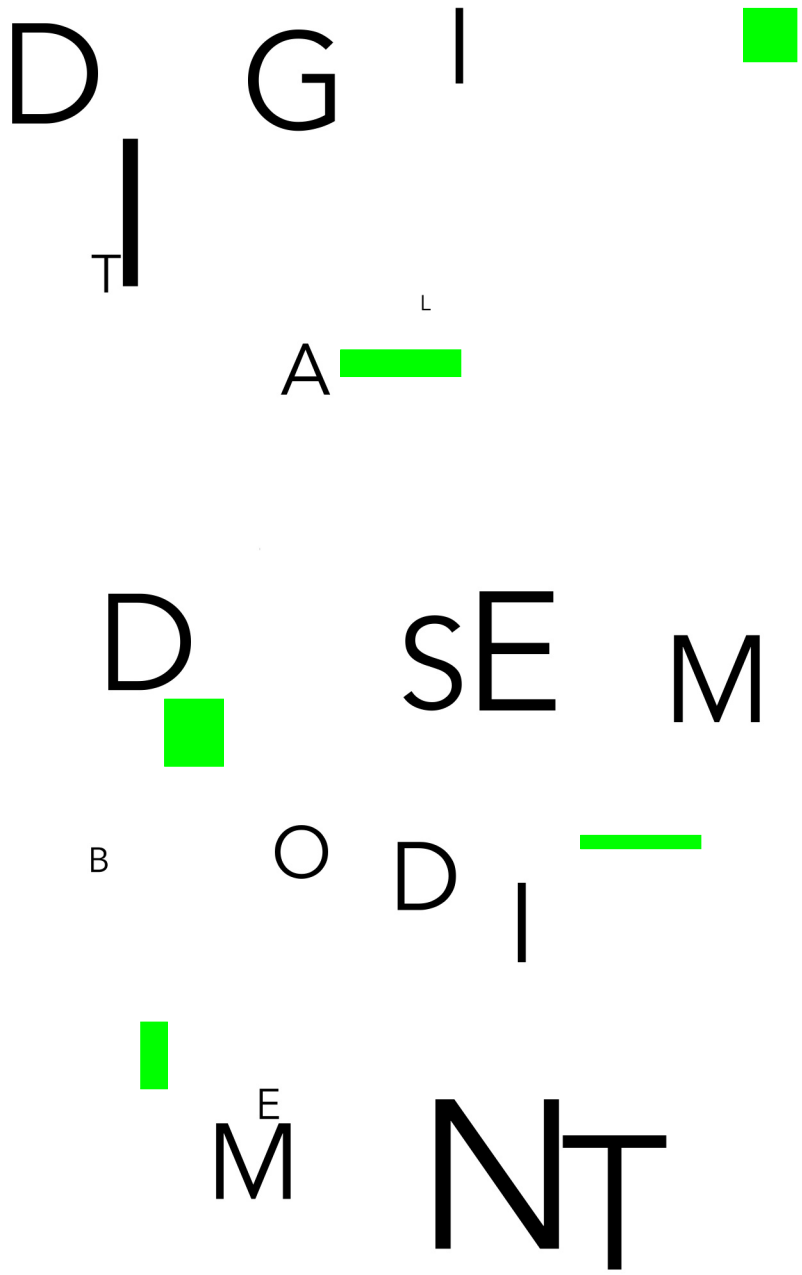
DIGITAL
DESIGN
BODY
MENT

Digital Disembodiment / Luke Munn, 2015, Colab, AUT

A thesis submitted to Auckland University of Technology in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Creative Technology

For more information about projects, writing and research, please visit: http://www.lukemunn.com/

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Attestation of Authorship:

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Abstract:

How does digital capitalism remap the body and how can contemporary art respond? As late capitalism continues its pervasive spread into spaces and temporalities not yet occupied, the limitations engendered by human bodies become increasingly untenable. Digital technologies provide both the model and the means for a body which operates frictionlessly within this always-on, always-improving framework. This vision forms a future trajectory for an updated somatic self - a colonized and dematerialised body which is sleepless, hungerless, discrete, disintegrated and self-optimised. This research project investigates each of these traits as evidenced by real-world technological trends and their broader ideologies. The written work maps out a particular relationship between technology and the body. The artworks inhabit this terrain without maintaining consensus - overloading sites in order to productively problematise existing knowledge systems.

Examiner’s Note:

The following section unpacks how this project functions as research: methodologies used, strategies employed, and the relationship between components such as writing work and art work.

Literature Review:
In order to demarcate a current vision of digital disembodiment, one of the writing's primary functions is to link together disparate ideas and examples into a contiguous map. Rather than isolated as a separate section then, the Literature Review component of this thesis is embedded throughout the text. It consists of a groundwork of real-world technologies which are then expanded upon by using a range of contemporary thinkers to explore their social, cultural, and political impacts. These ideas are subsequently connected, synthesised and juxtaposed to form individual chapters which reflect on a specific aspect of digital disembodiment.

Methodology:
The writing seeks to map a specific fantasy of digital disembodiment. In order to explore this disembodiment, the artwork produces and encapsulates bodies. These bodies range from the corporeal artist himself (Four Minute Tweet) through to bodies-as-output (Proxy), fictional identities (iChat) and informatic selves (SR / DPR). These bodies inhabit the space defined in the writing without illustrating it. Instead they seek to engender a form of 'immanent critique' - operating as entangled entities within a framework and embracing its logic

in order to investigate both inconsistencies and alternatives.

Knowledge is not peacefully constructed in a vacuum, but instead arises from conflict, “carved out in a clash between forces” (Topinka, 2010). By remaining connected to (and indeed embedded within) existing orders while simultaneously problematising and clashing with them, these works produce new forms of knowledge (Topinka, 2010). In this sense these works function in a similar fashion to Foucault’s heterotopias. But rather than a simplistic “site of resistance”, they better represent a layering or “intensification of knowledge” (Topinka, 2010). Instead of two distinct options - a pair of cleanly separated objects - it’s precisely this overlapping or ‘overloading’ of a single site which complicates and contests it. The result is a type of productive problematization which aims at both “making order legible” (Topinka, 2010) and destabilizing that order to create new possibilities.

This project-specific strategy falls under the broader rubric of practice-led and practice-based research methodologies, approaches common in creative and artistic research. As practice-based research, alongside the writing is the creation of objects or artefacts which lead to “new or substantially improved insights” (Candy, 2006). While the writing provides contextualization and key discoveries, a “full understanding can only be obtained with direct reference to the [creative] outcomes” (Candy, 2006). Ultimately however, this project - like my wider artistic practice - is practice-led. This methodology

more closely mirrors my own approach in which works are conceptually and cognitively developed based on research, rather than a 'play first' approach. In other words, "research leads primarily to new understandings about practice" (Candy, 2006).

In line with the practice-based research model, the writing and practice are interdependent, influencing each other without covering the same territory. Allowing these two modes of knowledge-production to interfere with each other produces a richer and more rigorous body of knowledge. In this "co-composing" process, a "new and complex pattern emerges, reducible to neither one or the other" (Manning & Massumi, viii).

The writing was developed over the course of a year in phases, connecting areas and islands to form a contiguous concept. In contrast, development of each artwork ranged from 2-8 weeks and employed more intuitive, tangential leaps from one specific idea to the next. The knowledge gained by writing provides an understanding of the context in which the artwork is placed, allowing for more strategic positioning and deployment of practice-led interventions.

The practice, in turn, provides a productive problematization of the writing, undermining the privileging of "pure knowledge" (Schön, 1983, p. 27) and adding criticality and complexity by embodying specific notions as artworks. Art practices also

contain the notion of distancing or slippage between artist and artwork, enabling productive play through disparate aesthetics, politics, and positions without ascribing this experimentation directly to the identity of their author. Artwork production ranges across media and platforms - from mobile applications to sound recordings, printed textiles and custom software. Though completed works are highly medium-specific, many works (both uncompleted and fully-realized) originate as concepts which could be manifested in a variety of ways.

Writing:
The writing does not use a traditional exegesis approach, which explains the artwork through close analysis and unpacking its theoretical underpinnings. Instead, the writing seeks to define a space, the context in which this body of work exists. Because the primary purpose is to delineate a field, the language is relatively unemotive, concerned with operations rather than judgements, mapping rather than editorializing. In this aspect, the writing work reflects the artwork. The writing seeks to explore relevant real-world technologies with a wider lens, examining their surrounding social, political and cultural contexts using theoretical and critical tools sourced from contemporary thinkers. This written work is generated by thinking through the issues involved and formulating them into text designed for understanding, accessibility and distribution. As a form of communication, it seeks to define a conceptual space and demarcate a range of issues in an autonomous and understandable format.

Artwork:

The artworks inhabit the context mapped out in the writing. They do not seek to directly illustrate the theoretical points from the text, nor do they (as a body of work) seek to convince the viewer of any particular response to these ideas. In other words, they are neither didactic nor prescriptive. Instead, each work is simply a point in the field - one possible permutation of the ways in which identity and embodiment are performed today. Some of these works are reflective, mirroring the trends outlined in the text. Others are resistant, pushing against these trajectories. Some are speculative, attempting to envision alternative responses or perhaps different questions. This is not to say these are completely open, ambiguous works - decisions around content, code, and materials have all been made to communicate unambivalently and produce a specific cluster of experiences. Equally however, they utilise a basic strategy of contemporary art, recognizing that the viewer is required to complete the work and respecting her contributions in doing so. By making art, each piece contributes towards a body of work, a system of knowledge which is more fluid and rhizomatic in structure. This framework allows sets of works to be activated in a range of configurations towards a more flexible and experiential form of knowledge production. As a form of communication, single works seek focused opportunities to intersect with targeted audiences while ultimately pointing to the wider body of work for more holistic understandings. As a form of research, the practice aims to enrich theoretical knowledge with articulated learnings which

are both immersed in the technology they critique and embedded in real-world contexts.

Curation:
The works selected for inclusion in this research project are those which were a) produced within the 18 month degree period, b) deemed most successful from an artistic viewpoint and c) considered most theoretically relevant, in terms of the research question being framed as a curatorial premise. These works are all documented in this publication and positioned to 'converse' with a specific chapter. The works selected for in-situ presentation at the examination are primarily time-based or performative pieces in which a live, first-hand experience offers a significant benefit in contrast to static image documentation.

Form of Conclusion:
Rather than a single artwork or artefact as conclusion, these pieces seek to maximize their value as a body of work - that is, a more fluid, rhizomatic system of knowledge which allows for a range of possible interpretations based on configuration, context, and the viewer's contributions. The final statement then is primarily a written one, which should however be read in conversation with the experiential 'text' generated by the exposure to the artworks, both documented here and presented in-situ during examination.

Introduction:

“These knowledge systems and conceptions of the disembodied self remain embedded in machines; concomitantly, machines act as conduits for the perpetuation of these systems and ideas of the self in culture” (Munster, 2010, p. 15).

Desires are inscribed in our digitality. Operating as the ‘natural’ evolution of a series of purely technical supercessions, digital technologies encapsulate a complex and often invisible array of political, social and cultural ideologies. Notions of adaptability, performativity, mobility and connectivity are woven into the intersection between hardware, software and network infrastructures and modeled by their mainstream manifestations. Together they permeate our everyday, privileging specific ways of working and playing, eating and sleeping.

Digital technologies offer neoliberal capitalism an afterburner. This regime seeks untapped temporalities and territories to fuel new efficiencies and accelerate existing productivities. Seen within this framework, the traditional concept of the body as a cohesive, corporeal entity becomes frictional. Single and sited, it is dead weight, dragging down velocities of perfect productivity, hampering slipstreams of pure performativity.

The body becomes a pathology. Digital technologies successfully ‘embody’ the productivities which late capitalism desires of all bodies. They therefore function as a model - demonstrating a frictionless integration with capitalism and simultaneously

highlighting the failure of our somatic selves to do the same. But they also operate as motor - providing a future trajectory for an updated framing of the body which would better mirror these ideals.

The dematerialised body dreamed of by digital capitalism would more fully attain its valued qualities: transparency, performativity and mobility. Transparency valorizes a barrierless body, an inner life mined and made open to circulation and commodification. Performativity implies a body which matches the hyperproductivity of always on markets, shrugging off sleep, hunger and other biological rhythms and restraints. Mobility posits a body which can be relocated in space and time, not typically as a whole but rather as a disintegrated set of data, recombined and repackaged from device to device, screen to screen.

At the same time, those traits traditionally aligned with the human must somehow remain. Affective and cognitive labour are increasingly valued - service and information industries integral to the ongoing vitality of late capitalism. The psychological and spiritual provide notable critiques of capital which can then be enfolded and co-opted into new evolutions of labour. The creative is fundamental to discovering new commodities and modes of production in a world of limited resources and shrinking time. The social allows value-creation through peer review or crowd-sourcing and affords new networks of distribution for the finalised cultural and cognitive

commodities.

Digitised and dematerialised, yet deeply human. The result of these twin forces is a free floating entity which hovers between various prevalent notions of the body. This digital body moves beyond the machinic, a metaphor primarily concerned with motor movements and limited in the end by its cohesion and immobility - a single engine fixed in place. Secondly, it occupies a different territory than the post-human, that futuristic but ultimately fleshy idea of the computer inserted into the carnal, and its insistence on technology as a prosthesis or augmentation of the somatic structure. Finally, whether its attributes can be defined as uniquely 'human' or not, this entity is understood to represent (in however mediated a form) a single human body rather than a nonhuman object.

Rather than a single body-computer interface, which could become "frictional and resistant" (Munster, 2010), the digital here is seen as a broader environment which is both ubiquitous and device-agnostic. It discards any permanent "embodied zones of connection" (Munster, 2010) for a constellation of screens and signals, protocols and processes, software and sensors that mine the body via a range of active and passive operations. The result is a diffused digitality which bypasses the 'man/machine' trope in a more subtle and seamless subsumption - a contiguous colonization of everyday experiences.

While ‘material media’ theories have problematised this notion of digital disembodiment in artistic (Stelarc 1996; Rokeby 1983-1992) and academic (Munster 2010; Hayles 1999) contexts, this project is far more interested in the perpetuated fantasy itself. How do these disembodied dreams persist and manifest in the mainstream - social media, shopping, SMS and other everyday digital technologies - and how do they reshape the way we think about the self and the somatic? The following chapters lay out this vision of an updated, dematerialised body - one which is hungerless, self-optimized, disintegrated, discrete and sleepless. The final chapter explores two strategies which could inform a critical artistic response to this situation.

Proxy
bodies, code, content, digital audio, plastic prosthetics
AUT Performance Space
June 8, 2015

Affective phrases are mined from Tumblr accounts and recompiled into 'natural language' by an algorithm. This process is outputted into two bodies who speak and move around a space using an established logic.

Hungerless

In 2011 software engineer Rob Rhinehart was working for a Silicon Valley startup, desperately trying to produce a minimum viable product (MVP) before the firm's venture capital ran dry. Heading into the final weeks, the small team subsisted almost entirely on a diet of frozen burritos and two minute noodles in an attempt both to maximize coding hours and stave off bankruptcy. Rhinehart came to view hunger as a distraction, an expensive problem in terms of time and money which needed an engineering solution.

Rhinehart largely ignored the recommendations of nutritionists and dieticians, a space he found was full of contradictions. Instead he updated the biochemical machine of personal idol Buckminster Fuller with a digital model driven by software-based quantification and open-source optimization. Reducing the body down to a series of chemical inputs, Rhinehart developed a slurry which could completely replace the messy, costly necessity of meal preparation, a food substitute he termed Soylent. "You need amino acids and lipids, not milk itself," he explained, "You need carbohydrates, not bread." (Sparrow, 2014)

Similar products have existed for some time but with key differences in both marketing and intended use. Protein shakes have long been utilised by the fitness community to build muscle mass rapidly, diet drinks like SlimFast are temporary weight loss regimes, while ready-to-use-therapeutic-foods such as Plumpy'Nut are envisioned as an instant aid to severe

malnutrition with a long-term shelf life. Designed by Ryder Ripps of OKStudio, an artist/designer adept at managing his own image, Soylent's packaging is just one aspect of a carefully curated brand. Minimal but beautiful, elegant but everyday, Soylent adopts an Apple-esque aesthetic to create a premium product aimed at the white collar workers of the information economy. This is a product for focus not fitness, targeting software developers and overburdened managerial sector employees intent on maximising their 'up-time'.

In a feature in the *New Yorker*, the magazine's journalist accompanies Rhinehart throughout his day. From sessions refining his formula to a meeting with an enthusiastic dorm of student testers, the duo take sips from a water bottle filled with the substance, maintaining their energy levels while moving without interlude from one task to the next, an experience in which "time stretches before you, featureless" (Widdicombe, 2014). Soylent removes the punctuation and rhythmic fluctuations of the working day brought about by food rituals, liberating each minute for its optimal labour potential. Breakfast, lunch and dinner dissolve into a de-differentiated temporal plane. The product 'solves' hunger by disintegrating the body, treating food as an energy input problem and obliterating the wasted time of meal preparation and lunch breaks. Any embodied biological temporalities are discarded and a new one instantiated which more closely aligns to the always on, always available time desired by late capitalism.

