



INFO NYMPHOS

ERIKA BIDDLE

You don't make love anymore because it's dangerous, because sometimes there are problems—one person may not be very skilled or the situation may get messy. So you use a kind of machine, a machine that transfers physical and sexual contact by waves.... What is at play is no longer the connector rod in its housing, but the loss of what is most intimate in our experience of the body.... In cybersex, one sees, touches, and smells. The only thing one can't do is taste the saliva or semen of the other. It's a super-condom.

—Paul Virilio (1995a)

Argentinean author Jorge Luis Borges, whose writings celebrate the sensual hyperreality of the world, famously struggled with deteriorating vision. He was such a voracious reader that he read himself blind. Fittingly then, Borges once wrote, “everything touches everything.” Developments in network culture bear this out (see Terranova 2004).¹ New communications technologies enable the constant mobility of bodies and information; networks of people, ideas and interests continuously oscillate and grow in changing social landscapes that provide opportunities for digital frottage via always-on interactivity; interactive

¹ As Terranova (2004, p. 1) explains it, “To think of something like a ‘network culture’ at all, to dare to give one name to the heterogeneous assemblage that is contemporary global culture, is to try to think *simultaneously* the singular and the multiple, the common and the unique” about the hyperconnectivity and informational overabundance characteristic of contemporary network societies.

fields of experience become immersive lifeworlds. In these relational and fluctuating fields of affinity, mental and libidinal energies engage on an informational plane, provoking erotic contact between bodies and machines to produce new forms of social control and subjectivization.

Theorists such as Michel Foucault, Paul Virilio, Gilles Deleuze, Maurizio Lazzarato, and Tiqqun have discussed the development of a socialization of control that is coextensive with the “information society.” In his “Postscript on Control Societies” (1995), Deleuze extends Foucault’s periodization of regimes of power in *Discipline and Punish* from the disciplinary power of modernity (biopolitics) onward to what he calls “control societies” (dividuation).² For Deleuze, control societies mark a shift in *dispositif* wherein “power relations come to be expressed through the action at a distance of one mind on another” (Lazzarato, 2006, p. 186).

Deleuze attributes this movement to the rapid development of communications and informational technologies during the cybernetic turn of the post-World War II era and the mechanisms and techniques of control they enable. Lazzarato extends this analysis of power and technology in control societies from the physical body to subjectivity—or the body’s “psychic life.” As Tiqqun (2001, p. 33) suggests, the post-World War II development of cybernetic capitalism has steadily involved a generalization of *self-control*, or, “a disposition that favors the proliferation of devices, and ensures any effective relay.” What this statement effectively expresses is capital’s efforts to dominate by its imperative to connect, to stay in the grip of control.

This article will investigate the transformation of subjectivities and new forms of social control through this imperative as it manifests in technological advances in communicative media and human-computer interaction (HCI). Considering a selection of contemporary social media platforms, including Twitter, Facebook, and online porn, it will examine modes of performativity and participation on the Internet as forms of haptic control. While haptics are traditionally thought to directly involve touch (“haptic” is Greek for “touch” or “grasp”), it may be more broadly understood as forms of non-verbal

² From Foucault to Deleuze, the control diagram mutates from territorialization to deterritorialization, from segmentation to perpetuation, from enclosures to open distributed networks, from the external division of masses of bodies as a control mechanism (individuation) to the internal division of bodies into measurable and adjustable parameters as a control mechanism (dividuation). Bogard (2007) provides a definition for dividuation that’s among the clearest I’ve read: dividuation is “the internal division of entities into measurable and adjustable parameters, in the way, for instance, a digital sound sample is divided into separate parameters of tone, pitch, or velocity.”

communication and somatic feedback.

As William Bogard (2007) explains, haptic control is “not just the control of touch but rather a technical and social program for the adjustment of sensibility as a whole, including proprioceptive awareness, the body’s internal sense of its own position and movement relative to the outside world.” The immersivity of haptic forms is thus co-evolving with the Internet’s capacity to control at a distance. With the hyperconnectivity these communications technologies enable, capitalism’s modes of desire and anxiety are inscribed in bodies as processes wherein devices and their users have become increasingly adaptive to each other. We are learning to experience the body as a medium, rewiring our brains for new affects and learning from how machines learn.

