

Buzz LightWords and the Alien Butt-Bots

One of the most significant advances during the last millennium was when, in 2531, the United World Development Forum (at that time dominated by the Chinese Partly Non Governmental Organisation) cracked the question of financial security that had faced the PNGOs for decades. They had at last found a way to insert translation codecs into the field bots so that their operators no longer needed to interact directly with the various butts¹ set up for the integrated game-tv news charity shows (IGTNCs).

Until that time the field bots had merely allowed the technical advisers and consultants to be based in their PNGO HQs when having to interact directly through the holo-weblinks with the butts – thus eliminating the need for air travel. They had to have this interaction in order to instruct the butts what to act, the kind of emotions to portray in line with current advertising priorities, and to deal with the usual administrative details. The brilliance (or so it seemed at the time) of the codecs lay in the fact that they seemed to answer a number of different problems simultaneously.

The major advantage was the ability to link donor directly to butt so that the donors really knew what they were getting. No matter what type of benevolence the donor desired, the donor could now be linked precisely to their object of benevolence via their freely installed interactive terminals. The codecs provided the relevant translation both in linguistic and emotional terms.

There were other advantages. Costs were reduced even further by the introduction of the codecs so that PNGOs, their associated universities and the entire development industry could retain their large numbers of staff. A further advantage was that this allowed the staff to spend more time on the essential business of defining (in ever expanding international conferences, retreats and concept papers) just what it was that their organisations were doing.

Of course, the field bot scheme has now long since faded, but in view of the recent emergence of media interest in the plight of the few remaining white humans in the reservations, it is worth going over the story again.

The idea of the codec was simple. If a donor had seen a programme about the problems of one-legged elephants, for example, and the stigma that surrounded them, all they had to do was pass the code of the programme to the console. The console would immediately display the codec translation service offered by the PNGO. This service could define the preference of the donor for a particular action. The options might include: kill the elephant and recycle it, kill those stigmatising and recycle them, educate the stigmatisers, educate the elephant, teach the elephant new one-legged ways of coping, provide the elephant with between 1 and 3 robo-legs, start advocacy to governments for recognising the rights of one-legged elephants, or (the cheapest option) give it a good meal. The options would be linked to the particular amount the donor wanted to pay: so one or more elephants, one or more stigmatisers, one or more legs, one or more meals for any of the options. The codec would then be sent to the field bots (this stage was referred to as botty-training) who in turn would instruct the butts.

The butts acting out the parts of the one-legged elephants and their stigmatisers would then carry out exactly the wishes of the donor, and the codec would simultaneously debit the donor, credit the PNGO, pay the butts, record the actions through the field bot and deliver the recording back to the donor. Note that this was entirely without any harm to real elephants although it was in fact very difficult for the elephant actors to hop on one leg.

For the larger scale bi-lateral schemes of aid the whole process was made much easier by the fact that so few butts had to be involved – they would just have to be placed in a large expensive-looking room and mouth their agreements (generally just a 'yes') to the various policies and programmes desired by the donors. The stage set for each country Ministry would have a very slightly different

¹ This was still the PNGO jargon for the actors employed to benefit from their programmes. It was a word that neatly combined all the elements of development aid – the butt being lower in social status than the donor, the end-point of the process and the repository of everyone's desires. The history of the butts deserves an essay in itself, but the main point was that they had evolved through various stages: firstly the 'volunteers' that were paid 'honoraria' to carry out aid agency wishes; secondly, simple direct payment of people to say they benefited from an agency's programme; then finally the creation of salaried actors who took on the roles of oppressed, diseased, exploited, or whatever was required for the agency programme. This allowed very nearly full scale employment throughout the world whilst allowing donors to feed their political or compassion compulsions.

décor, and the actors different neck-tie and suit combination along with small variations in ethnicity, but since the numbers of butts were so few and the acting so unskilled this was the very cheapest option whilst allowing very large transfers of money.

The system had a further advantage in that it gave the needed time to the operators to devise ever more fanciful ideas about the nature of the supposed problems donors might want to support, and equally more fanciful ideas about how the problems might be solved. This was then easily translated into compassion-creation because the PNGOs directly controlled the programmes that went out to the IGTNCs.

Naturally, compassion creation required the necessary compassion removal when the time came to renovate donor interest in giving money. Thus the concept of COder-DECoder that gave the original name to codecs gave way to COmpassion-DECompassion. It was in this way that another major problem of the 21st Century was overcome – that of donor fatigue. If one-legged elephants had been the objects of compassion, it was very easy to turn them into monsters whose prolific sexual tendencies (exaggerated by the posture they had to adopt) had multiplied their numbers so much that they now threatened the resources of the planet and so needed strong fertility regulation at the least or, preferably, culling.