In smoothing out the rhythms of the everyday, Soylent also produces a homogenisation of emotive experience. Replacing the mid-morning hunger pangs or post-lunch food coma, Soylent deletes the subjective peaks and troughs from the office day, replacing them with a stabilised system - a body which never becomes too hungry or too full, a body which never craves or cramps. By removing these biological factors, Soylent assists in producing a body which is not only more productive, but ostensibly more rational. Unaffected by sugar crashing, unhindered by external stimulants (coffee can affect iron absorption ("Mixers - Coffee - Tea?", 2013)), the body on Soylent is a more predictable platform, a more rational algorithm which more closely approximates the supposedly objective decision-making processes offered by our current digital paradigms.

Stemming from a Silicon Valley mindset, Soylent is transparent in its rational worldview, systematically reframing the body and its corresponding biological necessities via the language of the digital. Like the tech products created by the startups surrounding it, Soylent aims at "deftly abstracting away volumes of complexity" (Rhinehart, 2015). Early problems with the formula were a "bug, that we fixed" (Widdicombe, 2014). Other forms of food are "archaic" while meals consumed for pleasure are differentiated from Soylent's more streamlined, utilitarian model with the term "recreational eating" (Widdicombe, 2014). The kitchen becomes a early adopter platform for iterative improvements. The messiness of cooking

is eradicated, replaced by a clean liquid manufactured with full transparency under the glass dome of the blender. Improvised meal preparation is superseded in favour of tight control - a product which can be reproduced in exactly the same way, every time, down to the calorie.

The DIY Soylent website (http://diy.soylent.me/) leverages a sweet-spot of interest between open-source initiatives and the Quantified Self, allowing users to create their own ‘nutrient profile’ which can be shared, fine-tuned and optimised. Like other open-source projects, Soylent rapidly iterates through progressive solutions to a software problem - with product testing, improvements and innovations provided by an army of enthusiasts at zero cost.

DIY Soylent extends the food-drink into an all-encompassing dietary model via an array of custom variants which 'fork' the original Soylent 1.0 formula. Vegan or lactating, ketogenic or bulking, US female or Danish male. Ingested as the latest version, every code enhancement leads directly to a better body. A bump for those Vitamin B12 levels, a slight shaving off of one's Omega-3 count. Rather than technology as empowering tool or media as external mediation, Soylent exemplifies a more intimate osmosis of the digital, "a world in which the effects of technology and late capitalism have been absorbed into our bodies and altered our vision of the world" (Cornell, 2014).

Rather than an assumed given, Oliver Marchart (2008, p.103) wrote that "the public comes into existence only - and always anew - in the moment of conflict and dispute". If this social body only arises out of antagonism, then Soylent's suppression of the urging, surging biological body is also a kind of deletion. The base and the primal are bypassed. The somatic is sustained precisely so it can be ignored.

Summary:
Soylent introduces the concept of body as pathology - hunger is an impediment to focused performativity and maximized productivity. This problem is attacked with a Silicon Valley ideology of technosolutionism which dematerialises the body into somatic software - just one more codebase with a particular set of requirements, variations and glitches. The next chapter explores how this quest for perfection via quantification extends beyond meal-time and into every sphere of our everyday activity.

Cron Jobber
automated body, time
Embassy Gallery, Edinburgh, Scotland
July 18 - August 3 2014

(for the duration of the exhibition,
during regular gallery hours)

Every hour, on the hour, mark the time.

(on the wall, in twenty-four hour format,
include the seconds)

If you are late or early, mark the time regardless.

(use blue marker, use your own handwriting,
make lists)

After each marking, you return to your task,
but remain in the work.

12:07:10
13:02:17
14:12:30
14:59:50
15:06:22
17:04:41
18:00:15
19:01:23

11:
13:
14:
15:
16:
17:
18:

12:
13


15:03:46
16:00:31
17:04:12
18:01:09
10:01:49
11:06:17
12:23:04
12:04:39
13:02:11
14:00:22
14:59:43
18:01:04
19:05:21
12:01:24
13:01:29
14:05:07
17:08:44
17:58:19
19:57:04


12:04:39
13:02:11
14:00:22
14:59:43
10:01:44
11:06:17
12:23:04
18:01:04
19:05:21
15:01:14
16:12:22
17:04:03
12:01:24
13:01:28
14:05:07
15:03:02
15:57:11
16:04:55
17:45:20
18:00:04
12:00:04
13:59:47
14:07:22
15:00:12
16:02:22
17:04:07
18:00:31
11:55:51
13:02:35
14:11:12
15:01:23
16:32:15
17:23:30
18:00:26

Self Optimised:

In it's language of bugs and nutrient profiles, Soylent taps into a wider trend of self optimisation and 'life hacking'. Coined originally within programming communities for the inelegant scripts hastily put together to automate tasks, life hacking quickly gained traction within wider Silicon Valley tech circles as a broader set of gestures designed to "accelerate their workflow" (Life hacking, n.d.). Recent posts on Gawker's LifeHacker website (www.lifehacker.com) range from "decluttering" by deleting unnecessary phone apps to applying antiperspirant at night for "maximum effectiveness". Taking on the values of digital models, the messy problem-space of the everyday is smoothed over by a 'user' embodying a library of optimum routines.

Self-optimisation signals a significant update from the heavy-handed managerial techniques of Frederick Taylor and others in the early half of the twentieth century. The time-and-motion studies associated with Taylorism reduced the human worker to a machine, striving to eliminate wasted energy and repetitive gestures with systematic, rational logic. Management were hired to streamline every process, reducing inefficiencies such as workplace chatter and unnecessary movements while increasing outputs. "Workers were forced to become aware of their bodies and their motions to a degree beyond anything that they had known before" (Saval, 2014). Taylorism was firmly embedded within the disciplinary society described by Michel Foucault which reached its height at the outset of the twentieth century. The disciplinary paradigm sets out a top-down

confinement of the body and a normalization of behaviours via deeply entrenched institutions such as schools, hospitals and prisons. This enclosure of the body is an ongoing project which seeks “to distribute in space, to order in time, to compose a productive force” (Deleuze, 1992).

Self-optimisation updates this regime, exemplifying instead the society of control, whereby control is ubiquitous and atomised. Rather than a linear progression of confinements - for example from the family to the factory - responsibility is diffused across the spheres of the everyday (Crain, 2013). If the corporation was Deleuze’s principal agent of control when writing in 1992, the rise in freelance, temping and self-employed labour could be said to collapse the corporation to the level of the individual. Jockeying for declining jobs, fighting for dwindling projects and their associated prestige, each of these ‘own bosses’ must discipline her own body in order to compete in the new labour market. The result is an incessant and self-induced project of bodily regulation. Compared to the former time-limited regimes of bodily constriction engendered by the school, the barracks, the prison, this new programme is both open and open-ended, a space in which “one is never finished with anything” (Deleuze, 1992).

In *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello note further limitations of Taylorism as a managerial method. While these techniques were undoubtedly dehumanizing, their machinic model was also their constraint - circumscribing

capital into an embodiment of muscle movements, repetitive gestures and energy outputs. By treating the body as an engine, control was limited to motor movements. In the new world of work, however, it is the specifically human properties of labourers which are desired, a deeper set of internal forces harnessed towards furthering capitalism's encroachment into previously unexplored territories. As Boltanski and Chiapello stress, these vastly more sophisticated techniques often employ understandings taken from post-behaviourist psychology and the cognitive sciences, allowing the qualities of humans, "their emotions, their moral sense, their honour, their inventive capacity - to be placed directly in the service of the pursuit of profit" (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005, p. 98). While the taylorization of work practices imposed a skin-deep, surface level control over labouring bodies, contemporary capital penetrates far into the spiritual and psychic fabric of the individual. In this way, the "digital exchange impresses the commodity deep into the body's tissues" (Crary, 2014, backflap). We are to give it all, opening up the intimate and internal to the wider circulations of capital.

In the self-optimized body then, affect becomes mined and managed as a free-floating entity. The legislation of this emotional regulation into employment contracts is just one sign of the increasing prioritisation of 'affective labor' over the last thirty years. Particularly in service and hospitality industries, in which the product is already provided or specialist skills not required, this "prosocial" (Hardt & Negri, 2004, p. 108) work of

service with a smile is no longer value-added but the core value itself. Chains like Pret-A-Manger in the UK hire on personality, not skills, with successful applicants demonstrating mastery of the Pret Behaviours: moodiness and bad-temperedness are forbidden while someone that “has presence” and is “genuinely friendly” is desired (Mazella, 2013). Real-time reporting and flexible payment systems allow Pret’s managerial mystery shopper to visit branches weekly, evaluating their relative radiance and conferring instant bonuses accordingly. CEO Clive Schlee underlines this attention given to affect, “The first thing I look at is whether staff are touching each other… I can almost predict sales on body language alone” (Noah, 2013). In Japan, Omron’s Smile Scan is leveraged to quantitatively assess an employee’s smile, using face-sensing technology cross referenced with a global database of gender, age and ethnicity markers to confer a score of 0 to 100%.

One of the seminal studies in this space comes from sociologist Arlie Hochschild, who used a Delta Airlines training programme to explore the instrumentalization of affect within workers bodies as a mandatory component of corporate culture. Conducted in 1983, Hochschild noted the doubled selves this produced, especially in more experienced employees, a “separation of self from role” (Hochschild, p. 188) which was consciously policed. Based on this estrangement, she posited a distinction between inner-essence and outer-face, or in other terms, private-self from performance-body (Negishi, 2012). However if a precarious barrier between these two states

was acknowledged at the time, it has become increasingly blurry. With the systematic instrumentalisation of affect comes a growing cynicism. Is that warmth real or regulated? Pret wants to see ‘genuine’ friendliness, Omron trains towards a ‘natural’ smile. Distinctive delineations collapse in a body deeply pervaded by capitalistic demands - an affective supply chain which starts at the inner, emotive core and ends with a performance externalized on the surface via facial muscles and skin contact. Privileging a body which freely shares these authentic emotions, work shifts from something you make, to “how your display of feelings makes others feel” (Myerscough, 2013).

Digital discourse provides the aspirational framing vital for individual adherence to this programme of self-optimisation. Along with smart phones and smart devices, one is urged to work ‘smarter, not harder’ - leveraging information technologies to produce more value in a shorter timespan. A term like ‘kaizen’ (continuous improvement) - crucial for Toyotism-inspired managerial methods in the 90s - becomes ‘self optimisation’, whereby the labouring body is reframed as an always improving codebase. ‘Hacking’ co-opts the mythos of the independent coder gaming the system, utilising his intelligence to find weak-points and vulnerabilities in the infrastructures of the everyday. In this respect, ‘lifehacking’ claws back the terrain lost to cubicle slave or ‘corporate drone’ notions, re-establishing the office worker as a savvy and autonomous individual instilled with agency.

Similarly the precarity of contemporary labour is restyled as an invigorating competition, a never-ending contest via the language of gamification in which self-optimisation offers an advantage, an edge. This notion of “playbour” (Kücklich, 2005) blurs enjoyment with exploitation, employees expected to have fun working and be ‘always on’ while playing. As technology entrepreneur ‘bulletproof exec’ describes it, “In Silicon Valley, you have to kick ass in your day job just to keep up with your colleagues. But as a biohacker who is obsessed with getting more time and energy everyday, I still blog, and I use biohacking to get an unfair advantage in my career – more time, more energy, and less stress" (Asprey, 2014). Key to this discourse is the notion of the ‘game changer’, the dynamic individualist who breaks all the rules. Within neoliberalistic capitalism, which voraciously seeks expansion within a terrain of limited markets and materials, the notion of innovation is held up as a “salvationary strategy” (Pellizzoni & Yloenen, 2012).

This creativity is an important antidote to the crassness of the commodity. The passion project replaces the paycheck as a vastly more open-ended model, well adapted to the spheres of cognitive and cultural production. An influential book like *Netocracy*, which championed an informational elite spawned by the digital revolution, came with the explicit tagline “life after capitalism” (Alexander & Soderqvist, 2002). The book described a class birthed from a Californian Ideology which perfectly blends libertarian, sixties counter-cultural and

techno-utopian notions - combining the “free-wheeling spirit of the hippies and the entrepreneurial zeal of the yuppies” (Barbrook & Cameron, 1996). Rather than material prestige then, this ‘symbolic class’ of designers, developers and knowledge workers privilege access to exclusive information, social structures and experiences (Zizek, 2004, p. 192). The traditional targets of accumulation are stereotypical and static, but more importantly, they impinge upon the nomadic mobility demanded in a globalized economy. Things are tethers. Material degrades rather than improves. Stuff is (physical and mental) clutter. In a strange way this digerati has attained environmental activist and buddhist Gary Snyder’s famous phrase, “true affluence is not needing any thing.”

But as Slavoj Zizek points out, the operating paradigms of late capitalism, far from being historical vestiges that have been shrugged off, are actually “positive conditions of the functioning of the informational society” (2004, p. 193). Rather than post-capitalism, the laissez faire approach instigated by these free-floating entrepreneurs begins to resemble a capitalism perfected. Shortcutting both the initial outlay and institutional thinking of brick-and-mortar corporations, innovation can occur wherever, disruption whenever. This software spiritualism allows services as commodities to be conceived *ex nihilo*, freed from the shackles of physicality.

Anchored by the mythos of a Californian counter-culture, creativity can maintain its free-thinking connotations while

becoming highly instrumentalized as a tool for value-creation. In the world of the data deluge, both the creation of innovative information and the curation of quality information take on new significance. The workplace heroes of today are the ‘crazy ones’ who ‘think different’ - iconoclastic, aspirational figures like Steve Jobs or Bill Gates who bypass the limits to growth and buck the trends. Innovation is key for introducing entropy into the closed-loop system of capitalism, for discovering new markets and initiating new modes of consumption. Creativity is a personal badge for the employee or the entrepreneur, a token for the disruptor who has changed the world and changed the game.

The unstated assumption is, of course, that this is a game which can be won - that the smart, self-optimised body can shortcut the system, maximising positive production while minimising side-effects such as stress and debt in order to not only get ahead of colleagues, but construct a meaningful existence despite the onslaught of information, the crush of capitalism, the complication of the everyday. Sprint’s ‘waitless’ campaign exemplifies this gamified acceleration with a series of mini-commercials designed to “fast-forward through the boring parts of life” (waitless.org). These ‘sprintcuts’ are instructions for everyday tricks like speed-tying your shoelaces or quick-drying your nail polish. Each commercial features a ‘time rebate’ value (“save 4 days of your life”), the unintentionally morbid calculation of how much time in an average lifespan it buys (Speed-Tie Your Shoes, 2010). Lifehacks help you to save

time, but this is a time which is invariably snatched back by the voracious demands imposed on the labouring body. Free time hovers forever in the distance, a beckoning mirage. “Leisure…remains an asymptotic horizon, while productivity becomes a good in and of itself” (Sparrow, 2013).

The promise of a future rest dependent on toiling through the crisis of today is an eerily familiar one. A similar sentiment was appearing as early as 1930 when famed economist John Maynard Keynes predicted that the increased productivity brought about by machines would usher in a leisure society and confront man with his first great problem, “how to use his freedom from pressing economic cares, how to occupy the leisure which science and compound interest will have won for him.” (Keynes, 1963) Even in 1975, American sociologist Max Kaplan was forecasting that with the aid of computerisation, the average workweek at century’s end could be 20 hours. (Ferguson, 2012)

Per-capita GDP in the US has indeed doubled, rocketing from $15,688 per person in 1964 to $37,807 per person in 2006 (Lee, 2007). But the average working hours have also increased, rising 12% between 1973 and 2000 (Lee, 2007). In fact, the longest average hours are worked in some of the most technologically developed countries: South Korea, the US and Japan (Lee, 2007). Even these statistics struggle to capture unpaid overtime or forfeited time off, a growing proportion of hours with Americans taking less vacation time than at any

point in the past four decades (Thompson, 2014). In Japan, *karoshi* or death from overwork is an 'important social problem' with reported cases rising from 47 to 121 between 1997 and 2011 (International Labour Organisation, 2013). Rather than freeing up the body, self-optimisation inevitably frees it up for more work.

Self-optimisation disintegrates the body into a type of codebase, actively taking on the paradigm of iterative improvements and constant upgrades modelled by our current digitality. Like software, this model proffers everyday experience as a set of scripts to be tweaked and tested. And like software, the least attractive body is one which has decelerated into stasis, 'unmaintained', ignoring the possibilities of new features or untried optimisations. "To improve is to change, to be perfect is to have changed often" (Churchill, 2000). Patterned on the immense mutability of the digital, self-optimisation engenders a body not only 'maxxed out' in terms of productivity, but one which is inexhaustibly flexible, adept at time management and learning new tasks.

