# On False Tears and Outsourcing

by Cally Spooner

Outsourcing may begin as an offshore call center, but I'd like to consider it in a broader sense as how we outsource complex communication to smoother, faster and more effective semiotics.

To talk about this, I want to go back, a hundred and sixty years, to Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. The novel follows the demise of Emma Bovary, an attractive, bored housewife, trapped in her marriage to a mediocre doctor and stifled by the banality of provincial life. An obsessive consumer of sentimental novels and Parisian magazines, Emma becomes desperate for high society romance, which she chases through an adulterous affair with the equally adulterous Rodolphe Boulanger de la Huchette. Drawing on all the books she has ever read, and the inherited language of what the language of love should be, she constructs an identity as a romantic mistress, built from credit and lies. Entirely embracing her own fictions, she falls into irreversible debt, then suicide.

Whilst Emma and Rodolphe produce their emotional language, they start to display a form of alienation, perhaps the same alienation that Umberto Eco suggests is experienced by the writer of pop songs: "he who is so conditioned by a certain convention that the moment he comes up with the word 'remember', he'll conjure up the image of a sad 'September'." [1] Like Eco's pop song lyricist, Emma and Rodolphe are stuck. Their voices scratch out readymades, un-sensual love letters, whispered sweet nothings as spontaneous as an Amazon recommendation - readily available, eerily accurate - when it comes to predicting and fulfilling one another's desires.

In chapter 13, Emma receives a break-up letter from Rodolphe, signed with a single false tear: a waterdrop from his drinking glass. As much as the emotions he fabricates are spurious, Emma's response is monstrously real and physical. I want to think about the false tear as a piece of outsourcing; undercutting the inefficiency of an in-person confrontation, Rodolphe draws on the cheapness of well-honed cliché (the lover's last tear), so that he can attend to his other lovers and matters. The tear becomes a technic, and Rodolphe the technocrat, who needs to get a job done.

In her text "Our Aesthetic Categories", Sianne Ngai introduces three words that dominate contemporary culture in the USA: 'zany', 'cute', and 'interesting'. [2] They allow for accessible communication, their ready availability encouraging swift exchange. Equally they become excellent carriers of capital, implying a passive relationship to production, circulation, and consumption. As we hand our communication over to these readymades, the 'zany', cute', and 'interesting' become linguistic technics, smoothing devices, echoing Bill Gates' big, digital dream; the dream of creating tools that make things easy. "These tools are really cool!...It's empowering stuff!" [3], says Bill.

Technics are ancient. They start somewhere around the birth of the written word (a technical *langue* to support the more fallible, less mediatized *parole*) and continue as an inexhaustible list of man-made stand-ins: satnav, symbol systems, rhetoric, industry standards, institutions, algorithms, rituals, Ritalin, lip-syncs, apps. [4] Technics maintain potentials and data, keeping us in check, by converting a continuous space into a more manageable space. Like cliché, pre-aggregated choice, and credit (and it's relevant that Madame Bovary was in great debt), the false tear becomes a technic. In each case, we outsource to a readymade, creating a distance between us, our actions and others. True to this, Rodolphe does not engage in the complex break-up in person. Instead, he delegates, to letter and waterdrop, delivered by a messenger, in a basket of apricots.

Invisibility, thanks to smoothness, is the secret of successful industrial design. If you don't see it, then paying attention to it is harder. If Rodolphe does not witness and personally experience Emma fall to pieces when the false tear leaves its impact, he will remain unaffected and free from care. Franco 'Bifo' Berardi says: "the virtualisation of social communication has eroded the empathy between human bodies." [5] He also says: "[A]utonomy is based on the ability to share daily life and to recognise that what is good for me is good for you and what is bad for me is bad for you." And whilst the Bovary breakup is something of a 19th century matter, I want to focus on the timeless cruelty of contracting our voices to technics, transferring to false tears and to efficient solutions for messy human problems.

1  Umberto Eco, "Form as Social Commitment", in: *The Open Work*, 1989

2  Sianne Ngai, "Our Aesthetic Categories", in: *Cabinet*, Issue 43, Forensics, Fall 2011

3  "Email from Bill", in: *The New Yorker*, January 10, 1994, p. 48.

4  Bernard Stiegler, "Pharmacology of the Proletariat", in: *For a New Critique of Political Economy*, 2010. In his 2010 book *A New Critique of Political Economy* (of which "Pharmacology of the Proletariat" forms a core section), Bernard Stiegler examines a contemporary over-reliance on technics. This dependence, he argues, creates a proletarianization of the subject. The subject loses its abilities to function with agency, autonomously. He introduces the notion of short and long-circuits of grammatization, or more simply, ways of engaging with externalized sources of memory that require more or less from a subject, or are more or less complex. Long-circuits of grammatization provide the subject with deep knowledge, and thus more agency, while short-circuits are efficient but don't offer any knowledge or skills -- short-circuits of grammatization threaten the autonomy of the subject and delegate more knowledge and action to technics.

5  Franco 'Bifo' Berardi, *The Uprising. On Poetry and Finance*, 2012