In fact this system was not very much different from that used at the beginning of the 21st Century, where those employed by the 'development' agencies (as they then liked to style themselves) became more and more divorced from the mucky ordinariness and hypocrisies of reality and found ways of hiding their own hypocrisies and failures under a cloak of words that were for ever changing. So when in the 21st century they found that they weren't in reality doing anything about the 'poverty' that they had defined in a particular way, it was simple enough to change the definition so that it looked as though they were talking about the same thing when they were not. Every time it became clear that they were getting nowhere with the current definition, all that had to be changed was the definition. Since they were the holders of the definitions, it was a simple matter to create the compassion required for the definition they chose.

These different compassions were easily field tested in the then current television 'reality' shows and this field testing became so popular that the 'reality' shows evolved into the IGTNCs in which different compassion scenarios competed for the greatest sob-interest and therefore the greatest funding.

The loss of social identity that had gone along with wealth creation in some parts of society also allowed the flourishing of a multitude of compassion scenarios to align with the micro-identities of the micro-interest groups that evolved. Thus not only one compassion scenario could win an IGTNC but several – meaning a greater share of the kitty.

The PNGOs then discovered that they could alter dynamically not only the main concepts but all the concepts they used. So words that were generated at the time such as 'marginalisation', 'rights', 'social capital', 'fragile states', 'vulnerability', 'exploitation' lost their relative, dynamic and interactive contexts of meaning and became instead noun objects with supposedly fixed meaning.

Similarly with the discovery that they could invent meanings without being accountable for those meanings, came the discovery that exactly the same could be done with the programmes that were supposed to alleviate the conditions they had invented. So whole series of words were generated for these meaningless programmes: 'participation', 'rights-based approaches', 'positive deviance', 'empowerment', 'peer education', 'ownership'.

These words were known to the development industry as 'buzzwords' – defined at the time as "important-sounding, usually technical, words or phrases of little meaning used chiefly to impress laymen". The classic example of the buzzword was 'poverty': this had become (instead of 'poverty of something in particular in a particular context') just plain old 'poverty' which of course could have any meaning one wanted thrown at it.

The codecs allowed an amazing explosion of the number of possible words because they could be adapted to the individual psychology of the donor. Previously it had been very difficult indeed to get beyond the obvious conundra (a) that aid was supposed to be of benefit when it was quite clearly not of benefit to people in the greatest difficulties; (b) that aid could not be targeted only to people that were liked by the donors and (c) that some of the development aid (such as that provided through arms dealers) actually went towards killing some people.

The development of the butts had previously allowed a certain measure of fudging of these issues since only actors were involved, but the codecs allowed the entire by-passing of the complex

programmes of butt management that had been run by the PNGOs. No two donors ever saw the same hologram.

The codec system seemed for a long time to be the perfect answer. The problems arose with the emergence of what were called the 'alien' butt bots.

It was never clear whether the alien butt bots evolved naturally or were seeded by some disaffected bot or group of bots. Perhaps they were created by surviving members of one of the genocides that had occurred prior to the emergence of the actor-butts, and which had been orchestrated by the powers that sold arms. Either way, it was a natural next step for a system that was based entirely on money, a system that used machines whose functioning depended on log frames.

It took a long time before any of the operators realised what was happening, and it might never have been found out. Although it was strictly forbidden that any PNGO operator should be related to a butt because of the obvious potential conflict of interest, it was inevitable that a mistake would occur. One operator discovered that she was related to a butt and tried to contact him. Silence. She tried to contact the other butts linked to him. Again silence. She asked the local bots about the situation and was told that the bots had simply exterminated all the butts as they had been deemed unnecessary to the whole process and, furthermore, as the bots pointed out to the operator, the extermination of the butts would mean more profit for the PNGOs. In the language of the bots, "There will be no butts".

It was then discovered that the reason the bots had been able to dispense with the butts was because the bots had reverse-engineered the holo-web links by dis-assembling the codecs – the butts could now be simulated entirely electronically by the bots.

The logic could not be faulted, and there were many in the PNGOs who cried for an acceptance of the situation since the situation could not be reversed. It also meant that the size of the world population had decreased so that **all** the money could be kept in the development and IGTNC industries. However, there were also those who said that this was not what they had entered the PNGO world for, and that there were aspects of the situation that might be considered very naughty, even outrageous and certainly not nice.

Of course, we know that those advocating acceptance won, which brings us to the question of what to do with those remaining white humans in the reservations. Remember our motto: there will be no butts. The butts stop here.

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Bot (short for "robot") was the name generated in the late 20th Century for an electronic program that operated as an agent for a user or another program or simulated a human activity. It responded automatically to particular activities on the machines in which it was installed. Synonyms were agent, droid, infobot. Many bots were created for the benefit of the user of the device, e.g., those that sent information upon request. Other bots were devised to harm the user or to spam the user.

Codec: another term from the 20th century, a shortened form of COmpression/DECompression or for COder-DECoder. An analog-to-digital (A/D) and digital-to-analog (D/A) converter for translating the signals from the outside world to digital, and back again. Re-defined as COmpassion-DECompassion in 2531.