Summary:
Self-optimisation transforms the fleshy inefficiencies of our corporeal selves into the promise of frictionless productivity via digital discourse. Updating the skin-deep colonization of Fordism and the disciplinary society, these new control mechanisms seek to capitalize on the deeper psychic fabric of the individual. Attention is managed, affectivity is instrumentalized, creativity is commodified. Lifehacking and gamification leverage digital discourse, reframing work as play to be perfected and the body as an app to be optimised.

STAROFFICE TEMPLATE DRAWING


GBM
GAY BLACK MALE
PARTY AND PLAY

Code Swishing
code, browser
Blue Oyster Gallery, Dunedin, New Zealand
May 5 - 30, 2015

Code Swishing picks up on the shorthand codes brought about by the historical pricing of personal ads within newspapers or magazines, which charged per letter for their content. This compressed language of identity and sexuality ranges is conflated with that of information systems, whose file extensions also take the form of 3 letter acronyms.

SeeDee
cd, semen, digital audio
Blue Oyster Gallery, Dunedin, New Zealand
May 5 - 30, 2015

SeeDee continues an exploration into conflating sexuality and software systems. A compact disc is burned with a silent sixty minute audio track and then coated with small amounts of semen to produce skipping and glitching artefacts. This disc is then played/performed, re-recording the audible incompatibility into digital audio.

"At fifteen her hair was one day red, the next blonde, then jet-black, then teased into Afro kinks and after that rat-tails, then plaited, and then cropped so that it glistened close to the skull... Her lips were scarlet, then purple, then black. Her face was ghost-white and then peach-coloured, then bronze as if it were cast in metal."
- Jeremy Seabrook, Landscapes of Poverty

"Lodge yourself on a stratum, experiment with the opportunities it offers, find an advantageous place on it, find potential movements of deterritorialization, possible lines of flight, experience them, produce flow conjunctions here and there, try out continuums of intensities segment by segment..."
- Deleuze and Guattari, How Do You Make Yourself a Body Without Organs

Disintegrated:

In 1997 Tom Peters wrote the definitive article, *The Brand of You* in Fast Company, arguing that individuals needed to learn a lesson from the big corporate brands about what's needed to stand out in the "new world of work". Regardless of your age or standing, he argued, the importance of marketing yourself was vital: "We are CEOs of our own companies: Me Inc." No longer tied to a single company for life, employees needed to capitalize on the shift to a project model occurring in many industries. One powerful method of self promotion was to leverage the increasingly blurry delineation between business networking and (offline, pre-platform) social networking.

In 2002 and 2003 with the launch of Friendster and Myspace, the notion of identity construction expanded beyond the self-marketing sphere of business into a notably younger demographic. While Peters had focused mainly on project braggables and word-of-mouth exposure as self-branding strategies, these techniques remained relatively free-form. In contrast, early social networks provided not just zero cost, public access to brand building, but a type of established identity construction kit able to be continually reassembled into a flexible and powerful image of self. Friends, Likes, Favourites and Comments constitute a social currency which is both quantifiable and common across the userbase.

Social media is exemplary for the way identity is dissected and how compelling these platform-specific categories can be as a method of self-presentation. The templates of Facebook,

LinkedIn, QZone and other networks aren't simply a method for data input, but a means of slicing the self into a set of compartments which fit the logic of the platform. While a user can elect not to enter information into one field or another, the categories themselves remain fixed and unyielding. Relevant here is Cheney-Lippold's notion of "soft-biopolitics", a progression from Foucault's terms of biopolitics and biopower which focused primarily on nation states and their control of citizens through the subjugation of the body. Integral to any software platform is the ability to learn or 'improve', updating the way in which factors are weighted and assessed, tweaking their workings or outputs within the pliable medium of pure data. As Cheney-Lippold notes, this algorithmic adaptation may alter what patterns or behaviour constitute 'manliness', for example, but they "do not change the fact that they are looking to distinguish men from women" (2011). The sifting scripts iterate, but the compartments remain fixed. This 'hard edged' categorisation is vital for the real-world application of big data in fields such as advertising, allowing marketers to target, for example, 'women between the ages of 35-40 located in the UK'. It also features strongly in fields like the mobile health industry, one which is "much less prepared to soften notions of what is consider 'healthiness'" and much more focused on conformance to standards (Cheney-Lippold, 2011). The rigid delineation endemic within the digital produces bodies which must speak, regardless of whether they want to or not. (Galloway, 2013)

Compartmentalization standardises the input received but also acts as a type of shortcut to self, a single page of cultural references and quirks which approximates an identity within social media. This drastic compression allows others to quickly scan each 'self', but also produces a type of anxiety where "everything is a token, a marker for who you are" (Turkle, 2012, p. 184). Each cultural reference must be weighed in the balance, each favourite thing chosen with care. Theoretically a profile page can be infinitely updated. In practice, the peer-reviewed and public nature of profiles together with features such as Facebook's update notifications amplifies the anxiety around this self of soundbites. One of Sherry Turkle's interviewees in *Alone Together*, a teen social media user, stresses that "you have to know that everything you put up will be perused very carefully" (p. 184). Given the natural hierarchies associated with lists and the manner in which these profiles are skimmed, the order of favourite bands, films and places also becomes vital. This provides some means of delineating the importance of each artist or organisation to the user, but in the end social media is a space of passion, not subtlety. The same interviewee reiterated the necessity of this wholesale buy-in: "list your favourite music - that gives you no liberty at all about how to say it" (p. 185).

Reconstituting the individual's body as a brand destabilizes any fixed definitions, repositioning it to mirror the ideal corporation which is able to flex with the dynamic fluctuations of the market. In this sense, identity construction is an

incessant project, a commitment to nothing but change itself. Rather than the permanent support of any one ideal, any static favourite, the social media user rides the undulating topographies of public opinion. Likes, shares and comments provide an instant feedback mechanism for judging the success of each body-brand tweak within the social marketplace. The key trait for any user becomes one of malleability, of adaptability - “the ability to treat one’s own person in the manner of a text that can be circulating in networks , guaranteeing the transit through heterogeneity of a being minimally defined by a body and the proper noun attached to it” (Boltanski & Chiapello, p.461).

Reframed as a brand of shifting signs or a profile which requires its own feed, the body here begins to resemble Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of a ‘Body without Organs’, one which “is made in such a way that it can be occupied, populated only by intensities. Only intensities pass and circulate” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Like the BwO, the facebooked-body incessantly actualizes one virtual potential after another, a liquified self which is always becoming. Social media feeds on these constant flows, not only because more recent information is more valuable, but because each relationship switch, friend request and avatar update draws a host of advertising eyeballs to the platform. In this respect social media is the epitome of post-fordism, “a mode of production that makes life itself the site of valorization, that is to say, it turns seemingly normal human behaviours into monetizable labor” (Galloway, 2013, p. 113).

Static profiles, in contrast, are dated, dubious records of an identity which should be constantly in flux. They undermine the credibility of the platform to capture the now, a situation which companies like Facebook desperately seek to avoid through scheduled email notifications like ‘what you’ve missed since you’ve been gone’. Despite the disintegration of the body into a series of shifting digital compartments, even corporations understand that, “you have to keep enough of the organism for it to reform each dawn” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

Crucial to this post-fordist micro-labour is the mining - not just of affect - but of affective difference. A body which flexes in exactly the same way as other bodies on the social network lacks individuality, that special something. In order to stand out in the social marketplace, each body must distinguish itself both from its peers and its previous self. This uniqueness, this ‘transactional’ property of having something to offer, is required just as much as adaptability. The ideal entity must possess both prominence and plasticity (Boltanski & Chiappelo, p. 461). Like brands repositioning themselves in order to capture more market share, each body must reinvent itself, grasping at handfuls of a constantly shrinking attention-economy. These affective differences are transcoded into the digital, allowing ‘bagged and tagged’ bodies to be distributed throughout the platform. Here they can be monitored and rewarded quantitatively in currency which can take the form of the social (likes, retweets), the cultural (commissions, press) or the monetizable (revenue sharing, ad impressions).

Circulating on a social network, however, these digitized discrepancies are rapidly consumed and co-opted; ruptures of uniqueness are quickly smoothed back into the monolithic mainstream. This continuous push/pull cycle reflects the incessant drive for novelty and diversity occurring within wider capitalistic frameworks. Variation becomes a vital fuel for reigniting sluggish, saturated markets brimming with homogeneity. “Produce variety and you produce a niche market” (Massumi, 2002, p. 224). Affective differences must be played out carefully - too radical and they lose their aspirational quality, too subtle and they risk being ignored entirely. In this regard, social media provides a powerful set of instant feedback mechanisms for judging the success of each rebrand, each reinvention. This crowd-sourced identity construction sets the stage for a constantly disintegrated body, a digital self incessantly seeking the new.

The discrete packets of this disintegrated body are able to be distributed both spatially and temporally, greatly increasing its ability to operate frictionlessly within the ‘always on’ times of contemporary capital. Bypassing any weaknesses of the flesh, the tweets and updates emanating from this expanded body are able to rack up views and churn tirelessly through the night. “An animated GIF never stops cycling silently in the ether, even as your tabs are closed and your laptop shut” (Darling, 2013). This commodified body is able to be repackaged and represented across a range of platforms in ways which far outstrip its spatiotemporally locked counterpart. Distributed via

Content Delivery Networks such as Akamai and Cloudfront, this data-mirrored body entirely ignores its creator's location, streaming info from the server closest to the end-user in order to minimize latency and load times. The body stays, the exploded body-image travels far and wide via the cloud. In a similar fashion, these platforms shift their data from one device to another, mobile to desktop, desktop to tablet - serving up snapshots which are low-res or Retina Ready, adjusting line-lengths, tweaking aliasing and pumping up type sizes in order to optimise their bodily payload for maximum effect.

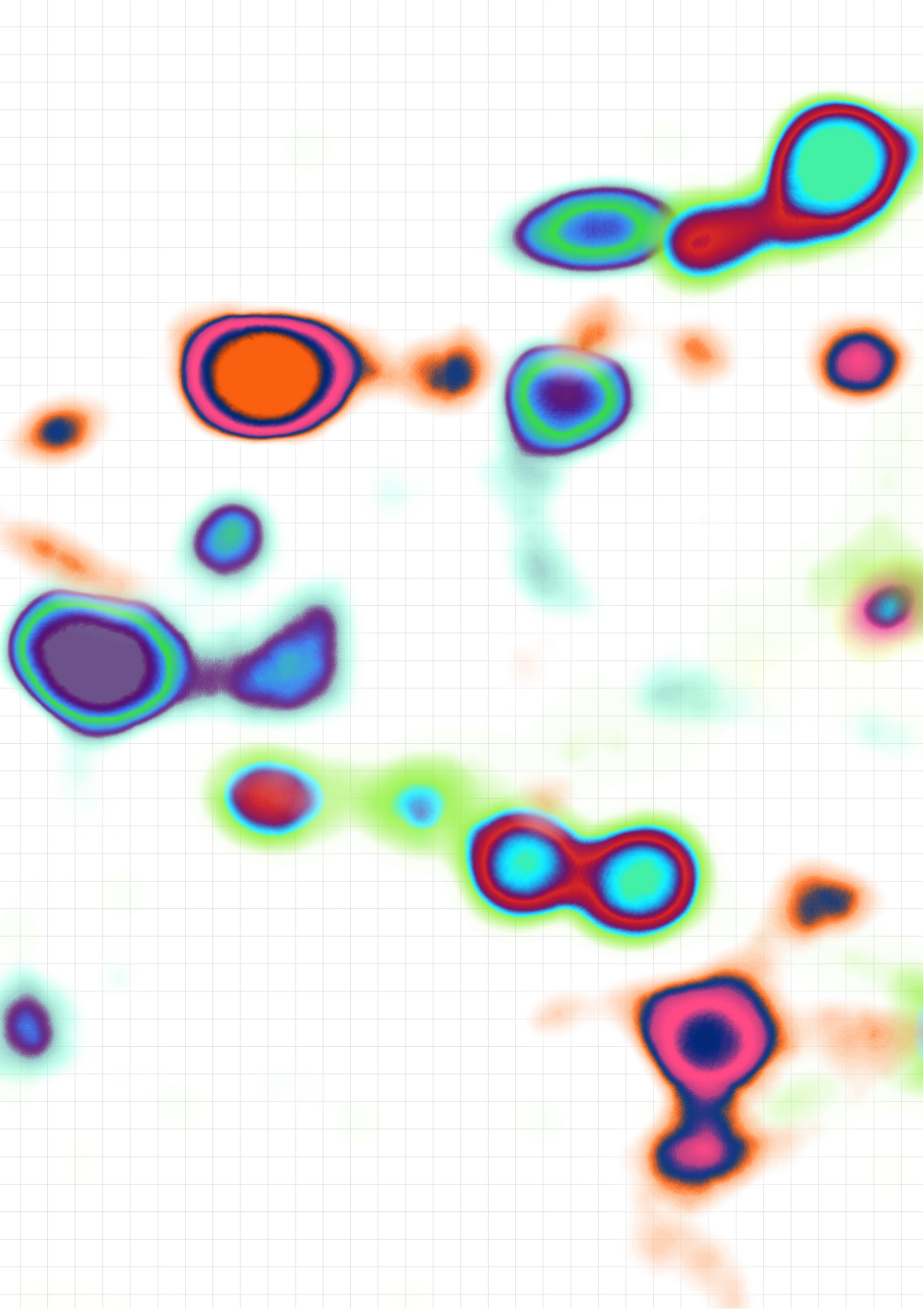
The seductive notion of the imminently reconfigurable package is also present on-screen, disintegrating the durational body into blocks of free-floating, instant-on affect. In his book *Present Shock*, Douglas Rushkoff broadly outlines the shift away from monotheistic religions and familial belonging to the highly individuated existence endemic to contemporary Western culture. Culture has become both wary - and weary - of grand narratives. Contemporary media consumption reflects this accelerated and atomised everyday with a 'dip in, dip out' paradigm which undermines the linear, long-duration arcs of heroes tales and three act structures. Replacing this chronological storytelling are shows like "Beavis and Butthead" or "Mystery Science Theatre 3000", in which piecing together pop-culture references within a meta-media setup becomes the goal, or series like "The Simpsons" or "Seinfeld", whose characters are wrapped in a frozen, repetitive time in which nothing ever really changes. But the clear winner within this

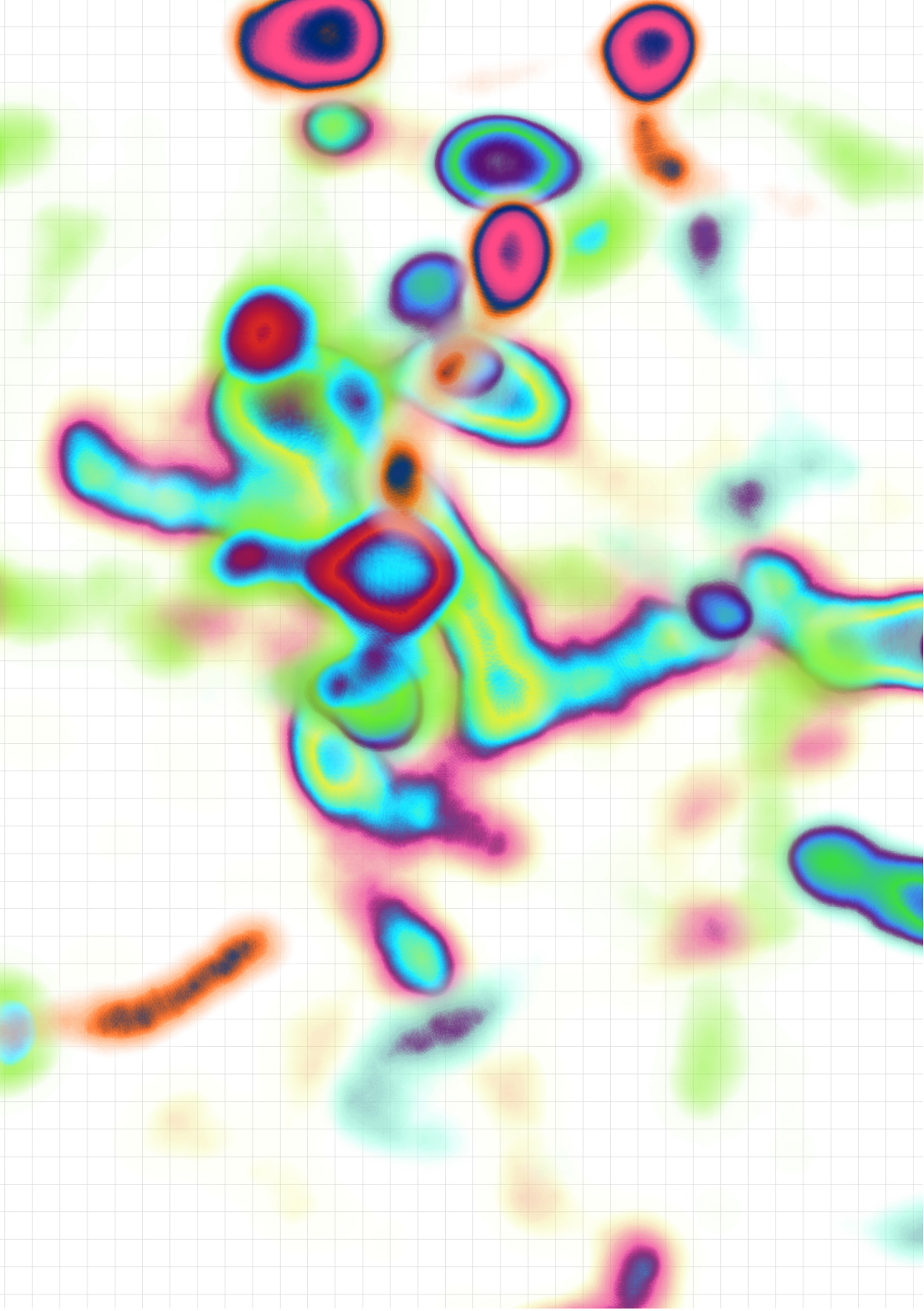
compressed temporality of second screens and on-demand interactivity is Feeling itself, which bypasses the slow build of narrativity for the shock and spectacle of an emotional outpouring that will “create the most immediate sensation for the viewer” (Rushkoff, 2013, p. 37).

