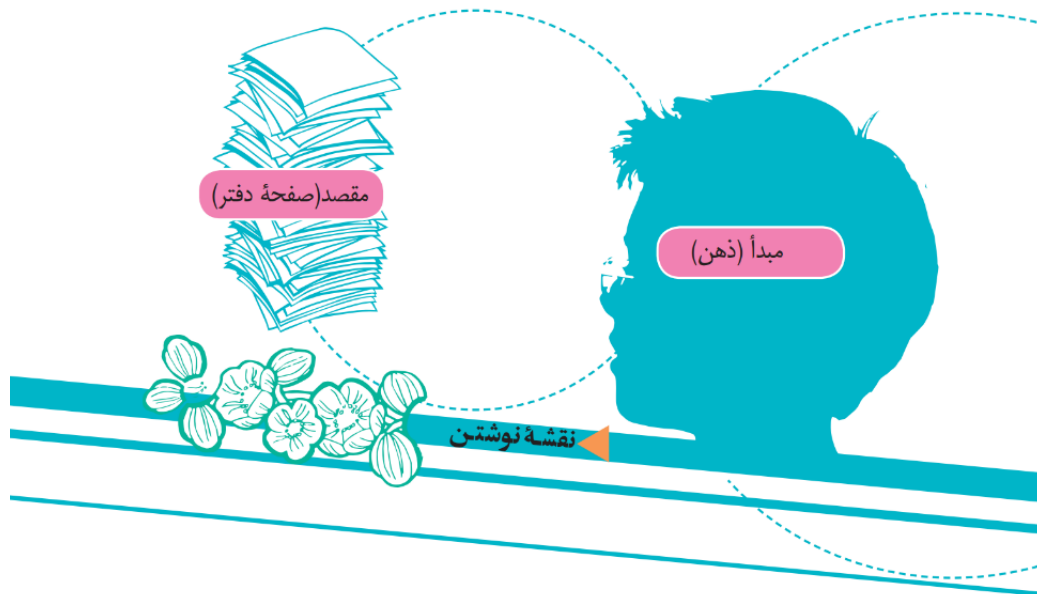

Figure 1. The diagram depicting "The Map of Writing," with the mind as the starting point and the page inside the notebook as the destination (Akbari-Sheldareh, et al. 2014:15)

Sizing up her practice of blogging against that of others in the blogosphere who in her mind supposedly were following the conventions of the established view of writing and accordingly that of intentionality and sincerity, Nooshin felt embarrassed to expose her insincerity and lack of intentionality to me. In fact, that she wanted to refer me to other bloggers for my research shows that Nooshin thought others in the Persian blogosphere blog in accordance with the conventions of the commonsense view of writing in which people write to make their minds and hearts (in its non-anatomical sense) present to others[1]. Nooshin, however, did not have any certain ideas in mind prior to writing and as a result used writing not to refer to some pre-exiting thoughts but to create them. In other words, the blogposts like those of hers in which the thought or topic trails after its expression in written words are, according to the dominant view, insincere, and hence a source of embarrassment—if not, for example in the case of other bloggers discussed above, it is because they were deliberately and playfully "insincere" and as such were exempted from the dominant discourse of sincerity. If the logic of the carnivalesque is to be followed, playfulness seems to be the permit for limited acts of upsetting the Cartesian ideas-materiality hierarchy so the dominant ideology could recover its thorough power outside the controlled domain of these blogs. In contrast, Nooshin's practice of writing marks an unrestricted version of subversion that in spite of a prevailing quest for order and hierarchy is dispersed through and contaminated the commonplace.

Particularly in the Persian blogosphere, a departure from the dominant view was effortlessly construed as insincerity, for blogs were largely considered to simply reflect in writing an already-experienced episode in the blogger's life, his or her inner states, or his or her previously-thought ideas—rather than allowing typed words to *fabricate* one for them. This dominant view is embedded in a majority of existing studies of the Persian blogosphere that scrutinize blogposts as a reflection of the bloggers' inner states, "as product but not as production" (Roseberry 1982:1023-1024). Also, although the Iranian bloggers' practices of writing and their understandings of those practices contradicted this view, it was predominantly acknowledged as the dominant view in the Persian blogosphere itself where a considerable stress was placed on other bloggers' inner states, and consequently, their intention. Taking other bloggers' words by default as sincere, people in the Persian blogosphere were deeply engaged in a process of mindreading (Lillard 1998) and interpreting other bloggers' intentions via their written words, although they themselves ironically may not have considered their own blogposts sincere.