Haptic Control at a Distance: From Pleasure to Performativity

The human body is the magazine of inventions, the patent-office, where are the models from which every hint was taken. All the tools and engines on earth are only extensions of its limbs and senses.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson (1885)³

In 1958, at the height of the Cold War, the United States Department of Defense created the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA). In 1969, ARPA hooked up the first two nodes of what would become the ARPANET—an experimental computer network—and a new universe was born. After a decade of development, in 1983, the TCP/IP protocol, which is still the standard used today, was launched. In 1988, the US Federal Networking Council approved the use of the Internet for commerce. It was nineteen at the time, still a teenager by all accounts. In 1992, commercial entities offered Internet access to the general public for the first time in the form of the World Wide Web. Our subjectivities—with or without Internet access—have been networked ever since.

As a correlate to this, in Deleuze’s notion of digital control societies, power is increasingly networked into every aspect of social life and

³ Regarded by many as a “McLuhanism” because of the subtitle to his 1964 book *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, this is Ralph Waldo Emerson writing on the emerging symbiosis between man and machines that was part of his larger project on solitude.

“technology is social before it is technical” (1986, p. 40). Broadband has allowed for the creation of programs that constantly reach out to the Internet for updates in order to forestall death by pre-programmed obsolescence. Many basic applications cannot function without communicating over a network. The necessity of being on the Internet and connected to a server has been built into these utilities. The social feedback mechanisms that the Internet provides parallel the manner in which the programs we use are controlled at a distance. Proponents call this networking of techno-social spaces “ambient intimacy” (Reichelt, 2009) and claim that it enables people to keep in touch with a level of regularity and closeness that real time and distance conspire to make impossible.

However, with every promise for connection comes an interface. On the one hand, there is journalist Clive Thompson’s (2007) argument that social media permit a tactile sense of community. He refers to this as “social proprioception.” If proprioception is the unconscious perception of movement and spatial orientation arising from stimuli within the body itself, then social proprioception is an augmented capacity to sense the presence of those in your community while at the same time informing, or reinforcing, where you are in dynamic techno-social space. Almost two decades ago, Virilio (1995b) discussed this phenomenon in terms of “tactile perspective”: the ability to reach at a distance, to feel at a distance, amounting to the shifting of perspective toward a domain the audiovisual perspective of old had yet to encompass. He called this “tele-contact.” What Virilio describes is an early form of haptic control at a distance. Developments in haptic control have been marked by a series of shifts toward control from afar, toward the immaterial exertion of power.

And yet the connectivity and intimacy that is promised by these new platforms forever retreats before the grasp of its users, in a manner that recalls Roland Barthes’s discussion of the striptease in *Mythologies*, a collection of critical articles on French mass culture in the 1950s. Barthes observes that one of the primary experiences of capitalism is its “look but don’t touch!” proviso for the things we most desire. At the core of capitalism’s aesthetic, then, is the seduction and refusal of the body. The striptease illustrates this performative phenomenon as it pertains to the lap dance, where the spectacle of erotic contact doubles as haptic control. Lap dance patrons know their desires will be unfulfilled, but this refusal is idealized, reworked in fantasy and becomes essential to the pleasure of the experience. Thus, the author states, “consumption can perfectly well be accomplished simply by looking” (1999, p. 79).

As will be discussed in detail, contemporary social media users occupy the same position as the lap dance patron, only their experience is redoubled by the physical presence of the screen and the feedback mechanisms of interactivity. Captured by their focused attention, watching themselves perform a role in a virtual interchange, the possibility for connection is instrumentalized and recoded as instantly attainable self-pleasure. The new forms of social control operate at a distance by activating their subjects' desires to participate and perform. These desires are inherently erotic—as Marshall McLuhan (1967) wrote, “When information is brushed against information ... the results are startling and effective. The perennial quest for involvement, fill-in, takes many forms” (pp. 76–78)—and are heightened by the striptease of online performativity.