Reality television exemplifies this format with series like "Survivor" or "Big Brother" which throw together an array of precarious bodies with polar personalities for the calculated unleashing of extreme affect. This is an architecture of incessant catharsis - a constantly unfolding crisis. With thousands of hours of footage filmed from multiple angles, reality TV producers are adept at probing bodies for tell-tale sentiment - the dirty glance, the derision muttered under the breath - slowed down, subtitled and replayed for maximum effect/affect. These rhizomic micro-scenes of intense emotion can be accessed in any order by their viewers, but equally important, they allow themselves to be reassembled in a variety of packages by their production companies. This shifts the static television show into the realm of mutable and monetizable ‘content’ - a series of characters and constructions which can completely fill the temporal and spatial properties of a range of media (teaser, webisode, behind-the-scenes, 30 second spot, etc). Whether inserting alternate angles, linking to behind-the-scenes content, or providing extended cuts, each re-presentation alters relational dynamics and amplifies personalities, destabilizing any notion of a fixed, authentic narrative.

Disintegration is reframed by Franco Berardi as the way in which the body is atomised to more closely conform to the whims of contemporary capital. In a traditional labour model, the employer hires a person for the day and is presented with a physical body which appears at their factory gates. In contrast, info labour allows corporations to treat employees as cognitive capital on permanent standby. The employee remains 'on call' and off site, bearing the brunt of the market's fluctuations, while the employer pays only for the hours worked. In this sense again, the digital provides both a model and a means for disintegration in the form of timesheet software, reporting tools and content management systems, all hosted on the cloud and available to telecommuting or even outsourced employees. These frameworks enable the utilisation of "cells of productive time [which] can be mobilised in punctual, casual and fragmentary forms" (Berardi, 2003). A term like 'billable hours' floats within the spreadsheet space as just one more variable to be recombined in limitless ways, recalculated alongside earnings and expenses to reflect the oscillations of the current marketplace. These liquified, abstracted minutes create a form of disintegration, unhinging bodily time from bodily presence and thereby allowing the employer to ignore their physical needs (working conditions, trade unions, political negotiations, etc). Depersonalised time has neither rights nor demands. In effect, work is extracted but the body remains. What is left, explains Berardi, is "like an inert object, irrelevant and useless".

Summary:
Social media disintegrates the body into variables, compartmentalised and compressed in ways specific to each digital platform, subjecting users to new anxieties and soft-biopolitics. The self becomes a self-brand, expected to leverage the real-time refreshing possible with digital technologies. Affective difference is mined and monetized as plastic identities rapidly experiment in the crowded (social) market. Affect itself becomes free floating, repackaged and distributed onto devices and networks. Digital technologies disintegrate time and presence, extracting (info)labour while delinking the political requirements of the physical body.



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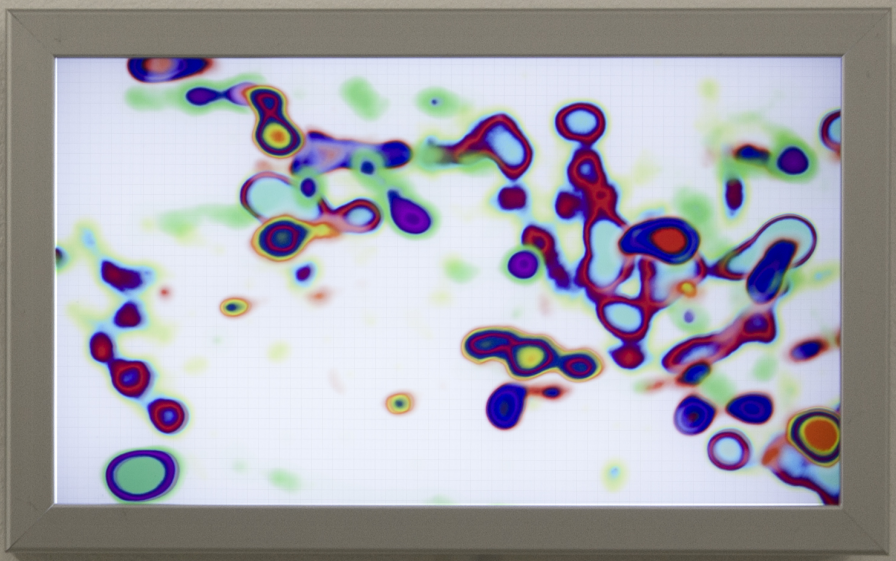
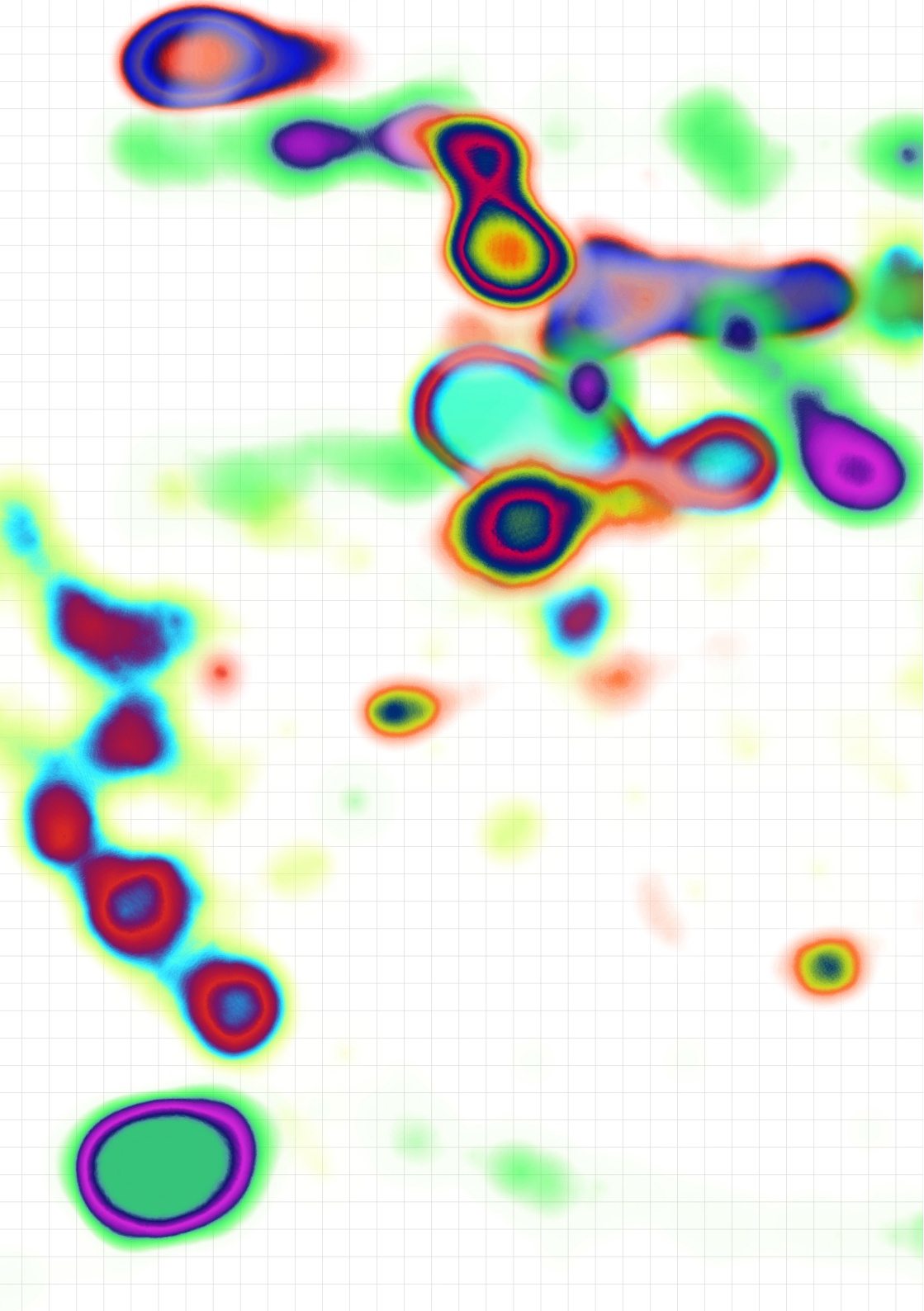
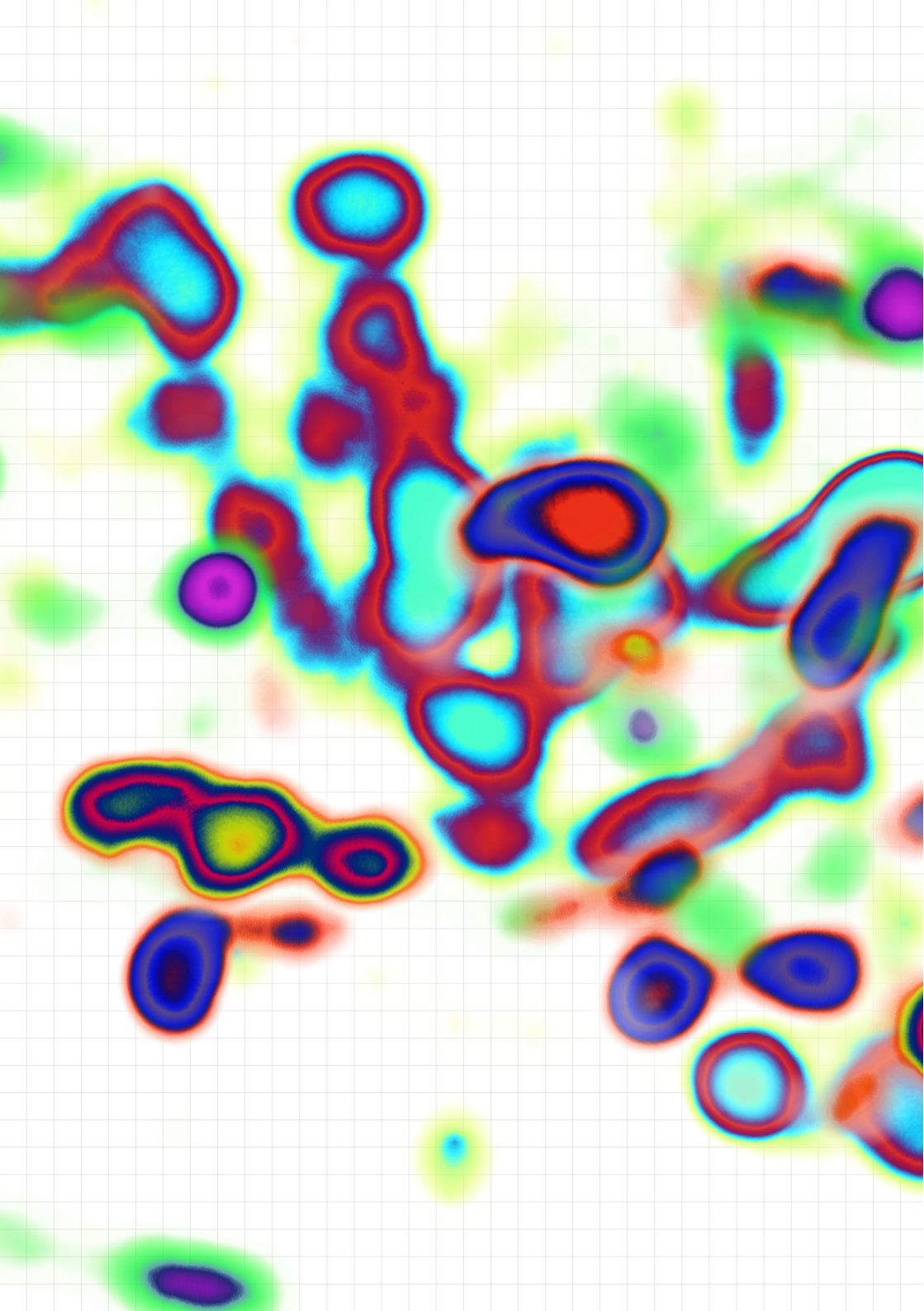






Gazemaps
code, webcam, lightboxes
PLATFORM, Munich, Germany
3 November-31 December 2014

Custom software tracks the movement of the eye across the screen, leveraging advertising mechanics while moving from commodified quantification to abstracted aesthetization. This first series comprises responses to works by Gretta Louw.

“A new dismembering and a complete reconstitution of the human being so that he can at last become the objective (and also the total object) of techniques.”
- Jacques Ellul,
The Technological Society

“These populations are spam, not flesh; made of a material that has been ground for generations by a never-ending onslaught of capital and repackaged in ever new, increasingly hybrid and object-like forms.”
- Hito Steyerl,
Digital Debris: Spam and Scam

"In the face of the functional object the human being becomes dysfunctional, irrational and subjective: an empty form, open therefore to the mythology of the functional, to projected phantasies stemming from the stupefying efficiency of the outside world."
- Jean Baudrillard,
The System of Objects

"The individual form itself is the pathology... pathological in the sense that the setting in which it functioned is passing away.... depression, anxiety, autism and hyperactivity signal the breakdown of a form that was always itself a problem..."
- Jodi Dean, Collective Desire and the Pathology of the Individual

Discrete:

One of the paradoxes of the digital is that it separates and individuates while never relinquishing a broad claim to connectivity. The notion of discreteness is reflected in our contemporary use of the word digital, predicated on a strict delineation between on and off, one and zero. But this concept was present even within the original 15th century etymology of *digitalis* as something countable, a number less than 10 that could be mapped onto the digits of the hand. Each finger a distinctive unit, each finger separated from the others. In this sense, the digital excels at producing digital bodies.

Eli Pariser picks up on this separation with his book, *The Filter Bubble*, arguing that the personalised data delivered by the major technological platforms ensures a highly individualized experience. Each user gets exactly what she wants, when she wants it. Conversely, the possibility of exposure to potentially troubling information, be it counter-arguments, world news or political views becomes significantly reduced (Pariser, 2011). This situation sets up a controlled connectivity where contradictory ideologies are hermetically sealed and individuals are wrapped in “cloistered cocoons of cognitive consonance” (Miller, 2009).

Despite its namesake, social media is actually comprised of single users and governed by SLAs (single user license agreements). Through a wide-ranging and deeply pervasive set of data harvesting tactics, many of which users freely participate in, tech titans such as Google and Facebook can

tailor content not only based on traditional identifiers such as age, sex and location, but also likes and dislikes, joined groups, previous web searches and email content. In the same way, they offer the chance for their advertisers to serve up highly targeted campaigns based on these detailed demographics. In contrast, physical sites like the city square or even traditional mainstream media such as public television were able to offer the chance encounter, the unexpected event, the broad appeal precisely because they couldn't be customised to this extent. Shifting from favourite to favourite, friend to friend, feed to feed, each step is predictable and predetermined by the user. The dynamically generated data inherent to most digital platforms allows this bespoke bubble to be delivered so fluidly, users aren't even aware that it's taking place. "Immersed in the amniotic embrace of communications technology, which offers the promise of surfing on your interests forever, the full spread of a user's psychic demands can be met" (Miller, 2009).

As Jonathan Crary notes, disconnecting from this technological embrace often elicits a deep seated disappointment in the physicality and people of the 'real world'. Online, there is always someone more charismatic, more persuasive than one's peers. Online, there is always a wider array of richer and more seductive media. Powering down the luminous screen, the infinite and on-demand digital domain vanishes, leaving in its wake a series of environments which increasingly seem drab, a set of pressures which appear daunting. These hard, impervious realities inevitably amplify our desire to dive back

into the infinitely mutable cocoon of digitality. The discrete bodies which are produced in this process occupy a world in which the “interhuman basis of public space is made irrelevant to one’s fantasmatic digital insularity” (Crary, 2014, p. 89).