In a later conversation with Nooshin, I brought up the request I was not able to ask that morning. After she agreed to my request, late one night in November 2014, through Skype's 'Share Screen' function, I observed Nooshin's practice of writing a blogpost without having a preplanned idea. She started what fifteen minutes later turned into a blogpost with simply typing the word "bread" (*nān*) in the first line of the editor window of her blog's content management software. She then cut the word out using the keyboard shortcuts and pasted it in the "Post Title" box whose content appears as the *topic* of the published blogpost. She however changed the title after proofreading the post and before hitting the "Publish" button.

Once she published her blogpost, I asked why she chose this specific word ("*nān*") to which she answered because "it is one of the first words that strikes your mind when it is totally empty." In other words, she did not essentially choose the word; the word itself emerged in her mind. Interestingly, in the now-retired pedagogical method by which I and most of my informants in Iran learned to write back in first grade, along with some other words like "water" (*āb*), "father" (*bābā*) and the third-person past form of the verb "to give" (*dād*), "bread" (*nān*) was one of the very first words that children were taught to write— simply because these short words are very easy to spell and comprise simple repeating letters making them good pedagogical tools. Then as they compiled these words into unsophisticated sentences that make only a little sense (like, Father gave bread: *bābā nān dād*[2]), children learned some of the most frequently-used letters of the Persian alphabet. Although literacy education in Iran has recently shifted towards a more meaning-centered method wherein pupils are given more extensive and meaningful texts to subsequently recognize alphabet letters in a reverse (i.e., meaningful texts to meaningless letters) process, the old method through which my informants were initially introduced into literacy seemed not to so much care about meaning.

This pattern of creating larger linguistic units out of smaller ones[3], reminiscent of the literacy education of my informants, is observable in Nooshin's practice of blogging. Like a new learner who puts together the few letters and then words she can spell to create some sort of a meaning about which she did not know before writing, Nooshin retyped the word "bread" (the word that she had removed from the body section of the editor and pasted in the title box) and added other words to it to create a sentence. She typed, deleted, and un-deleted a few more half- and full sentences. The sentences sounded like clichés with ready-

made meanings not fully of her own making implying predictable moral messages: "In the past bread always used to be on our table (*sofre*) regardless of the type of food we ate;" "Bread is the table's blessing (*barkat-e sofre*);" "People no longer kiss and put at a corner [away from the well-trodden path] the pieces of bread they find left on the street;" "Afghans still call any type of food 'bread;'" and "Taking out the half-baked dough (*xamīr*) from the inside of the bread is what we do first before eating it." She deleted all sentences and kept the latter after restoring it (undoing the delete action). The moral message of this sentence, although guessable, was not as clear to me as the other ones.

After producing, deleting, and moving around a few more sentences inspired by the implied meaning of the first sentence, she added that although the half-baked dough is delicious and it is why children love it, parents advise against eating it, lest it gives the children stomachache. She then linked this observation to the activities she had started but did not finish (including learning French on her own and learning to play *setār* (a string instrument) with an instructor and concluded that

> Although delicious, they are not good for my health. It is not good for me to go to private music sessions once in a while without enough practice. I've learned very little. I must decide to either carry those half-done (*nesfe n   me*) projects through or forget about them altogether and instead spend my time and money on more useful things important to me.

She finished the blogpost by giving herself a deadline until her upcoming birthday almost a month away to either take those projects seriously or "act like an adult and throw away the dough and instead eat the bread." Nooshin ended up giving up her self-instructed French lessons because she did not pick them up the way she wanted by the deadline, but dedicated enough time to her *setār* practices and has since been meeting with her instructor routinely.

Although before writing the blogpost she had occasionally thought about concentrating on her half-done projects more seriously, Nooshin had never considered divesting herself of them. More importantly, she did not have any decisive plan for them whatsoever. She also did not remember to think about these personal projects immediately before she wrote the blogpost and even "for weeks if not months before that;" but she is happy that she "finally did something about them."