In his dialogue on love, Plato wrote that human Eros took many forms. Many years later, Sigmund Freud laid the foundations for a neuroscientific understanding of sexual and romantic plasticity. Arguing that a person's ability to love intimately and sexually unfolds in stages, beginning from infancy through adulthood, he wrote, “The sexual instincts are noticeable to us for their plasticity, their capacity for altering their aims” (Freud qtd. in Doidge, 2007, p. 98). More recently, neuroscientific theories on subjectivity—in particular, neuroplasticity—have helped define new perspectives on social relations. Neuroplastic theory has underlined the importance of polysemic forces (e.g., intensity, attention, movement, sensation) in affecting change in the brain. Neurological connections can be wired and rewired through habitual stimulation of the brain, “neurons that fire together, wire together” (Doidge, 2007, p. 109).

What is at stake in control at a distance and in haptic control is a remapping of neural networks. As Norman Doidge informs his readers, focused attention is *the* condition for massive plastic change (p. 111). The users of these platforms are practising wiring new images and behaviours “into the pleasure centers of the brain, with the rapt attention necessary for plastic change” (p. 109). With every social ping, the brain is rewired for new pleasures and new forms of control.

Haptic Technologies: From the Vibrator to Teledildonics

Hey, don't knock masturbation; it's sex with someone I love.

—W. Allen & M. Brickman (1977)

From the beginning, haptic technologies have been closely linked to the administration of pleasure. The relationship between pleasure and performativity in haptic control and the movement from direct touch to control at a distance is illustrated by the history of the vibrator. The electromechanical vibrator was created in 1887 at the Salpêtrière Hospital in Paris, an institution famous for its experimental treatments of hystero-neurasthenic disorders in women, or “hysteria,” which comes from the Greek word for uterus.⁴

In Plato's *Timaeus*, the cause of the “ailment” was allegedly an errant uterus moving through a woman's body, to her chest, where it smothered her. In the first century CE, physicians and midwives used manual stimulation to treat hysteria. In the second century CE, the physician Galen diagnosed its cause as the sexual frustration of particularly libidinous women when they are deprived of an outlet for their sexuality. Later, in the Victorian era, it was taken as a sign of the stresses of modern life on the fragile constitution of “pedestal women,” as Victorians liked to imagine the female of the species. Thus, when it crossed the ocean to America, physicians asserted it was a sign that America was finally catching up to the modernity of Europe (see Briggs 2000).

According to Rachel Maines's (1999) history of the vibrator, technology and the orgasm have been linked since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, when the vibrator was first used by physicians as a “capital-labor substitution innovation” to treat female hysteria. Treating hysteria through pelvic massage had become a lucrative practice for physicians because of the tendency toward repeat business. However, after their initial excitement, male doctors began to search for alternatives as they became tired of the labour involved in manually stimulating women, often for more than an hour at a time. These doctors were reluctant to lose the practice to midwives, so to maintain their incomes and at the same time retain control of the female orgasm and body they turned to the vibrator. One of the earliest of these machines, invented in 1870, was a clockwork-driven vibrator. More devices soon followed and eventually became available for use in the home. By 1918, the Sears catalogue included a home vibrator with attachments, proclaiming it to be “very useful

⁴These experiments most famously occurred with French neurologist Dr. Jean-Martin Charcot.

and satisfactory for home service” (Maines, 1999, p. 42). It was one of the earliest widely available electrical home appliances.

The release of the vibrator into consumer society falls in line with the historic shift that Foucault outlines in *Discipline and Punish* from the eighteenth century (when physical torture was the most widely used control device) to the modern era, beginning after the French Revolution and expanding into the early parts of the twentieth century. Foucault writes: “At the beginning of the nineteenth century the great spectacle of physical punishment disappeared.... The age of sobriety in punishment had begun” (1995, p. 14). The administration of bodies became an issue of self-governance and creating discipline, which required living outside of one’s self in order to be self-policing. Putting women on the drawing board, as it were, in a social experiment as to how the body is controlled without the threat of violence proved to be a remunerative venture because the subjects tended toward habituation. The “treatment” of female hysteria served to sustain a patriarchal and proprietary control of women, but also, paradoxically, to fulfill capitalism’s task of putting bodies to work. The vibrator is an almost perfect precursor to social networking, as an example of how we can, as Foucault (1983, p. xii) explains, “desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us.”