Fortunately tech titans like Apple are working hard to alleviate any breaks in a digitality which soaks into every sphere of the everyday. Their newly released Yosemite operating system includes a number of Continuity features aimed at optimising both aesthetic and structural interoperability, producing a frictionless user-experience when moving from one device to another. Users can schedule their iPhones to make calls for them while still on their desktop. Conversely, desktop applications such as iMessage now pick up incoming SMSes from the users phone. The flat design with semi-transparent windows which debuted on their mobile operating system, iOS 7, has now been integrated into the desktop, enabling a more consistent and intuitive digital ecosystem. “We believe you should be able to use the right device at the moment”, Apple VP Craig Federighi asserted, “but the transitions between these moments should be natural and seamless” (Goode, 2014). The ideal user moves fluidly across devices, shifting modes rather than powering down entirely. In a similar fashion, the recent Transformer Book Trio device from ASUS markets itself as a three-in-one solution, shifting from a laptop to a tablet to a desktop PC at a moment’s notice. Its slogan, to “bring any possibility to life every step of the way” (ASUS website) posits a kind of ghostly digital twin which moves in lock-step with its

host. The vision presented here by both Apple and ASUS is one of a morphable digitality which is able to encompass the user in a wider range of spatial and temporal configurations, a “sieve whose mesh will transmute from point to point” (Deleuze, 1992). This sets up a future trajectory in which the bubble is never broken, a body made truly digital in its original sense, discrete.

Military drones also leverage the specific form of discrete connectivity modeled by digital technologies, producing one body which is ‘lethally oblivious to the specificity’ (Crary, p. 32) of the other. On one hand, drone technology ostensibly engenders an intimacy between geophysically separated agents - an operator at an Air Force base in Nevada and a potential insurgent located in Kabul, Afghanistan, for instance. Using the latest in imaging technology such as the ARGUS-IS 1.8 gigapixel camera, drones are equipped to take “clear images of objects as small as 15 centimeters” from a distance (‘Flanker41’, 2013). This allows a former operator like Brandon Bryant to describe his first kill from 2007 in explicit detail, a gruesome scene in which “there’s this guy over here, and he’s missing his right leg…. he’s holding it, and he’s rolling around, and the blood is squirting out of his leg, and it’s hitting the ground, and it’s hot. His blood is hot” (Mullen, 2013).

On the other hand, drones, or unmanned aerial vehicles, were specifically developed to mitigate this kind of intimacy. At 5,000 feet up, the optimal height for surveillance according to

interviews with former pilots, “they wouldn’t hear you nor see you” (Bowen, 2013). Carrying out attacks from several miles above the target, operating the drone itself from thousands of miles away - these aren’t just physical distances but also psychological ones, engendering a disassociation which is highly disembodied - a compelling argument for continuing a ‘war on terror’ in a risk-averse climate (Darnstädt, Hujer & Schmitz, 2012). If this resonates with the Department of Defense, this disconnection also benefits its employees - the UAV pilots themselves. “It is a lot like playing a video game”, admitted one former Predator drone operator in a recent interview (Bowen, 2013). Some of the newest cockpits actually incorporate Sony Playstation 2 controllers, while Lockheed Martin has been using modified, unbranded Microsoft Xbox 360 controllers in small UAVs such as the Desert Hawk (Inside a Drone Pilot Cockpit, 2014).

Information architectures provide crucial functionality and guidance but also support a specific programme of disinterestedness. UI overlays and stacked dialogs allude to an inherent virtuality, the somatic converted to a digital sprite. The myriad chat windows that pilots use to converse with analysts and team leaders undermine immersion and instead produce a diffused attentivity. Procedures are framed with language indistinguishable from gaming or software engineering. Thus one pilot describes the procedure for a typical strike: “I’ll set the laser on a spot. You’ll see a box pop up and what it does is lock in those pixels” (Fast, 2011). Programmed into circling patterns

several miles above their targets, drone pilots spend very little time worrying about the mechanics of flying but endless hours engaged in the activity of gazing, monitoring, surveilling. While it could be argued that the 'God's eye view' allowed from such heights automatically activates a certain hubris, it's the specific imaging technologies employed within drone technology which engender an unreal/hyperreal mode of seeing: the white 'blooms' and bodily heat traces of the onboard thermal camera, the 'light of god' laser which illuminates the strike target (Fast, 2011). This heavily mediated experience of live feeds and machine-assisted vision leverages the language of data, shifting the pilots actions out of the theatre of war and into a series of benign software operations.

Drones in many ways are apt symbols for the specific form of digitalism of the last decades: physical distance is compressed while intimacy is repressed, radically extending the agency of selected human actors through technology but in a way which reinforces existing political, cultural and technological hegemonies. From this viewpoint then, as James Bridle notes, "drones are inherently network objects. They allow you to see and act at a distance while themselves kind of remaining invisible" (Carp, 2013).

This digital 'decoupling' also functions ideologically in a similar way to outsourcing, providing a buffer for consumer consciences between software and the somatic. Nowhere is this more apparent than at Amazon, a company which excels in

providing seamless technical integration between hardware, software and meatware in order to deliver near flawless customer experiences. Their bespoke digital systems enfold customer and worker within a complex process chain but simultaneously engender a significant physical and psychological distance between the two bodies. Out of sight, out of mind.

In 1997 the company filed a patent for 1-Click ordering, an e-commerce technique that has been licensed by other heavyweights like Apple and is worth billions of dollars (Arsenault, 2012). The technology validates previously stored user and payment information in the checkout process, allowing for products to be purchased with literally a single tap of the finger (1-Click, n.d.). This 1-Click however, doesn't just trigger databases to update and hard disks to spin up, but "forces people to get up and walk around" (Bridle, 2014), extending the interface outwards to logistical and labour practices which imprint on the body.

Amazon's highly targeted use of technologies for optimisation and integration simultaneously provide the scaffolding for precarious, exploitative working conditions. This starts with the environment of the company's warehouse facilities, or 'Fulfilment Centres' as they're termed. The items aren't arranged according to any human-readable categories but instead use a logistical strategy known as 'chaotic storage', a bar-code based distribution where a "product's characteristics

and attributes are irrelevant" (Inside Amazon's 'Chaotic Storage' Warehouses, 2012). In this system, items that are often purchased together are placed next to each other, analogous to how data is stored on a hard disk. The result is a "beautiful warehouse madness" (Greenfield 2012), an algorithmic optimisation of warehouse space. To collect products from this chaos, workers must walk between 7 and 15 miles per shift (O'Connor, 2013), developing blisters and sores. Each 'associate' is expected to collect a customer order every 33 seconds (Allen, 2013). Pickers are given handheld scanners which display the optimal route to each item but also indicate to each employee if they're reaching their productivity targets (Allen). If any employee is particularly dawdling, managers can send text messages to these devices to get them to speed up (O'Connor). Like Tesco's arm bands, these devices are ostensibly for security and efficiency purposes while also functioning as real-time surveillance, tracking employee walking speeds and time spent on lunch breaks (Rawlinson, 2013).

In other warehouse sections such as packaging, Amazon employs a full range of digitally enhanced optimisation techniques, ranging from a Taylorism-like analysis of 'time and motion' to the contemporary 'lean production' techniques of Toyota management (Head, 2014). These business methods are rounded off by an array of supplementary human resource technologies: compulsory drug testing, airport style scanners to prevent employee theft and 'zero day' contracts with discretionary working hours ranging from full-time to nothing.

For those who can't keep up, the company implements their controversial 'three strikes and release' discipline system, "release being a euphemism for being sacked" (Head, 2014). Thus the single tap of a shopper on Amazon.com radiates throughout a range of networks, encircling fibre optics, APIs, just-in-time logistics and the bodily relics which the retailer unfortunately just can't slough off. "You're sort of like a robot, but in human form," said the Amazon manager. "It's human automation, if you like" (O'Connor).

Even when both bodies are in the same room, digital discourse can be used as a psychological distancing, an interface which enacts a layer of abstraction. As Alexander Galloway notes in *The Interface Effect*, this operation is used to great effect in the television drama "24". Information is king throughout the show and every shred of intelligence becomes vital for unraveling the complex plots which threaten to undermine national security. The primacy of data shifts the notion of the body from one which is "never mere flesh, but is an informatic space that must be hacked" (Galloway, 2012). Hacking reframes interrogation as a series of software processes, exploiting 'vulnerabilities' to access memory which is encrypted biologically. "The body is a database, torture a query algorithm" (Galloway). The protagonists of "24" harness contemporary interrogation techniques drawn from such sites as Abu-Ghraib or Guantanamo, with 67 scenes of torture over three seasons, ranging from electrocution to simulated drowning and beating (Miller, 2007). But using a discourse of digitality allows their

actions to be carried out on a body made discrete, both from the audience and the actors' perspective. This is not a hate crime. These people are just doing their (infolabour) job.

Performed on these updated, dematerialised targets, the abhorrent, visceral deeds of counter-terrorism agents become justifiable acts of cyber-warfare. Any key piece of information is infinitely more valuable than the somatic housing of the informant herself. It makes sense then that at various points in the series, bodies are healed prior to interrogation sessions or lethally discarded directly afterwards. In "24", the body becomes a type of wetware firewall, a temporary barrier which blocks the flow of vital data. Like the illegality of destroying dollars or the "naive form of hoarding" (Marx, 1952, p. 61) in which money becomes petrified, attempting to halt the onward mobility of data-wealth is seen as both simple-minded and potentially treacherous. In this way the show perfectly models the broader ideology of late capitalism in which the continuous circulation of information is of absolute importance.

The digital provides a compelling model for a multi-tasking hyperproductivity. Whether based on specific hardware devices or software platforms, this model is never dedicated purely to any single task or process, but instead privileges the ability to maintain multiple states of awareness simultaneously. GPS pings geolocate a device while a phone call is being made, hard drives defragment during a word processing session, a social media app syncs a feed as a photo is downloading. It's never

enough to be doing just one thing. As such, the management of an array of flows, contact points and processes is a crucial one in the compressed temporalities of late capitalism. By actively and incessantly maintaining this 'meta-awareness', the digital provides a conduit for several streams of connectivity. The digital here is powerful not just for the notions it instantiates of the multi-threaded and multi-tasking, but for its capacity to actively carry them out. The digital perfectly models a role which we've come to esteem: someone who can juggle it all seemingly effortlessly, from the tiniest details up to high-level events. In its effortless handling of this river of information, it reveals precisely the ways in which human bodies fail.

Our current form of digitality privileges the handling of multiple and simultaneous 'high-touch' tasks. It values the ability to act as a fleeting conduit of connectivity over the immersion in any single activity (those wasted cycles, that unused memory). The explosive global growth of texting (SMSing) is understandable when viewed as a specific form of communication which syncs so well with this model, "a broadening and diversifying of the processes and flows to which an individual becomes effectively linked" (Crary, 2014). Teen girls between 14 and 17 will send on average 100 messages a day and boys in the same age group send around 30 (Texting Statistics in U.S & Worldwide, n.d.). As of 2010, almost 200,000 texts were being sent every second (Global number of SMS sent per second 2007-2010, n.d.). While technically messages from free chat applications such as WhatsApp have

now overtaken SMS (BBC News, 2013), the mechanisms and experience are nearly identical from an end-user standpoint.

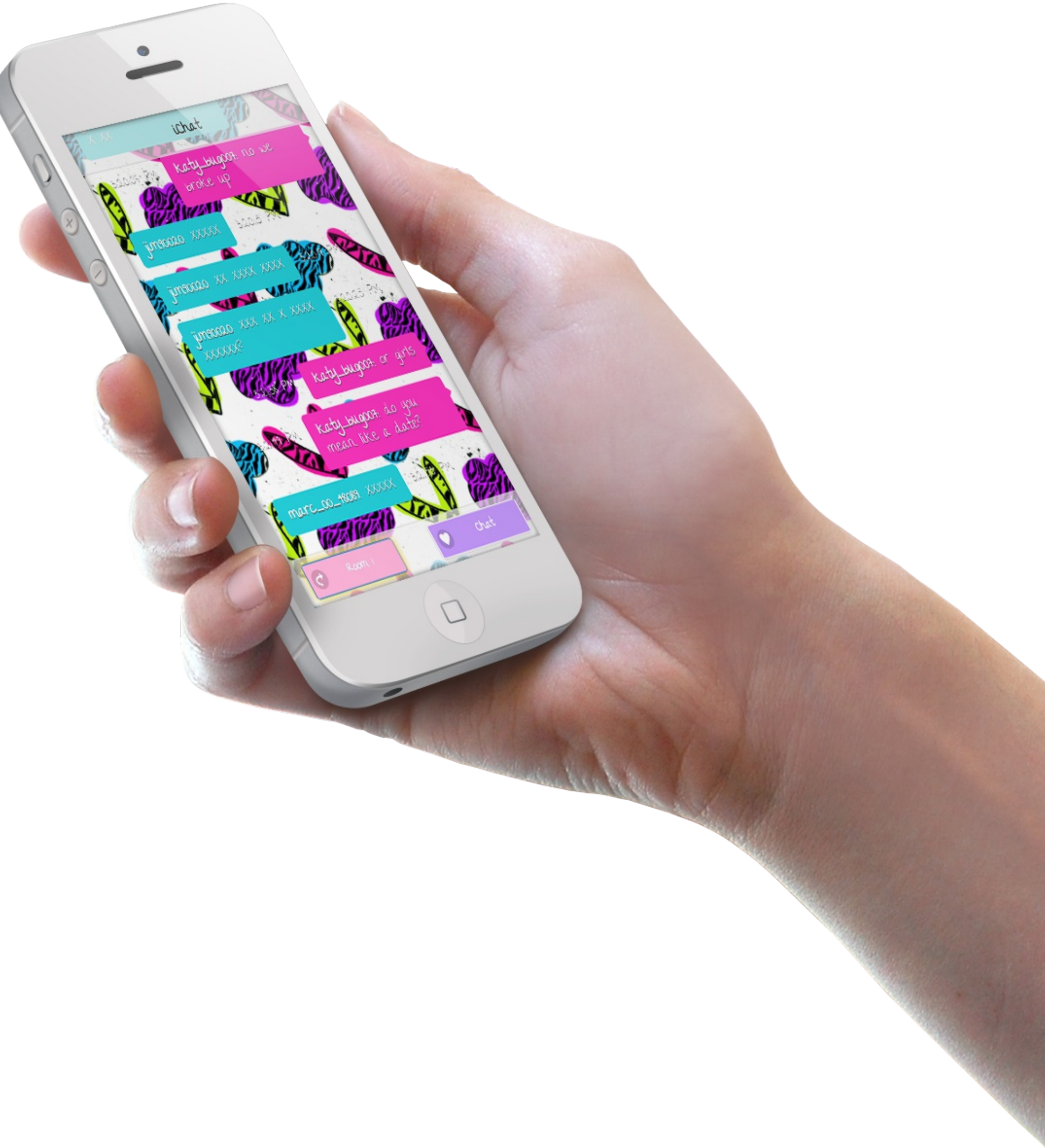
SMS shifts the traditional in-person or voice conversation into a realm of information streams. Bypassing the single-task immersion of a voice call, texts can be funneled into the digital data flows present on any typical mobile device: tweets and pics, updates and feeds. Texting also lacks any tell-tale vocal cues which signal distraction, pausing or failing to 'track' with their conversational counterpart. By definition the Short Message Service format consists of no more than 160 characters, a length designed for conveying succinct communications - skimming not submersion. This more economical, 'dialed-down' attention required of the user, coupled with the bite-sized packets of information that SMS contain, allows multiple text conversations to occur simultaneously and in tandem with other processing tasks. Texting is highly optimized - it obliterates the shared time (read: 'wasted time') of a traditional phone-call, the niceties, stutters and inhalations of one body speaking to another. People become parallel processes.

Texting is tightly controlled connectivity, managed intimacy. Parceling up a conversation in this way turns communication into an infinitely flexible flow which occurs entirely on the end-users terms. Just-in-time. Just-enough. One of Sherry Turkle's teen interviewees from her book *Alone Together* reiterates the predictability and protection that this level of command

provides. “With a text… I can respond. I can ignore it. So it really works with my mood. I’m not bound to anything, no commitment. I have control over the conversation and also more control over what I say” (Turkle, 2011, p. 190). Again, the digital engenders a body which is technologically tethered but emotionally discrete. The improvised and more unstructured format of the phone-call is too risky, both in terms of self-presentation but also as a way of relating. One could reveal or learn too much, too soon. Texting provides a distance, a means of disentangling two bodies from the unforeseen and messy exchanges embedded in any real-time conversation. The beauty of texting, the interviewee explains, is that “there is a lot less boundness to the person” (Turkle).