Did the written form of the noun "bread" on the computer screen which was probably inscribed in her mind at an early age when she learned how to write for the very first time alter Nooshin's life—even if in an insignificant way? Is not it then true that the written form of the word lent her "an adoptive place to speak from" (Pandolfo 1997:29) and summoned sentences not fully of Nooshin's own making with culturally predictable messages? Even beyond that, is what she thought not determined "by facts external to, and perhaps even unknown" (Glock 2001:112) to her? Is not it the case that one of those sentences consequently altered something in Nooshin's life? Is Nooshin's new understanding of herself not dependent on an external, material cognition to some extent already thought for her? In other words, is not it true that an *inscription* of a word initiated by an external source that summons culturally recognizable meanings in a mnemonic process resulted in Nooshin's *description* of her life—"a more or less coherent representation" (Clifford 1990:51) of the reality of her life? Then is it not similar to the carnivalesque which, although suppressed by a quest for order, undergirds the orderly itself?

Similar to Nooshin's practice of digital doodling with words in her blog with the hope of creating a meaningful blogpost at the end, one informant told me that he sometimes started to write not with a topic in mind but with a new idiom, adage, or aesthetically pleasant word that he had recently heard of or read. Another blogger mentioned that it brought him to giggle every time when people commented on how well-thought his essentially little-thought posts were. He said that he was being judged on thoughts over which he initially did not feel any ownership. It was only, in other words, when other bloggers attributed intention to his words that he became responsible for them. Another informant wrote to me that she thought that a practice similar to what Nooshin did was ridiculous because it sounded "like buying a car because you happen to have a spare wheel." In all these examples, the dominant view that gives precedence to ideas over the materiality of words and upon which Iranian bloggers' view of writing is based is violated by the very blogging practices of the same bloggers.

NONPURPOSIVE BECOMING

The lack of purpose and intention also played a role in as to why bloggers opened their blogs in the first place and then kept blogging. Iranian users started blogging for various reasons, but for the majority of my interlocutors, including Bahman, a prolific blogger in his mid-thirties, blogging was simply a new technology they wished to try out, with no set agenda as to about what they would write. In a conversation with Bahman that took place in 2013 when Instagram was becoming exponentially popular in Iran, he naturally used this photo sharing application as an example to illuminate his explanation as to why Iranians started blogging:

> Do you think Iranians who are joining Instagram know what type of things they want to take a photo of and because of that they create their accounts? Do you think they themselves even believe they're good photographers? I do not think so. They are signing up because everyone they know is on Instagram now. They create their accounts because their colleagues and cousins and friends are on Instagram. It was the same story when everyone joined Facebook and Orkut and, before them all, the blogosphere. Just look how many Instagramers post photos that they haven't even taken themselves. They are opening the accounts, but they don't have any worthy pictures in their phone galleries to share. So they end up posting pictures they download from the internet, just because they want to be part of the wave (*moj*)—not because they are good photographers or leading an exciting life worth sharing with others or even because they know what Instagram is good for.

The commonly familiar self-criticism of "us Iranians" (*mā īrānīhā*) not knowing the right way of using Western technologies aside, I found this explanation vastly at odds with the dominantly acknowledged reason for a massive interest in blogging and other digital social media platforms in Iran that attributes the popularity of blogging to a dire need to be heard. In contrast to this assumption, Bahman explained that users' introduction into online services was not planned and also not out of a necessity to be heard. It certainly does not mean that a lack of true representation in conventional media did not contribute to the Iranians' interest in blogging. However, it was neither the sole nor probably the most significant reason for joining the blogosphere. In many cases Iranians' initial interest in these online services and subsequent use of them were conversely for its own sake—to *play* with a new technology. In other words, they used the services simply because the online social

media were appealing to use. Moreover, according to Bahman, users did not always use these services as intended or prescribed by the designers. Instagram, for example, is designed for people to share the photos they snap with their mobile phones (Instagram.com), not for reposting publicly available pictures taken by others.