While the exertion of haptic control through technologies of pleasure is at least as old as the vibrator, in today’s network society, haptic control is marked by a series of shifts toward control at a distance through the feedback loop of online performativity that augments the horizontal⁵ quality of capitalism’s aesthetics of pleasure that Barthes recognized in the striptease. Nowhere is this better demonstrated than in an online video for [fuckingmachines.com](#) involving porn crossover star Sasha Grey, the pseudonym for Marina Ann Hantzis.⁶ Hantzis was born in 1988, the same year the teenaged Internet was placed in the hands of corporations. In 2006, upon turning eighteen—and becoming legal tender under US statutes—she began her career in porn as “Sasha Grey” and very quickly became an Internet sensation. Her video for [fuckingmachines.com](#) was made within nine months of her entering the porn industry.

The setting of the video looks like a military research laboratory in Hollywood movies, where clandestine experiments take place. As far as the viewer can see on-camera, the room is cold, grey, modern, and bare except for a light table (approximately six-feet long) and the machine. Grey sits on the table

⁵ See Gadamer’s work on hermeneutics, relating to Foucault (through Barthes).

⁶ Sasha Grey starred in Steven Soderbergh’s film *The Girlfriend Experience* (2009) and had a supporting role in Season 7 of HBO’s *Entourage* (2010).

as if waiting for a medical examination alongside her imminent partner, a dildo attached to a chrome shaft driven by a metal wheel. The demonstration begins, and the dildo moves in and out of Grey's body like a piston as the wheel turns. The contraption is reminiscent of an IKEA plexiglass box display in which an armchair is repeatedly tested by having a piston-powered shaft drive up and down against it to show that the chair can hold up to service in the field. While the video is supposedly an opportunity for Grey to test the pleasuring capacity of the golem fucking machines, one gets an unmistakable sense that she is being tested, the tolerances of her body and mind, as if she were an android sex companion off the assembly line that must have its kinks worked out before being shipped to the consumer. Indeed, she looks like a clone of any one of a number of waifish Hollywood starlets.

In the video, the machine starts slowly, and we hear Grey moan and scream profanities as she is repeatedly penetrated, with the camera between her legs and the light box illuminating the prosthetic penis and her genitalia. But then the wheel starts to spin faster and faster, she is penetrated more aggressively, and it becomes impossible to tell whether she is displaying simulated pleasure, or if she is experiencing real pleasure or pain. The machine revs up to a speed where it would be impossible for her to get off and it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish whether she is being raped by the machine or, more chillingly, whether that is the point and it's a calculated spectacle produced for an online audience alone in their rooms but for the glow of their laptop screens.

The body of Sasha Grey, being raped or pleased by the machine for an online interactive audience, connects the past and present of haptic control. An interactive technology created for military purposes and turned over to corporations for mass propagation culminates in the broadcast behaviour of a teenager, who has invented another self on the Internet—a porn avatar with a fake name from which she can disassociate—being manipulated by a machine created by physicians to preserve their profits and control of the female orgasm by treating female hysteria.

Finally, there is the interactive audience, enjoying the pleasuring/rape of Sasha Grey by a machine that must feed their own sense of inadequacy, and participating by offering commentary on an act to which they will always remain spectators. The comments themselves are performances for which they receive feedback: attention or indifference. For these viewers then, the pleasure of porn is no longer enough; they require the seeking of recognition from other pornographic viewers. In the throes of self-pleasure, haptic control is exerted at a distance. Ultimately, the scene provides both an illustration and metaphor for

the Internet: a device for the consumption and the annihilation of the body, where participation is little more than the ability to offer comments on a pre-set narrative and freedom is self-subjugation.

The Medium is the Massage: Connectivity in 140 Characters or Less

Sex is not speaking anymore. It is rather babbling, and faltering, and it is also suffering for it. Too few words, too little time to talk. Too little time to feel.