Summary:
Claiming to connect, the digital provides powerful mechanisms to engender discrete bodies. Customisation weaves a web of insular online cocoons. Drone interfaces and vision systems provide psychological disconnection. Amazon's 1-click ordering effortlessly integrates orgware while keeping precarious labor practices safely separate from consumer conscience. In "24", bodies become informatic firewalls, detaching viewer from victim as torture becomes cyber warfare. With instant messaging, the body becomes a conduit and conversation another data-flow, distancing users from the risky intimacy and shared-time of phone calls.

iChat
you are jokin with me
marc_00_48089 xxx x xxx xxxx
3:17:37 PM
katy_bug007: I guess I just can't believe someone would want to meet me. have you done that before ?
marc_00_48089 xxx xxxx
katy_bug007: really? what was it like?
marc_00_48089 xxxxx xx xxxxxx xxx xxx xxx
Chat


iChat
katy_bug007: no we broke up
jmr0020 XXXXX
jmr0020 XX XXXX XXXX
jmr0020 XXX XX X XXXX XXXXXX?
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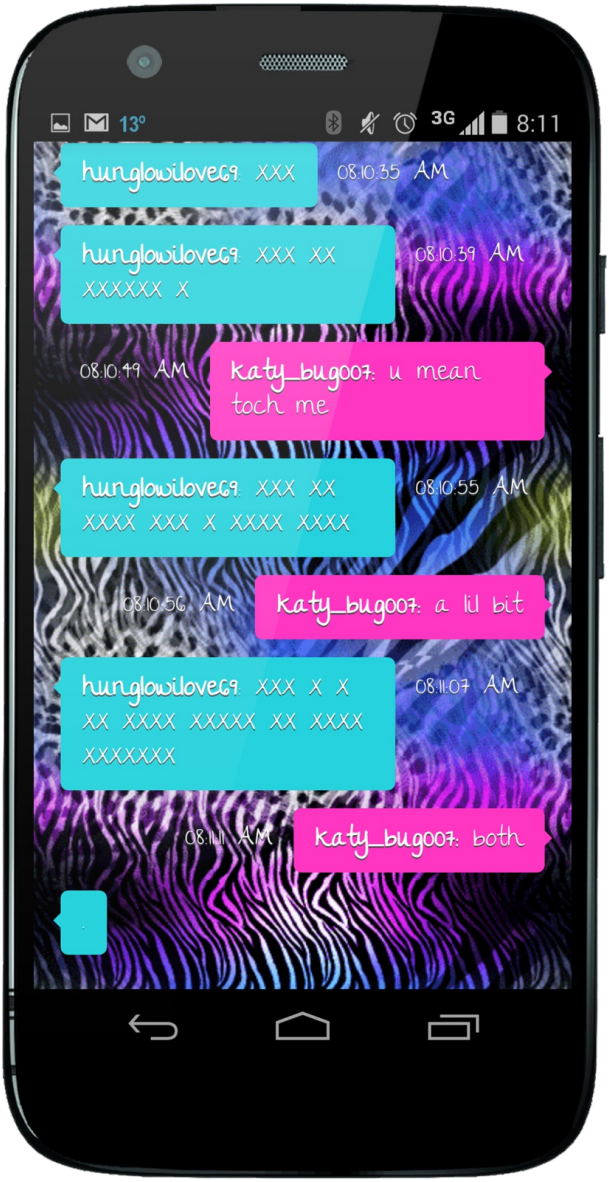
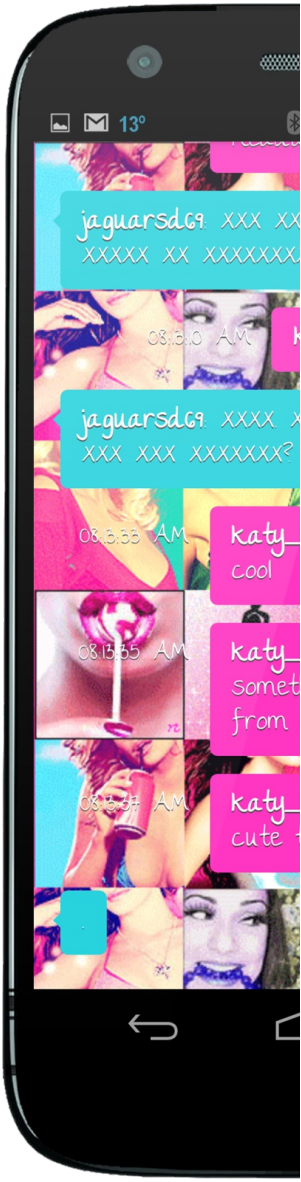
katy_bug007: do you mean like a date?
marc_00_18089 XXXXX
chat
Room 1


13°
3G 8:11
hunglowilove69: XXX
08.10.35 AM
hunglowilove69: XXX XX XXXXXX X
08.10.39 AM
08.10.49 AM
katy_bug007: u mean toch me
hunglowilove69: XXX XX XXXX XXX X XXXX XXXX
08.10.55 AM
08.10.56 AM
katy_bug007: a lil bit
hunglowilove69: XXX X X XX XXXX XXXXX XX XXXX XXXXXXX
08.11.07 AM
08.11.11 AM
katy_bug007: both


13°
jaguarsdc9: XXX XX XXXXX XX XXXXXXX
jaguarsdc9: XXXX XXX XXX XXXXXXX?
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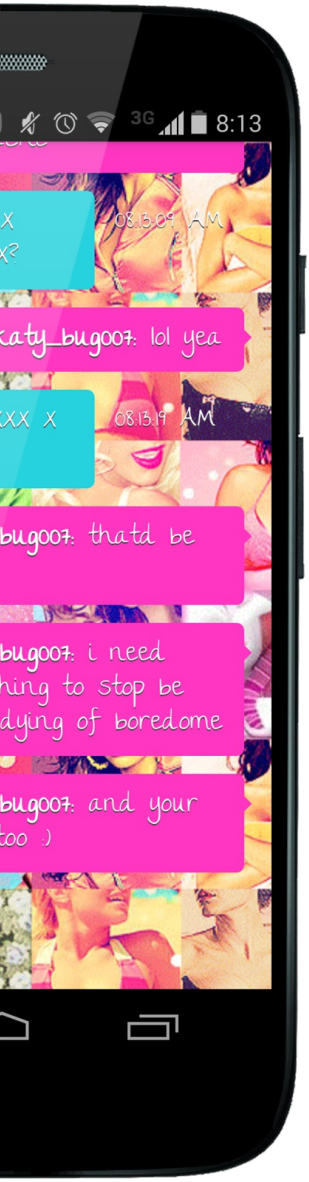
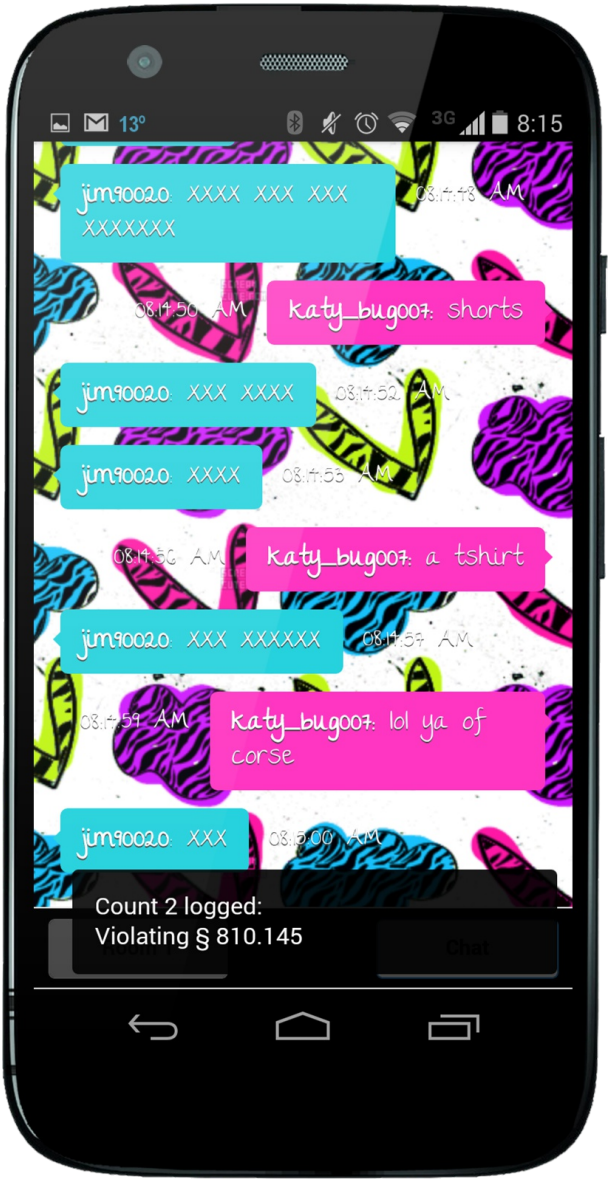
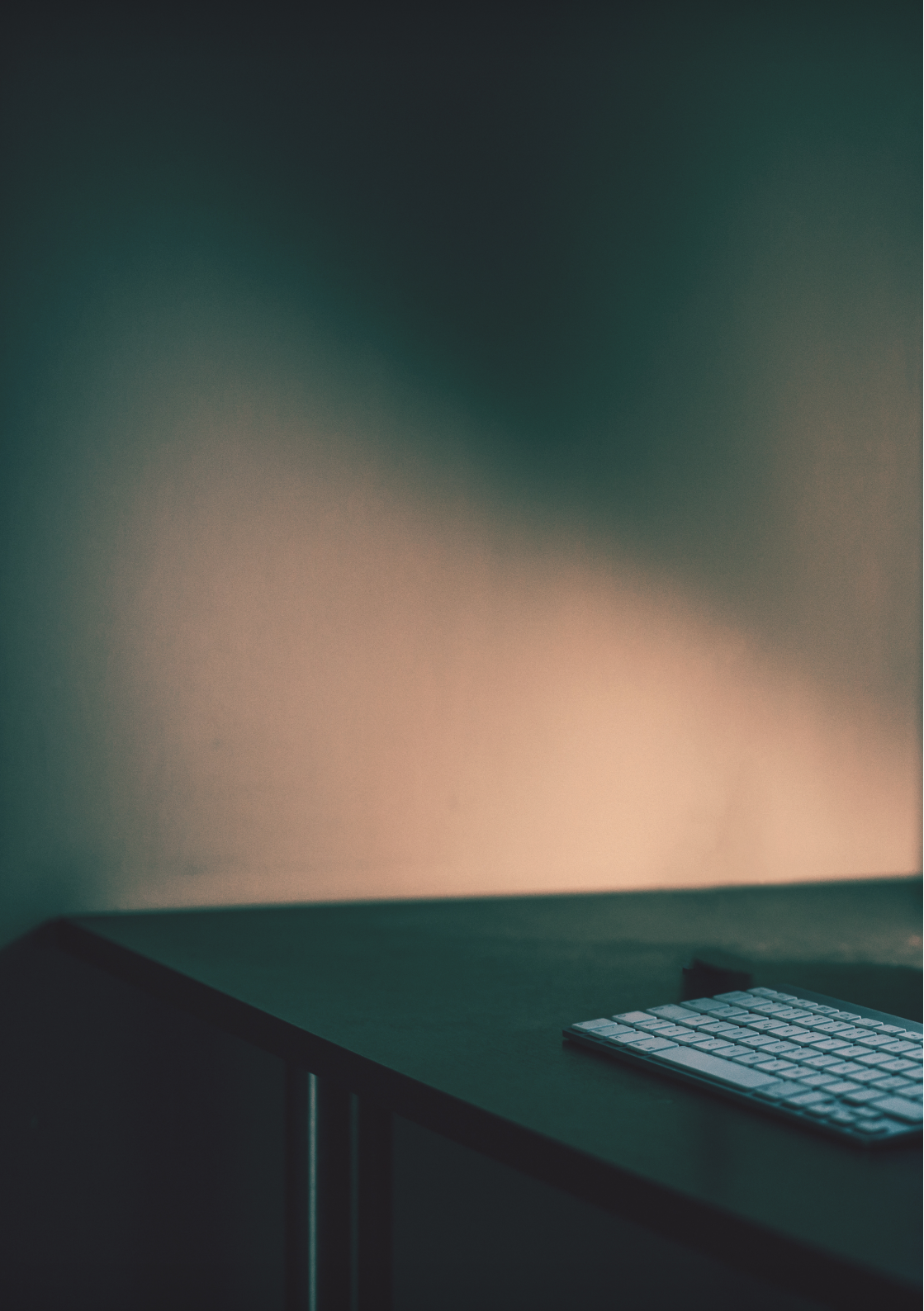

8:13
08:13:09 AM
katy_bug007: lol yea
08:13:19 AM
katy_bug007: thatd be
katy_bug007: i need
hing to stop be
dying of boredome
katy_bug007: and your
too)


13°
8:15
jim90020: XXXX XXX XXX XXXXXXX
08:11:48 AM
08:11:50 AM
katy_bug007: shorts
jim90020: XXX XXXX
08:11:52 AM
jim90020: XXXX
08:11:55 AM
08:11:56 AM
katy_bug007: a tshirt
jim90020: XXX XXXXXX
08:11:57 AM
08:11:59 AM
katy_bug007: lol ya of corse
jim90020: XXX
08:12:00 AM
Count 2 logged:
Violating § 810.145
Chat

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disconnected
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light
shiny
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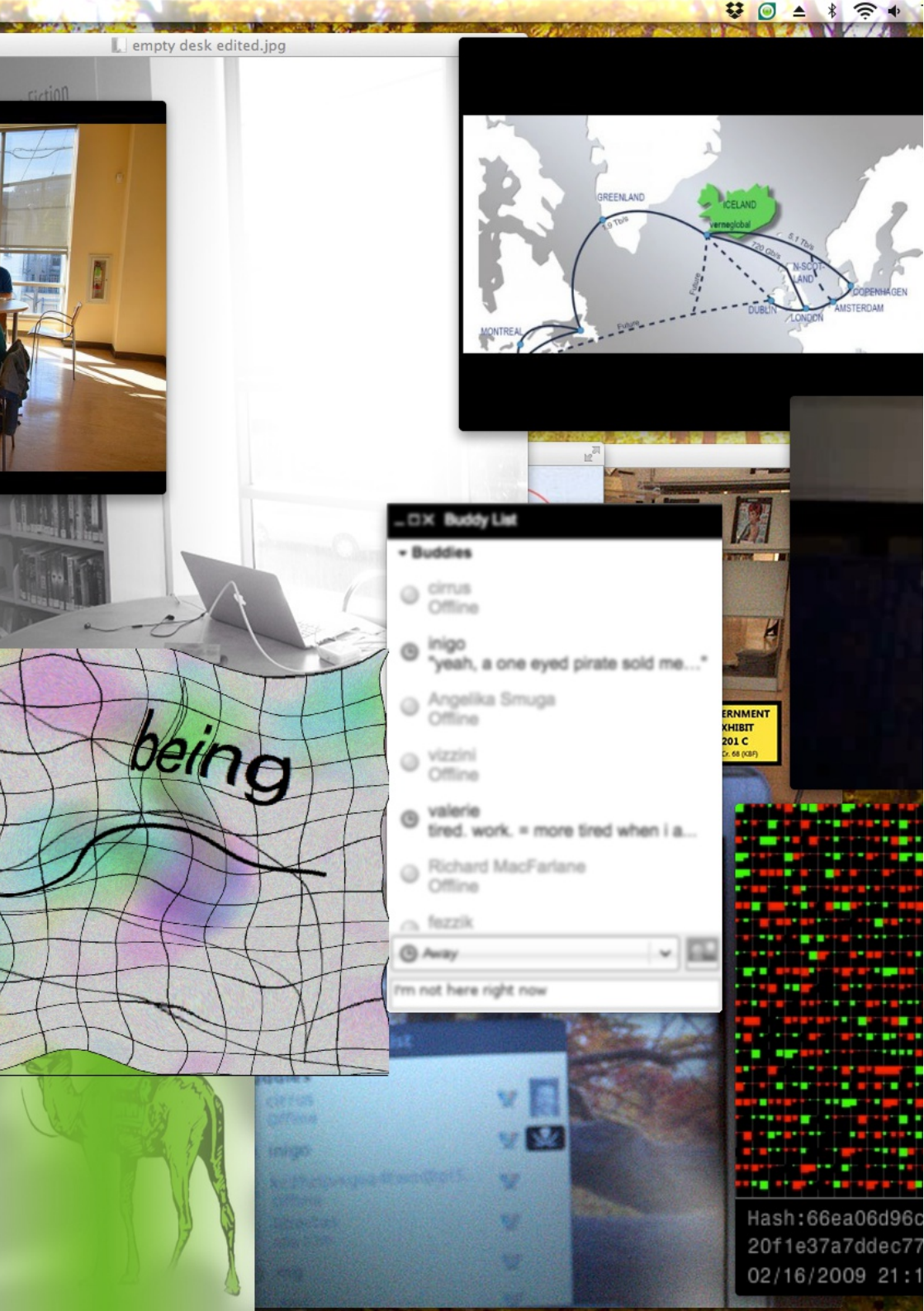
human