In remembering his early days of blogging, Bahman pointed out in another conversation that he sometimes posted on his blog "a few times a day" not because he considerably had more to say when he started his blog, but because when he was comparing his newly born blog with older ones in the blogosphere, he "was embarrassed and didn't like it empty, like a barren desert (*biyābūn-e bī āb-o alaf*)." For him, not only did the main area of the blog where the blogposts appear look better when it was filled with "words, sentences, and good-shaped (*xoš form*) paragraphs," but also the left-hand side column of his blog looked better too "when there were things there—like links to archived content, archive categories, and links to other people's blogs." Answering his blog's demand to look more like the older blogs in the Persian blogosphere, he started forming his own network of bloggers so he could post their URLs in his blog. His blog, in other words, used Bahman to link it to other blogs—to mediate its interaction with other blogs. Evoking animistic beliefs in objects having a life (Rod and Kera 2010), Bahman contended that he wrote more frequently and was more active during the first months after he created his blog, because it was as if the empty spaces in the blog looked him in the eyes, begging him to "write something—anything." In a similar vein, others described their blogs as human kids who needed the care of their parents. The common practice of celebrating the anniversary of a blog was called the birthday of the blog and similar to parents celebrating their kid's birthdays, bloggers sometimes celebrated the birth of their blogs by buying cakes, blowing candles, and posting the pictures on their blogs. Another informant told me once that blogs are like human babies (not any other animal babies) because just like human babies they are born prematurely and similar to human babies requiring more attention compared to other animals, blogs need more active attention than Facebook profiles (cf. the discussion of the Tmagotchi, the Furby, and other digital pets in: Turkle 2011).

Bahman did not want to write about just anything so his blog could look full and alive: "I did not want to embarrass myself to escape another embarrassment." So, to fulfill his blog's hankering for more posts without adding to his embarrassment of writing about tasteless topics, Bahman started to pay more attention to himself and his surroundings and to think more deeply about his experiences:

> I needed more meaningful things to say. So, I started to pay attention to things that I had never attended to. I did not use to pay attention to details or to my emotions, as a matter of fact. In the past, I did not really look that much for meaning behind everything. I was really a shallow person (*ādam-e sathī*). I can even say, I was a boring person with nothing interesting to say. I now had to pay more attention to feed my blog (*xorāk barāye veblāgam tahaye konam*). But even more importantly, I did not use to think of myself as a creative person in the past. So, it came to me as a big surprise when for the first time in the comment section my readers applauded my writing for its creativity.

Bahman was made subject (Foucault 1982:777) by being voluntarily objectified by his own blog. As he responded to the expectations of his blog, he was transformed into a certain subject, a creative person with a good eye for details. The "obligatory syntax" of the medium, or more accurately its recipe as it did not include "explicit and obligatory

prescriptions" (Foucault 1977:153), enabled a new self. More specifically, Bahman's blog communicated its recipe for constituting a suitable blogger-blog collective *negatively* through an aesthetic judgment by showing how *ugly* and *useless* (*zešt-o bīxasīyat*) it looks when it is unattended: "like the diaries (*daftarče xāterāt*) we were gifted when we were kids and we wrote only in the first two pages before we use the rest of the blank pages to solve school math problems (*qabl az īnke be onvān-e čerknevīs-e rīyāzī az baqīyaš estefāde konīm*)." He noted the disciplinary nature of the recipe by half-jokingly half-seriously pointing out the cruelty of his blog's recipe compared to Facebook's syntax which is communicated positively by automatically filling out some holes with tentative suggested items to show how *beautiful* your profile would look if you attend to it. This aesthetically charged recipe is an example of how what some Science and Technology Studies scholars (Latour 1992; Latour and Akrich 1992) call "scripts" demand specific things from the user and invite him or her to intervene in a certain way. The way Bahman's blog guided and compelled him to perform contributed to his perception of the person he now was.

The blogger-blog collective discussed here is an illustration of the "body-tool [or] body-machine" complex Foucault (1977:153) points out in his cultural history of discipline. This association was formed as soon as the blogger signed up and created his or her blog. However, the relationship between the blogger and the blog was always at the risk of demise. For the collective to maintain itself, in addition to the blog's caring for the blogger, the blogger must also persistently take care of the blog. In the absence of the necessary work and without the blogger's care for the blog the assemblage would stop to exist. A myriad of inactive blogs and retired bloggers are an evidence of the incessant care and work required to keep the instability of the assemblage in check. In spite of the required work, there is a tendency to either not consider the blogger-blog collective to be an interdependent assemblage, or the existence of the collective is taken for granted without noting the labor of maintenance, invention, and intervention that goes into the work of holding this heterogeneous complex together (Law 1992:386). Bahman's account of his early days of blogging is important, because it bears witness to the kind of care that is required for the process of reproduction and renewal of the relationship between the blogger and the blog that ensures the continuation of the collective.