—F. Berardi (2007, p. 200)

In 1985, Friedhelm Hillebrand, chairman of the non-voice services committee within the Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM), developed research towards the goal that by 1986 all cellular carriers and mobile phones would support the short messaging service (SMS) for its subscribers (see Millan 2009). This service occupied a smaller data channel, initially used to alert a mobile device about reception strength and to supply it with bits of information regarding incoming calls. It was a system by the cell phone for the cell phone, an internal feedback loop to inform mobile devices of their connectivity to other devices in the network.

In a quest for cheap implementation, the capacity of this channel was tweaked to accommodate short alphanumeric messages for subscribers. Research for the character length included analyzing postcard texts and Telex messages and Hillebrand sitting at his typewriter, counting the number of letters, numbers, punctuation marks, and spaces on the page as he typed out random sentences and questions. Nearly all of his messages weighed in at approximately 160 characters, thereby setting the standard service providers still use today.

In 2006, Twitter, a microblog service where one can post messages via the Web, instant messaging (IM), or SMS, was born from this research. Twitter permits only 140 characters, which is evidence towards the economy of language we've been tasked with ever since the advent of print culture. Since Twitter went viral in 2008, the question "Why do we Twitter?" (Thomas 2009) has been at the forefront of discussion. According to a panel of "experts" assembled by the *London Times* in 2009, "We Twitter to reassure ourselves that we are alive" (see Pemberton 2009).

In the most banal sense, this is true. A Twitter emergency broadcast system has been in development since 2008. In May 2008, before news of the 7.9-magnitude earthquake in central China hit major news sources (CNN, MSNBC, the BBC, even the United States Geological Survey), local Twitter users had broadcast the information from their smartphones. More recently, the Iranian, Tunisian, and Egyptian governments notoriously blocked access to Twitter in an effort to curb protests, domestic solidarity efforts, and broadcasting of the unfolding Arab Spring to the international community. Proving faithful to its origins, Twitter can serve as an electronic message in a bottle.

But this isn't the way the majority of people use Twitter, nor does it account for its ever-growing popularity. Twitter puts myriad possibilities for self-expression and self-promotion into the palm of one's hand. Twitter's capacity for immediacy, mediation, and remediation serves as a tool for control at the most deterritorialized level, or as M. Beatriz Fazi (2009) writes, "communicational practices of mass expressivity on the one hand, or, abstract corporeal decay and immaterial representation on the other."⁷ Aldous Huxley warned in *Brave New World* (1932) that new technologies would be called into existence by the social chaos resulting from rapid technological progress in general and the atomic revolution in particular, and develop, under the auspices of efficiency and stability, into the welfare-tyranny of Utopia. Technology would be created and humans would be adapted to a media world that does not really exist outside of its expressions.

In another classic work of dystopian science fiction, George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, there's a discussion about "Newspeak," a state-ordained language simplified to the point where any independent or contrary thought is impossible "because there will be no words in which to express it" (1983, p. 49). With the kind of communication that's been adapted for SMS, a new universal language is produced. This text-byte self-expression is rarely more complex than the level of detail provided by the Japanese smart toilets that analyze human waste and send the results to your cellphone (thereby making it easier to Twitter the information).⁸ The messages are short, repetitive, and they render all authorship and communication generic. Communication, which "transmits to us a universe made up of disconnected images and incoherent remarks," has become, as Alain Badiou (2006) among others have said, in the

⁷ I'm adapting Fazi's argument here. Although she is not explicitly referring to Twitter, she is describing forms of phatic suppression that can easily be applied to the platform.

⁸ For example, see A. Saenz, (2009, May 12), "Smart Toilets: Doctors in Your Bathroom," retrieved from <http://singularityhub.com/2009/05/12/smart-toilets-doctors-in-your-bathroom/>.

mass communication of our most personal discourses, increasingly standardized, commercialized, coded, oriented, and channelled by the infinite glitter of merchandise. In the velocity of this form of communication, people need narratives that are quickly accessible. Hollywood has produced a narrative library that is “ready-to-hand,” to use Martin Heidegger’s phrase, which provides the means to reduce lives into badly written screenplays one text-byte at a time. The minutiae of tweets or status updates may vary but the basics are the same.

