@**GP 2016 – Comprehension – Lesson 2 (Reliance on Technology)**

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|  | *Rafael Behr writes about how the reliance on technology alters what it means to be human* |  |
| 1 | The Furby is a fluffy robot toy that was popular in the late 90s. It looks part owl, part hamster and is programmed to respond to human attention. It has no intelligence, but it can fake attachment. In an intriguing psychological experiment, subjects are asked to take a Furby, a Barbie doll and a live gerbil and hold them upside down in turn. The rodent writhes in obvious discomfort and people quickly release it. The Barbie does not react and can be inverted indefinitely. The Furby says "Me scared" in a convincingly infantile voice. People ignore the plea, but only for a few moments. They know the toy has no feelings, but the simulation is enough to provoke empathetic urges. | 5 |
| 2 | The test is one of many cited by Sherry Turkle in Alone Together as evidence that humanity is nearing a "robotic moment". We already filter companionship through machines; the next stage, she says, is to accept machines as companions. Soon, robots will be employed in "caring" roles, entertaining children or nursing the elderly, filling gaps in the social fabric left where the threads of community have frayed. Meanwhile, real-world interactions are becoming onerous. Flesh-and-blood people with their untidy impulses are unreliable, a source of stress, best organised through digital interfaces – BlackBerries, iPads, Facebook. | 1015 |
| 3 | This is not a science-fiction dystopia. Alone Together is the culmination of years of empirical research. Turkle has watched people interact with machines and socialise on digital networks. Her inquiry starts out clinical and becomes philosophical: can humanity transform the way it communicates without altering, at some level, what it means to be human? Plainly, technology is doing peculiar things to us. The average American teenager sends thousands of text messages every month, and spends hours each day on Instant Messenger, MySpace and Facebook. (Email, Turkle reports, is considered old-fashioned by most under-25s.) None of these things existed a generation ago. Adults are matching the pace of digitisation set by their children, eking out proxy lives on blogs, in multi-player games and chatrooms. Millions of us appear to find simulations of life more alluring than life. We are training ourselves to fear a world unmediated by computers. | 2025 |
| 4 | Turkle is not a luddite, nor is Alone Together a salvo in some analogue counter-reformation. But it does add to a growing body of cyber-sceptic literature: recent examples include Nicholas Carr's The Shallows, warning that our cognitive faculties decay as we skim distractedly from one webpage to another, and Evgeny Morozov's The Net Delusion, which rebuts fashionable notions of the web as a tool for advancing democracy. These are correctives to what Turkle calls the "heroic narrative" of the internet – the effusions of digital evangelists who confuse technological advance with human progress. | 30 |
| 5 | The argument in Alone Together unfolds in two halves. The first section deals with objects that imitate living things. Turkle's subjects, mostly children and the elderly, are given robot companions for varying lengths of time. Universally, a bond is formed. The Furby exerts a hold over anyone who nurtures it for a few weeks. More sophisticated models provoke deep emotional connections. Scientists developing the latest robots report feelings of pseudo-parental attachment. They hate leaving the machines "alone" in empty laboratories at night. The machines are still primitive, nowhere near the Hollywood version of sociable androids. But people have always had an extraordinary capacity to project human traits on to inanimate objects. It only takes a bit of interactivity before our minds go a step further and start projecting consciousness. In Turkle's observations, the difference between playing with a doll and playing with a robot is the difference between pretence and belief. Even when a replica behaves implausibly, we compensate, filling the gaps in its repertoire with imagined feelings. Turkle calls this "the Eliza effect", after an early experiment in intelligent software. Students were asked to converse with Eliza, probing its capacity to imitate human chat. Instead of exposing the program's weaknesses, everyone pandered to its strengths. They wanted the computer to be lifelike and manipulated the test to help it succeed. | 354045 |
| 6 | An alarming revelation in Alone Together is how close we are to putting this effect into mass production. Pet robots are already available to comfort lonely residents of care homes. Mechanical nurses are on the way - nannybots to look after children. Research into artificial intelligence used to be about trying to make computers as clever as people, but in recent years the focus has shifted. Engineers now know that the machine only needs to act clever and people will play along | 5055 |
| 7 | The second half of the book deals with our addiction to the web; more familiar terrain, but equally disquieting. Turkle has interviewed people of all ages and from a wide range of social backgrounds and finds identical patterns of compulsive behaviour. We start with the illusion that technology will give us control and end up controlled. We get Blackberries to better manage our email, but find ourselves cradling them in bed first thing in the morning and last thing at night. Children compete with mobile phones for their parents' attention. Those children, meanwhile, are absorbed in the digital world in a way that older generations, with memories of analogue living, can barely comprehend. Turkle interviews teenagers who are morbidly afraid of the telephone. They find its immediacy and unpredictability upsetting. A phone call in "real time" requires spontaneous performance; it is "live". Text messages and Facebook posts can be honed to create the illusion of spontaneity. | 6065 |
| 8 | This digital generation also expects everything to be recorded. In any social situation, there are phones with cameras that relay personal triumphs and humiliations straight to the web. Turkle's interviews debunk the myth that web-savvy youngsters do not care about privacy. Rather, they see it as a lost cause. The social obligation to be part of the network is too strong even for those who resent the endless exposure. Teenagers perform on the digital stage, suppressing anxiety about who is lurking in the audience. From that anxiety flows ever greater reliance on technology to mediate human relations. Human beings can be needy, capricious, threatening, but at least calls can be diverted, emails blocked, Facebook friends "unfriended". Turkle sees this too as a symptom of emerging roboticism. The network encourages narcissism, teaching us to think of other people as a problem to be managed or a resource to be exploited. | 7075 |
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| 9 | Turkle is a psychoanalyst by training and her instinct is to describe unfamiliar social habits as pathologies. She tends to revel in the more neurotic cases among her subjects and to gloss over happier experiences of technology, although she rarely lets clinical jargon infect her prose. The focus on psychology also neglects wider social and economic forces. Western civilisation was probably on a trajectory of atomisation, loneliness and narcissism before the invention of the internet. But that does not invalidate the diagnosis. The robotic moment is not a point in history but a threshold in ethics. It is the decision we make to put our faith in technology as the antidote to human frailty, when acceptance of frailty is what makes us human. | 8085 |