The division of labor between the blogger and the blog indicates an expectant system in which the human-nonhuman hierarchy is upset. In a theoretical approach to the history of computing from an organizational perspective, Ekbia and Nardi (2014) contrast the better-known epoch of automation to that of heteromation, a phase in the history of computing where some critical tasks are pushed "to end users as indispensable mediators." Using the notion of expectant organization, they describe the division of labor between machines and their human users in this era. Following this characterization, an expectant system can be defined as a system with considerable built-in holes and gaps that are intended to be filled and bridged by the end user (Ekbia, et al. 2015). Expectant organization turns systems into "objectifying technologies" that operate based on what Ekbia and Nardi (2012) elsewhere term "inverse instrumentality." These technologies, unlike "automation technologies" that disallow user's intervention to a great extent, delegate some of their most significant tasks to end users and as a result, turn users into the instruments of their functionality. The technology therefore needs the user to mediate its functions. More clearly than in any other system, users are constructed by what we may call the machine's gaze (literally, in the case of Bahman whose blog looked him in his eyes and demanded content) when they interact with

expectant systems. Following the carnivalesque, this view in fact offers an unconventional correlationist view—a corellationism that is not centered on the perception of humans as technologies also *technocentrize* their human users and appropriate them for their own needs. Expectant systems in other words *use the users* as vehicles to extend their functionality, accomplish their goals, and mediate their interactions with other technologies.

CONCLUSION

The repertoire of analytic tools the carnivalesque provides guides us to consider user experience not as the outcome of fully-known technological patterns, cultural codes, or social structures. It similarly should not be thought of as a relation between an already-decided plan and a final product. Also, it is important that the plan does not magically transfer into the desired product with the help of technological systems with them having no effect on the form the final product takes.

   If we look at the bloggers use of the technological medium in the Persian blogosphere through the framework of the carnivalesque, we observe a picture different from what is usually portrayed. The heed the carnivalesque pays to becoming and transformation (Bakhtin 1984:10) guides us to see the Persian blogosphere as a 'factory' whereby the interiorities of bloggers are constantly fashioned; and not as a 'theater' stage where the already-made interiorities are reflected. It also directs us to realize the significance of materiality[4] in meaning making and the importance of the encounter with the material and the technological for creativity. As we saw, the interaction between bloggers and words brings to the forth, in a non-intentional manner, unplanned but consequential meanings. The subversive logic of the carnivalesque moreover allows us to see the heterogeneity of assemblages and collectives that bloggers create with the blogging technologies they use. It lets us account for the reversal of roles that takes place in the formation of those assemblages when users appear to be used by blogging platforms for them to be able to function.

Amir-Pouyan Shiva is a PhD candidate in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Minnesota where he studies how blogging, both as a technology of writing and a Foucauldian technology of the self, contributes to the creation of selves in the Persian blogosphere. *Shiva011@umn.edu.*

NOTES

1. The relationship between sincerity and one's interiority as the place of meaning and intention is a ground for the New Poetry movement in Iran in the early 20th century. The New Poetry gave precedence to a fully intended meaning in line with the "natural order" of an artwork not restricted by formal limitations imposed on expression (mostly *arūz*, or the metrical system used in Persian and Arabic poetry) (Akhavan Sales 1990 [1369]:104). As the descriptor "new" itself indicates, this literary movement deliberately departed from a "pre-modern" (*kohan*, literally: ancient) view of writing towards a "modern" regime that treated words as "tools of the poet's expression of his intended meaning, not the other way around" (104).

2. No longer part of the literacy education in Iran, these sentences were also criticized for the patriarchal gender roles they instilled in the minds of the new learners.

3. To be precise, the Iranian students' literacy education used to begin with non-linguistic units—i.e., lines—that were copied by pupils from a model in a practice called "*lohe-nevīsī*." Lohe (tablet) was a small wooden board

students used to practice writing in pre-modern Quranic elementary schools (*maktab-xāne*, literally, writing house). This educational method where writing was thought to be a form of and develop out of drawing lines, similar to the use of *doodling*, a drawing-related word to describe a practice of writing, is in line with Ingold's (2007) description of writing prior to the seventeenth century when it was identical to drawing.

4. Etymologically, carnival is derived from the Latin for flesh, *carnem*.

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