In Jean Baudrillard’s version of the simulacrum, the copies are identical without an original. Twitter provides tools to turn its users not into exact copies, but indistinguishable variations without an original. Social networking utilities have the capacity to render their users mongers of two-dimensional selves. Mimicking celebrity culture in the way the paparazzi cover every mundane aspect of celebrities’ lives thereby glorifying every social ping, social media users are able to be their own paparazzi, squeezing out fifteen minutes of fame by making themselves visible by dint of bandwidth consumption and, like well-behaved smart toilets, documenting and mass disseminating the most mundane and intimate acts of their daily lives.

Phantom Co-Presence: Doing What It Takes to Amass Friends and Followers

The amplification and modification of identity is at the core of social media’s seductive appeal and capacity to exert control. Identity is the first thing one creates logging on to any computer service. Users must define themselves in some way—whether it is through a screen name, a personal profile, an icon, or Gravatar—and at the same time, an audience, space, and territory are also defined. The disguises used as online identities reflect a society geared towards image manipulation and self re-creation.

What social networking technologies claim to augment is the ability to connect with others and form communities. However, connection and community have become matters of velocity and statistics. Twitter, for example, allows its users to constantly broadcast and update private accounts of their internal lives as if they were the minutiae of a world-historical event in order to attract followers. Facebook provides more of an “application mashup” than Twitter’s comparatively limited functionality and became omnipresent in the same year the latter was invented. As Thompson (2008) writes, “By 2006, Facebook had become the de facto public commons.”

Franco (“Bifo”) Berardi (2010) suggests that Facebook makes friendship impossible. Like Twitter, its users are fast-wired to assess visibility and emotional self-worth through the accumulation of followers. The Twitter or Facebook user is, from this perspective, what Fazi (2009) has described as a “strange creature in between a behaviourist Golem, pushing buttons and waiting for feedback, and a transcendental ego of Kantian reminiscence, positing itself and its relation to technology as a world-creating operation of knowledge.”⁹ As Fazi suggests, the promise of self-expression and interconnection does not go much further than the limits of solipsism.

The giddiness of participation distracts from how even the most transgressive interfaces bear the mark of an authority that keeps on changing but is an always-present phantom in the “network society” (Castells 1996), an assemblage comprised entirely of social networks that provide means for people to communicate without personal contact. Baudrillard (1998, p. 146) described this as “the ecstasy of communication,” where we are all wired into “connections, contact, contiguity, feedback and generalized interface that goes with the universe of communication.” These connections are distractions from the drama of alienation. This is how the Internet captures its users, but instead of offering the end of spectacle through perfect communication, it does the bait and switch, and we receive something other than what we paid for—the spectacle of communication.

Virilio (2005) has said the evolution of the virtual involves the development of a full-fledged aesthetics of play. According to him, play is not something that brings pleasure; on the contrary, it expresses a shift in reality, an unaccustomed mobility with respect to reality, and we are in danger of getting hooked on virtuality. Virilio argues that we’re not only slaves to an addiction with technology but we’re on our way to becoming the “planet man”: a being who is totally self-sufficient with the help of technology, who doesn’t need a partner because he has cyber sex, doesn’t need intimacy because he’s socially networked, and doesn’t have to go anywhere because the information highway starts and ends in his home. All his social responsibility filters through the Net in an infinite feedback loop, communicating and receiving all he needs to sustain himself. This being even has his own gravity in the “cosmic solitude” of the “interstellar void” that Virilio pictures as the future commons (see 1995b).¹⁰

⁹Fazi, writing from an art historical perspective, is trying to understand the lineage (from the early twentieth century avant-garde to Web 2.0) and phenomenon of abstract expressivity—from technique to technics.

¹⁰Virilio’s vision brings to mind science fiction’s dystopian futures, such as Harlan Ellison’s short story “I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream” and Arthur C. Clarke’s *2001: A Space*

Virtuality permits and develops a taste for transgression, but the transgressive acts of our false identities leave traces—most notably, guilt. Users can commit antisocial taboo acts in some sort of hazy in-between grey area where there is no apparent responsibility but at the same time feel the twisting of their souls, as they cannot shake the norms their real-world selves live with on a daily basis. Guilt, however, makes people compliant. In *The Trial* (1925), Franz Kafka's protagonist Josef K. wakes in the morning to find two men who ask him to go with them. Their only power over him is his sense of guilt, having performed some transgression he cannot identify, and because of this he follows them.