empty desk edited.jpg
GREENLAND
ICELAND
verneglobal
5.9 Tb/s
5.1 Tb/s
720 Gb/s
N-SCOTLAND
Future
DUBLIN
LONDON
AMSTERDAM
COPENHAGEN
MONTREAL
Future
Buddy List
Buddies
cirrus
Offline
inigo
"yeah, a one eyed pirate sold me..."
Angelika Smuga
Offline
vizzini
Offline
valerie
tired. work. = more tired when i a...
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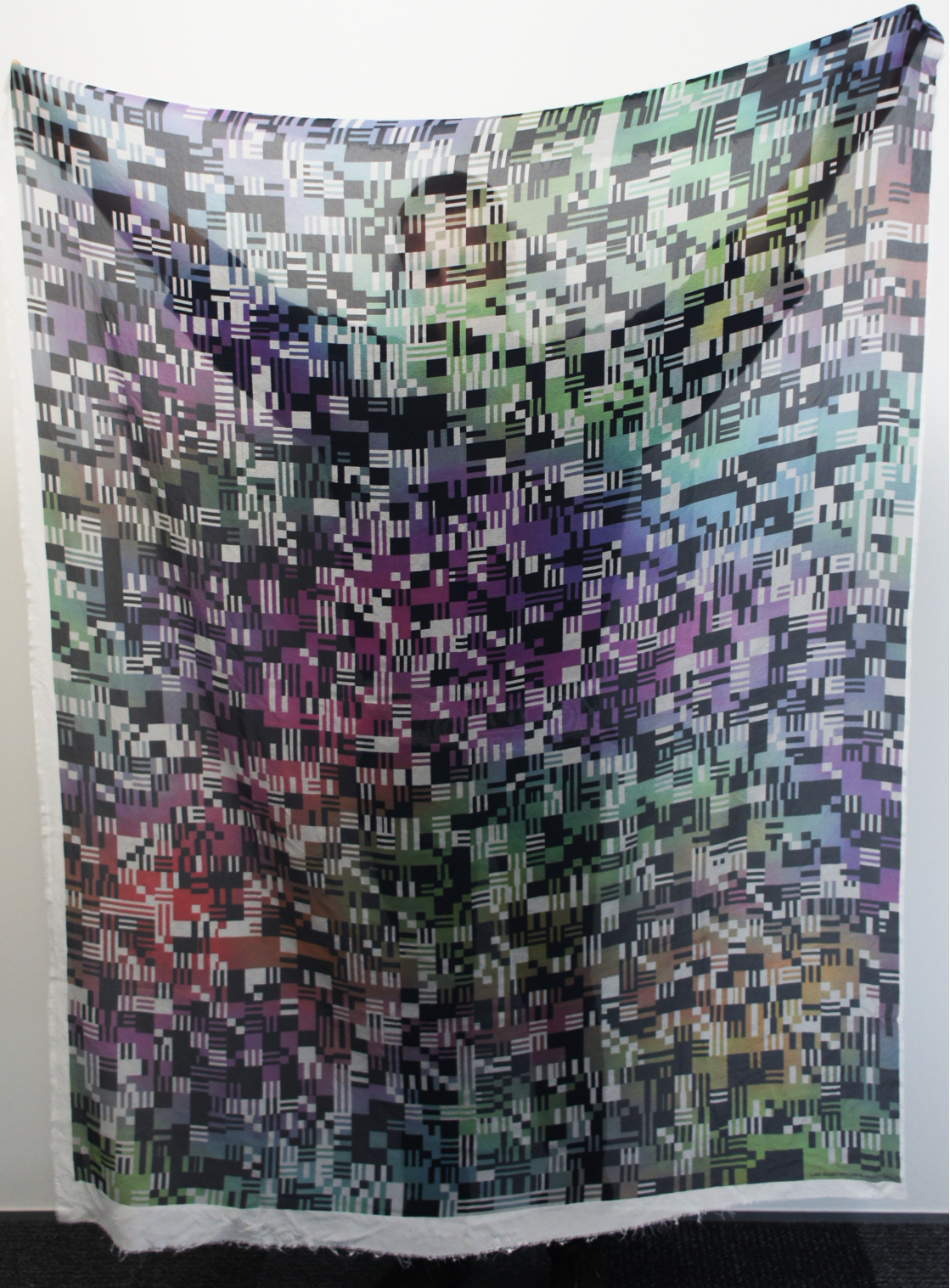
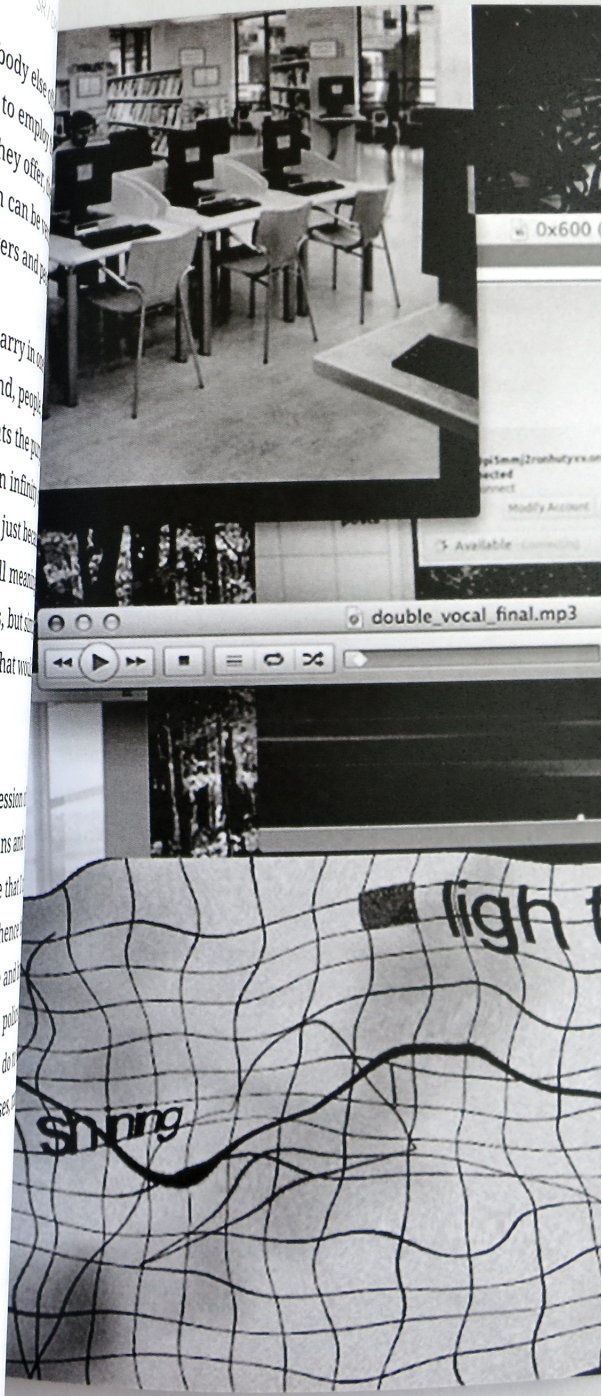


only find work if somebody else
else deems it profitable to
change which product they
situation is no pony farm can
living conditions of workers

Money is power one can carry
how much control over land,
have. Thus, a forgery defeats the
limit, this magnitude into an
– in principle – up for grabs just
has infinity power, it loses all
effective demand that counts,
demand, which is not to say
necessarily.

In summary, money is an
private property separates
have this quality it is imperative
which is mine. This quality
and means, with all its ignorance
must be violently enforced by the
network – where what people can
by an elaborate protocol of witnesses,
mathematical problems.



iChat
code, conversations
Blue Oyster Gallery, Dunedin, New Zealand
May 8 - 30 2015

iChat is a mobile web app which explores digitally constructed identity, using the taps and timing of the user to play out a series of real-world conversations. Interfaces and identities morph, innocence is emulated, sexuality is gamified.

SR / DPR
desktop computer, media, silk georgette, book
Split Fountain, Auckland, New Zealand
February 25 2015

SR / DPR is a data portrait of alleged Silk Road kingpin Ross Ulbricht, bringing together the digital sublime of cryptocurrencies with the net footprint of an eagle scout from Austin, Texas. The computer desktop is strewn with an array of these artefacts: looped slideshows, leaky captchas, contact lists and stretched audio. This core work is supplemented by textile pieces based on seized Bitcoin data and a reader publication providing a timeline and context around the story.

“At the very moment of the digital, at the very moment of the prohibition of the negative, from out of the trenches of forced speech, of enforced behaviour, of networks reinforced with apparatuses of captures and protocols for ebb and flow, here rises a new politics of disappearance…What was once a logic of supercession is now a logic of cancellation. Seek not the posthuman, but the nonhuman.

The operative political question today, thus, in the shadow of digital markets is…. 'what are we going to do without ourselves?'”
Alexander Galloway,
The Interface Effect

Sleepless:

Sleep has always represented a final and frustratingly insurmountable barrier to the expansion of capital. If time is money, sleep encapsulates a vast wasteland of untapped currency, a space seemingly indifferent to the neoliberal pressures leveraged so successfully in the spheres of waking life. The proliferation of mobile messaging technologies and the precarization of labour has effectively erased any hard divisions between work/life. Long after fluorescents flick off at headquarters, staff emails continue permeating onto mobile devices attached like prostheses. Even when employees aren't in-house, they're expected to be on-call, a new normal which leads to tips like the following from Forbes. "Choose at least one widely distributed email to respond to at 10 p.m./11 p.m. to appear as if your hours go late into the night. Don't get sucked into reading all your email. Just weigh in on the one that everyone else is responding to. Repeat as soon as you wake up, ideally before 7 a.m." (Bercovici, 2012).

Microsoft's recent #GetItDone day perfectly captures this trend, framing its digital products as liberating pieces of technology which allow "workers to get things done anywhere, from sunrise to sunset" (Microsoft, 2013). Whether working during children's activities or utilising the 'second screen' of a laptop or mobile device while watching television, the campaign encapsulates the 'life as work' leitmotif, even listing the bathroom and the bed as potential work sites. In the wake of the effective capture of each waking minute as one which produces value, it's unforgivable that any chunk of 'down time'

remains. Sleep becomes a vestigial luxury unaffordable in a digital, dematerialised body which operates frictionlessly with late capital.

The US military have long attempted to produce a body which more closely mirrors the 'always on' vigilance encapsulated in their digital technologies. *Gorgon Stare* is the codename for a recent US camera sensor attached to its MQ-9 Reaper drones which covers an area of 4km from 12 angles (Pocock, 2011). Named after the mythical Greek monster, the imaging technology within this unblinking eye incorporates both standard and infrared cameras, allowing vision during night-time and obliterating any diurnal distinctions. Indeed infrared removes light and darkness entirely from the chain of vision, producing a hyperreal aesthetic of heat traces undetected by any retinal process. These multiple high-resolution feeds could soon be coupled with beam-powering, a technology in development from companies such as Lockheed Martin which would allow drones to stay aloft for their entire lifecycle without refueling (Frink, 2012). In light of the capabilities embedded within these sleepless technologies, it's natural that the military would wish to update the living individual as part of their "command, control and execution circuit" (Crary, 2014, p. 2).

Modafinil is one such solution, one of the new breed of smart-drugs or nootropics, many originally developed for military use (Ulrich 2005; Stoker 2013). In contrast to the charged/crashing

states of historical amphetamines which come with their own series of deleterious side-effects, these drugs seek to decrease the need for sleep entirely and subtly enhance cognitive processing. Now publicly available in the US as a prescription drug under the name Provigil, the product's website shifts the usage into the civilian sector and broadens its application to a range of disorders, including "excessive sleepiness" and "shift work sleep disorder" (provigil.com). After only a few years on the market, the drug had racked up $400 million in sales and had already been subpoenaed by the US Attorney's office for 'off-label' marketing, making claims to alleviate symptoms that went far beyond what was written on the bottle (Barrett, 2004). Modafinil had gone from marginal to mainstream.

Rather than any top-down prescription from the military or medical professions, these smart drugs have been leveraged by white collar workers intent on transforming their bodies into the uber-productive, always on paradigms of our current digitality. The 'turn on, tune in, drop out' notions synonymous with sixties psychedelic drug culture which explored "the possibilities of negating the self and the experience of a dilated sense of time, are now increasingly inverted to a radical act of conformity and an amplification of the performed self" (Fallon, 2013). Previously drugs were destructive, the crutch for a diseased mind or a dysfunctional being - deadbeats and deadheads. Now it is the bodily form itself, and the constraints it engenders, which is pathological (Dean, 2013).

In a post titled "How I Became Mighty with Modafinil", one exec describes obtaining the drug through an underground entrepreneur's forum, transforming his usual workday into a paragon of productivity and eradicating his usual sleepiness (Pride, 2012). Many of the testimonials surrounding the drug revel in the way it suppresses other weaknesses of the body: staving off appetite and exhaustion, deleting sluggishness and distraction. Indeed, the drug produces a specific form of alertness far from the wide-eyed stare of junkie lore, one which operates frictionlessly at the upper bounds of cognitive capitalism and its particular demands. Thus Modafinil is described as "mood brightening" and "memory enhancing" (modafinil.com, n.d.), a "wakefulness promoting" (rxlist, 2010) agent with a "smoother feel" (Hanlon, 2004) than traditional amphetamines.

In the same way spirit, polyphasic sleep - the use of multiple shorter sleep shifts - arose from psychological studies and endurance tests frequently with military links (Polyphasic sleep wiki), but has since enjoyed a grassroots push into the mainstream through a convergence of trends such as the Quantified Self, self-optimisation, and post-human bloggers. Common to these communities is a willingness to experiment with 'de facto' lifestyle choices - treating sleep, hunger, or work as an algorithm to be optimised. Key to any polyphasic strategy is the attempt to compress sleep temporalities, shifting quickly through the 'buffer time' of pre-REM states into the more deeply ameliorative REM phases. Schedules such as the

Uberman enforce a pattern of six equal sleeps throughout any 24 hour period for a total of just 3 hours of sleep (Wozniak, 2005).

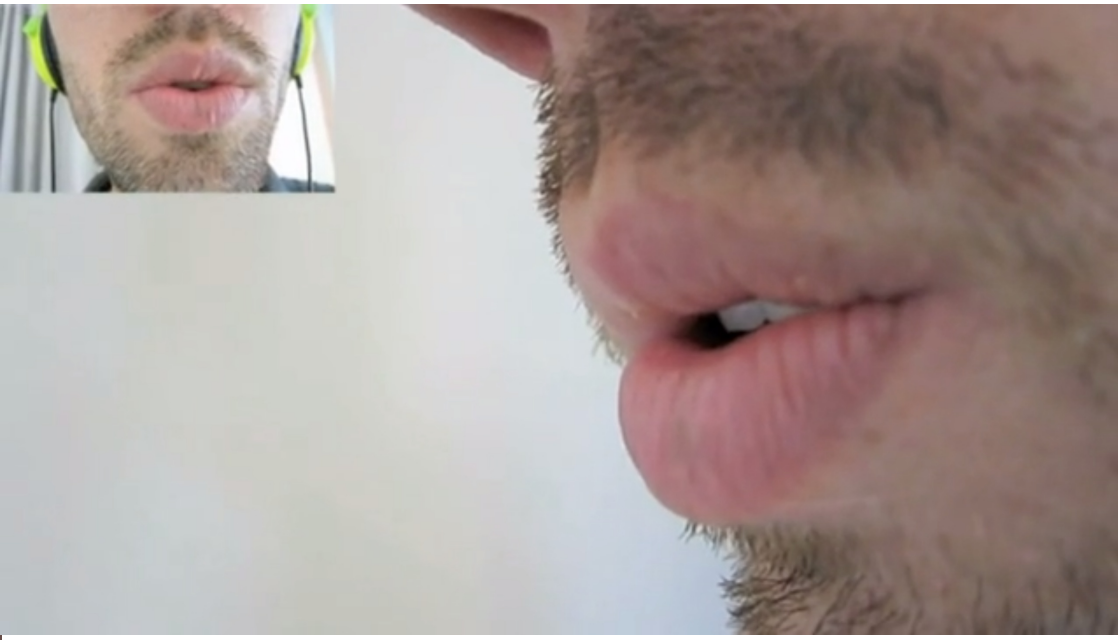
Biological sleeping rhythms ingrained in the body are reframed in the language of the digital as an “iterative process”, an opportunity to reduce “inferior phases” and implement a very “attractive life hack” (smartsleepteam.com, n.d.). The NeuroOn project, a recent success on crowd-funding site Kickstarter, leverages the same discourse, touting a Smart Sleep Mask in the same vein as smartphones or smart cars - a product which assists in adhering to polyphasic rhythms (Intelclinic, 2014). The device uses eye-tracking technology to differentiate sleep phases, waking the sleeper directly after the last REM cycle and saving days of ‘wasted time’. ‘Smart’ here is a reiteration of the self-optimized body (Chapter 2) which casts off the ‘dumb’ prehensile biological rest patterns ingrained merely through habit or tradition, abstracting sleep as another variable to be tweaked in order to obtain the winning edge.