# *Read the passage in the Insert and then answer all the questions. Note that up to fifteen marks will be given for the quality and accuracy of your use of English throughout this Paper.*

*NOTE: When a question asks for an answer IN YOUR OWN WORDS AS FAR AS POSSIBLE and you select the appropriate material from the passage for your answer, you must still use your own words to express it. Little credit can be given to answers which only copy words or phrases from the passage.*

1. What does the writer mean by the ‘robotic moment’ (line 10)? **Use your own words as far as possible.** [2]

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2. Explain how *The Shallows* and *The Net Delusion* are examples of ‘cyber-sceptic literature’ (line 28). **Use your own words as far as possible.** [2]

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3. Why does the author make reference to the religious term ‘evangelists’ in line 33?[2]

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4. Why is the word ‘alone’ (line 39) in inverted commas?[1]

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5. **Using your own words as far as possible,** explain the irony which the author describes in lines 58-61. [2]

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6. Why are teenagers ‘morbidly afraid of the telephone’ (line 64)? **Use your own words as far as possible.** [2]

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7. Explain why the author uses the word ‘lurking’ (line 72)[1]

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8. ‘… calls can be diverted, emails blocked, Facebook friends “unfriended”’ (lines 74-75).

Why are these referred to as symptoms of ‘emerging roboticism’ (line 75)? **Use your own words as far as possible.** [2]

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9. What does the phrase ‘gloss over’ in line 80 suggest about Turkle’s research?[1]

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10. What point is the author making in the last sentence (lines 84-86)? **Use your own words as far as possible.** [2]

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11. Using material from paragraphs 3-6 of the passage (lines 16-55), summarise what the author has to say about the impact of the reliance on technology on man’s behaviour.

Write your summary in **no more than 120 words**, not counting the opening words which are printed below. **Use your own words as far as possible.**

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12. In this article, Rafael Behr describes some issues around the subject of our use of technology. How applicable do you find his observations to yourself and your own society?

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