So from the Internet dream we wake, the Faustus that we are, and find ourselves guilty; we find ourselves willing to be led. Guilt, then, is yet another way that control is exerted at a distance. Considering that all forms of cybersex occur in the ultra-mediated environment of our digital devices, whether on or offline, is it possible that the Internet biomaps a society of guilt? The perverse pleasure of being subjects to power by participating in its growth fulfills a post-historical yearning for virtual participation. It is a fantasy that can easily be turned into a nightmare, but, like any fantasy, it first appears as a benign place to play out one's dreams. In these self-authored dramas one can be agent and victim, but there is a Faustian bargain: to experience everything, the good and the bad, be evil, be the victim of evil, but all of it virtually, with a thin sheet of latex between self and world.

Conclusion: Mass Hyperconnectivity and the Seduction and Refusal of the Self

The spectacle manifests itself as an enormous positivity, out of reach and beyond dispute. All it says is: "Everything that appears is good; whatever is good will appear." The attitude that it demands in principle is the same passive acceptance that it has already secured by means of its seeming incontrovertibility, and indeed by its monopolization of the realm of appearances.

—Guy Debord (1994, p. 15)

Odyssey. These are visions of how power plays itself out beyond politics, how the subjugation of the self as a purely virtual phenomenon can easily be exploited, and how the most dangerous machines are the smart and sensitive types.

With the proliferation of online social networking tools and the plastic spaces they provide, the Internet is the new social factory, a computational meta-architecture that frames everyday communications, penetrates every aspect of social relations, monitors and controls the movement of bodies, desires, and capital. Far from a celebration of our individuality, social media platforms represent an inherent distrust of it.

In a perverse twist on Foucault's idea of the panopticon, where the prisoners are in the yard and the jailers are watching over them, with social networking programs we're both the prisoners in the yard and the jailers watching over ourselves. As Thompson (2008) puts it, "young people today are already developing an attitude toward their privacy that is simultaneously vigilant and *laissez-faire*. They curate their online personas as carefully as possible, knowing that everyone is watching—but they have also learned to shrug and accept the limits of what they can control." The mythic agency of social status via connectivity needs to be vigilantly maintained and reasserted, but as Berardi (2009, pp. 162–163) warns, "devices of social control are replaced by automatisms.... The living collectivity has no decisional role any more." Every connection made is a spectacle of performativity. Every byte that's measured by some external authority is exceeded by the way we stalk ourselves online.

New haptic technologies build on older forms of discipline characterized by surveillance, adding the promise of pleasure to the threat of capture and punishment. Time on the Net is built upon the promise of the erasure of the past. Consumption of the Internet's highly mediated forms of sociability has long been premised on the belief that our behaviours are consequence free, that in the virtual worlds we inhabit, everything can be erased. Erasure is the mark of capitalism, and consumerism is the habit of destruction and replacement. There can be no permanent satisfaction of desire, only the creation of dissatisfaction following a temporary high. The carrot the Internet offers is the pleasure of participation, the fantasy-generating element, the false intimacy, the developing egocentrism of it—on Twitter, everyone is a star—and the stick is terror and bodily fear (of exposure to AIDS, diseases, germs, violence), the fear of social interaction and alienation endemic to rampant materialism, and the fear of our own mortality, which is ramped up to fever pitch by the practice of consumption. The act of consumption is the running away from a threat that we always carry with us and are reminded of by the very technique of escape—our own annihilation.

The horizontal quality of capitalism's aesthetics of pleasure that Barthes recognized in the striptease is simultaneously amplified, multiplied, internalized, and made public in the social reproduction of haptic controls. The body, the "magazine of inventions" (Emerson 1885), becomes technological medium in order to implement, habitually even, network society's haptic controls. Italian author Roberto Bazlen (1973) writes, "True life means to invent new places where we can be ruined ... every new work is the invention of a new death." The Internet, invented under the wings of the US military-industrial complex and now serving as the world's largest social reproduction factory, may very well be that new place for ruin.

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