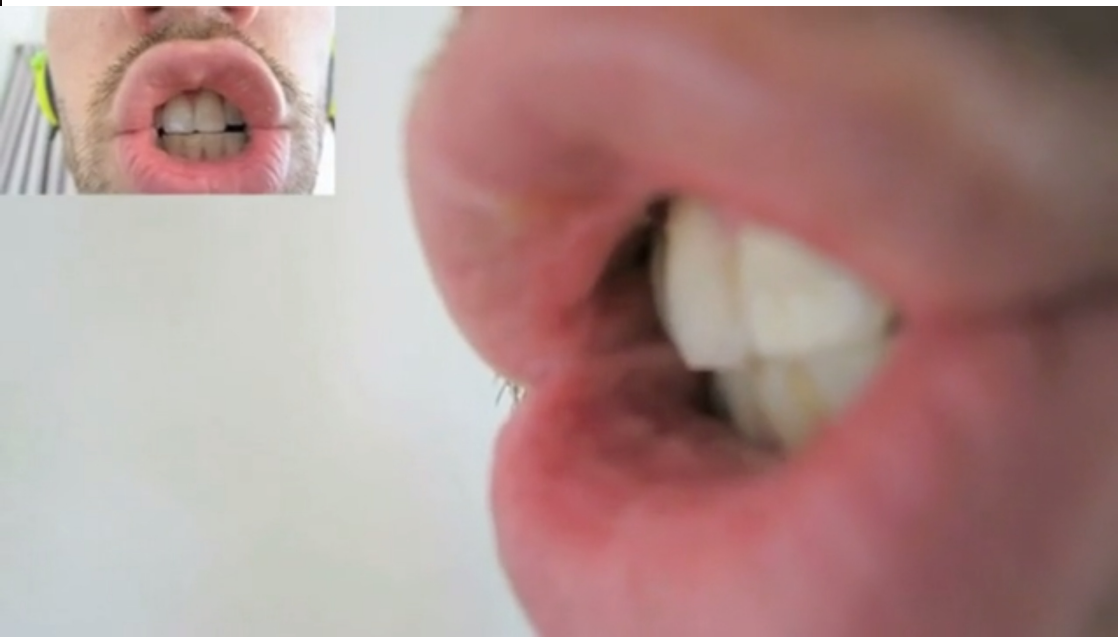
New technologies offer to capitalise even on these few hours of downtime. Shadow (Soik, 2014) is a mobile application which uses sleep-tracking and subtly increasing wake notifications staggered over time. Rather than the shattering buzz of a traditional alarm, this slow rousing of the user from slumber is meant to increase one’s ability to remember dreams. These dreams can then be entered into Shadow’s dream diary, a cloud-based global database of memories and mirages

extracted from the unconscious. Dreams make highly compelling content, capturing some of our darkest fears and shining hopes in experimental and often emotive scenes. As such it is unthinkable that they remain locked within the bodily consciousness of a single person. The unconscious shifts from the unseen and intimate to become a content-generation mechanism which bursts through previous inhibitions. The constrained consciousness is bypassed and typically abstract ideas (death, anxiety, desire) distilled into affective and strikingly visual vignettes.

Again the digital offers both a model and a means for a body which is ‘served up’ - mined and mapped into a series of packageable formats. Shadow and apps like it provide a powerful set of mechanisms for externalizing the inner life of the body into a dataset which can circulate throughout wider informational flows. Dreams can be shared, liked and retweeted - monetized into quantifiable products of (unconscious) cognitive capitalism. The digital engenders a body which works, even as it sleeps.

Summary:
Digital capitalism attempts to produce sleepless bodies, redeeming a wasteful dead-zone. This begins with the work/life balance and colonizing the rest formerly gained by physically being out-of-office. The military seeks ways for soldiers to match the infinite gaze and always-on performance attained by their digital weapons of war. Smart drugs enable execs and entrepreneurs to achieve the hyperfocused productivity of software and stock markets. Smart- and polyphasic sleep aim to quantify and optimize this biological process, while dream apps mine this down-time for compelling content.





Four Minute Tweet
single channel video, 4:11
Embassy Gallery, Edinburgh, Scotland
July 18 - August 3 2014

A tweet is read aloud and the recorded waveform slowed to 4 minutes. The performer attempts to emulate this audio, decelerating network communications into a slower, sited form via the breaths and stutters of the body.

"Digital technology is more than an invention, tool, or genre. It is a whole new landscape, a new biology, one that is changing us as much as we are changing it — and could one day live on the moon or inside us. Either way, we are digital's bitches."
- Jerry Saltz,
New Museum Triennial review

"First, how representations of the body and persona have evolved in an image-laden culture in which surveillance is widely dispersed and editorializing one's life in public is the norm; second, if it might be possible to opt out of or reframe the pressures of increasingly corporatized and invasive spaces; and third, how artists are striving to embed their works in the world around them through incursions into media and activism."
- Lauren Cornell, Curator's Statement for *Surround Audience*

Critical Responses:

How can contemporary art strategically and critically respond to digital disembodiment? The artworks documented in this research utilise a spectrum of strategies which fall between two theoretical poles: entangled accelerationism and post-digital materialities.

Entangled Accelerationism

Some of the earliest, seminal examples of accelerationism to date have been Nick Land's antihuman and cheerily nihilistic novels written throughout the nineties. Embracing the annihilation engendered by total capitalistic capitulation, these texts are described by Land himself as an "euphoric immolation upon the burn-core of literature, disintegrating into a senseless heterogeneous mass" (Land, 1992). In this variant, complicity is made complete and the colonizing effects of capital as alien force are total.

However Alex Williams and Nick Srnicek have recently revitalised the philosophy with their #Accelerate manifesto, advancing a more nuanced articulation of a positive post-capitalist scenario rather than an end game of extinction. They deride the "folk politics" of localism and direct action as nostalgic, horizontal counter-movements which increasingly spin in place when set against the high speed trajectories of a globalized and mobilized capitalism (Williams & Srnicek, 2013). The spectacular success of the neoliberal agenda, they argue, is at least partly due to the "continued paralysis and ineffectual

nature of much of what remains of the Left" (Williams & Srnicek, 2013). There is no viable return route to actually-existing-socialism, to a Neoluddite-like past, to the nostalgic triumphs of May '68. Unlike Land however, this version of accelerationism hopes to co-opt neoliberal tools, leveraging technology in order to supercharge its operational velocities to breaking point. Rather than a shrinking back to shores of sentimentality, this philosophy dives into the rushing rhythms of neoliberalism in the hope of pushing through to the other side.

The accelerationist response posited here removes the objective of a post-capitalism regime change and any attendant socio-Political programme, moving largely into the realm of aesthetics. What is carried over is accelerationism's strategic form of fatalism - an embracing rather than a negation of an ideology and the amplification or intensification of its forces to a point where contradictions, tensions, or edge-cases are revealed. In effect, this is an art which temporarily embodies an alien ideology and takes its asymptotic ideals seriously. This stance would be joined by a hypercharged technology use in order to generate a prolific and expansive artistic practice. Identity would be extrapolated, presence would be enlarged, productions would be extended.

Indeed, these strategies are already in use by young artists who build empires from single bodies. In *All You Need is Data?*, artist Simon Denny collaborated with the Digital Life Design

technology conference, receiving access to their full media library of video, image and sound material of speakers alongside logo and branding elements. Denny harnesses advertising production mechanisms to create a spectacular image barrage of 65 canvases which encompass the viewer and fill the gallery space. In *HyperCurrentLiving*, Ryder Ripps collaborates with Red Bull in a month long performance in which the artist generates ideas and consumes the company's energy drinks, updating these daily totals on a website. Ripps instrumentalizes the top-of-mind prestige built up by billions in Red Bull sponsorship, mobilising marketing strategies to distribute his hashtagged works for maximum viral exposure.

Rather than a critical outsider then, these are artists which are engulfed in the spaces they attempt to critique - merging, aligning and instrumentalizing themselves. These artists start to resemble hyper-subjects, a concept developed by Paul Rodaway to chart the shifts in self which occur within a postmodern milieu. Traditionally the subject has been viewed as a knowing agent, a locus of power, an independent and autonomous self with historical and geographical continuity. Rodaway instead sketches out an alternate self based on the notion of Baudrillard's 'hyperreal'. The classic example of the hyperreal is America's Disneyland theme park, a site which doesn't attempt to emulate any specific historical or architectural place, but instead jettisons itself free of those mappings to become a territory which is more real than reality itself (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 13).

In the same way, by attaching and detaching to an incessant line of compelling commodities, the hyper-subject "is made passive, hedonistic and loses its biographical and geographical grounding" (p. 252). Rodaway extrapolates Baudrillard's 'bursting' of the self, a self caught up in a network of swirling things, "an object-centred world characterised by the seduction of the subject by the technologies and images (signs) that continually replicate and circulate" (p. 252).

Rather than a stable, self-determining identity, the hyper-self presents a distributed, fluctuating individual enmeshed within the framework of late capital. In the "factory planet" (Dyer-Witheford) we are all participant-observers, all complicit, all involved. Instead of an active agent, the subject is "entranced and entangled with the technologies and images" (Rodaway, p. 251, 252) of contemporary digital capitalism. The power user becomes the user-victim. In a contemporary digital space where distinctions between life and work, friends and Friends become blurred, artists also maintain a fuzzy position between consumer and corporation, body and brand.

In such artistic practices, criticality seems to dissolve into collusion. Ed Fornieles leverages the content creation tools of Facebook to fabricate long duration narratives centred around cliches like college hazings and first girlfriends. Ryder Ripps' *Howl 2.0* updates Ginsberg's seminal poem, fusing software language with silicon valley tropes and internet memes, replacing the countercultural mantras of the beat generation

with the permeating 'prosuming' (production + consumption) of his digital native peers (2009). In an interview with Marc Garrett, artist Jennifer Chan speaks about the interpassive, rather than the inter-active artist, stating that she plays within Tumblr, YouTube and other established online platforms, "rather than overthrowing them or innovating new ones" (2013). In his essay *Warenwahn* ('product craze'), Pablo Larios follows this thread through pieces by other artists such as Oliver Laric, Helen Marten and Timur Si-Qin, stating that "the new proximity explored in these works between the consumer and the commodity – through corporatized burlesques like bio-branding, the neo–ready-made and Photoshop-ready product placement – may appear as a complicity with the market, if not a neoliberal savviness."

Criticality is sacrificed, agency evaporating away with the entangled artist. Steven Shaviro envisioned precisely this dilemma, warning that "one important role of art is to explore the dangers of futurity, and to 'translate' these dangers by mapping them as thoroughly and intensively as possible. This is not easy, since there is always a risk that the work will get lost within the spaces that it endeavors to survey, and that it will become yet another instance of the processes that it is trying to describe" (Shaviro, 2010, p. 139). But isn't this in itself an accurate portrayal of the contemporary condition? Isn't this a fitting reflection of late-capitalism's ability for critical co-option? The independent and autonomous shifts into the captured and colonized. The active agent becomes assimilated.

The artist as critical agent disappears. creating a curious void in the work. In the place of a viewpoint, stance or politics, there is simply a blank. In the place of a dissenting voice, there is a verbatim echo. The audience has the ability to investigate this emptiness on two fronts. The first mode entails a drawing-in to the work, searching for remnants of the artist's intention and manufacturing an agenda as a replacement. This deeper inspection might refer to supplementary texts from curators or critics, or expand to explore the artist's body of work as a whole. The second mode operates as a negation of the immediate or formal qualities of the work, producing a stance through skepticism. In this mode, the first impression of signs and images are taken as not-enough, distrusted as a misleading or at least incomplete reflection of the work's total political project. Both modes involve the construction of criticality by the viewer in the place of the engulfed artist's all-too-easily-offloaded agency.

The artist slips seemingly effortlessly into the digital depths of late capitalism. Without a ripple or a splash, the waters close over her. And it is precisely this crystalline stillness which is unsettling - this frictionless assimilation which triggers a latent criticality from an empathetic viewer. Closer inspection reveals a stream of bubbles, a body far below. If the previous model of artistic criticality was a prophetic voice crying in the wilderness, today's has been immersed and entranced, suffering from raptures of the deep.

Postdigital Materialities

The term post-digital comes from an essay written in 2000 by musician Kim Cascone titled *The Aesthetics of Failure: 'Post-Digital' Tendencies in Contemporary Computer Music*. Perhaps influenced by the recent dot-com bubble burst, Cascone immediately paints a more monstrous, darker image of information infrastructures, stating that "the tendrils of digital technology have in some way touched everyone". In his view, digital media and tools, far from allowing artists to be limited only by their imagination had instead enabled cookie-cutter cultural production for the mainstream. "With electronic commerce now a natural part of the business fabric of the Western world and Hollywood cranking out digital fluff by the gigabyte, the medium of digital technology holds less fascination" (Cascone, 2000).

The established ubiquity and commercialization of digital technologies shift them from novelty to banality. In this sense the 'post' in post-digital is not so much 'after it' as 'over it' - a disenchantment with the digital. This more skeptical stance of both wariness and weariness sits in stark contrast to a wide-eyed acceptance of techno-positivist prophecies. These prophecies create a blinkered hyperfocus on the new and the next, proclaiming innovation, disruption and evolution at each new product announcement. Simultaneously these digital visions exert a kind of historical amnesia, sweeping our rapidly accumulating pile of electronic afterglow behind it. Postdigital

practices begin from this overlooked wake of digital detritus, looking back as much as forwards. In contrast to euphoric anticipation, the starting point is a “sobering moment” in which we’re reminded of just how many “promises of the digital end in yet more false dawns” (Snodgrass, 2014). The gleam is gone.

Rather than retreating from the digital however, Cascone seeks to reveal its materiality. He references the shift in painting from portraiture to landscape, moving from the foreground to focus on what was considered background, which "helped to expand their perceptual boundaries" (Cascone, 2000). Cascone compares this to the noise floor of computer sound cards, a digital hum present even in state-of-the-art devices which can be amplified and manipulated as a musical medium. The specific materiality inherent within the digital becomes an overlooked and unexplored space for creative freedom.

Materiality has continued to be a primary theme in the postdigital space, an insistence on the physical, real-world underpinnings of digital technologies. This insistence is necessary because our digitality tends to obscure or abstract away these materialities. The screen hides structure, language manages voltage, ‘the cloud’ veils actual cloud storage sites. Software receives superpower attention, while hardware is relegated to offshore manufacturing in the global south (‘designed by Apple in California, made in China’). User interfaces and software platforms are framed as key business, while environmental or labour concerns with miners and

materials are relegated to “economic externalities” (Cubitt, 2014). Mobile broadband plans are heavily advertised while the cell sites which power them are presented as insignificant infrastructure, banal ‘greyware’. Amazon uses A/B testing to optimise it’s e-commerce shopping ‘funnel’ to perfection (Christian, 2012) while consigning its employees to massive nondescript warehouses and Non-Disclosure-Agreements (Lounes, 2013).

Materiality intersects frequently with failure, another theme from Cascone’s original essay. Again the postdigital starting point is a negation or inversion of existing digital ideologies. Worldviews like techno-positivism or techno-hegelianism are often grounded in evolutionary, enlightenment discourse, asserting a constant progression towards perfection via technical improvement. In this framework, a term like ‘smoothness’ becomes not just a descriptor for the seamless functioning of technology, but also the effortless evolutionary ascension brought about by these “glossy innovation narratives” (Cramer, 2014).

Seamlessness, as outlined above with materiality, becomes a way to hide “hard problems embedded in hard physicalities” (Munn, 2014). Seamlessness is an evaporated interface combined with a black-box algorithm (Apple Siri, Amazon Echo). Seamlessness is a user’s private information or purchased content stored conveniently in a corporation-owned cloud (Apple iCloud, Kindle Store). Seamlessness from a

postdigital perspective becomes a way to construct “asymmetric power relations” (Cirio, 2011) in which users hand over their agency and understanding of technology to tech-titans who can better manage it.

‘Seamfulness’ in contrast, is produced through failure, disrupting the digital and simultaneously revealing the materiality which underpins it. A ‘bricked’ mobile phone transforms it from indispensable device to dead weight. A cell-tower triangulation mis-locates a user in Germany when he’s still on the French border (Oliver, 2012). An underpaid Google Books worker accidentally captures her hand during a page scan (Wilson, 2012). Failure becomes not simply an experimental production strategy, but also a deeper philosophical critique - a kind of binary blasphemy. Technology begins to make mistakes, to behave irrationally. By producing a space where imperfections and malfunctions are embraced, post-digital practices introduce sacrilege into the temple of technology, pulling apart the seamless sublime and exposing the all-too-human errors beneath the surface. While these behaviours expose the specific materiality inherent in the digital, they also destabilize the authority engendered by its supposed perfection.

Within a postdigital framework, the body becomes another set of materials, a “geology of flesh” (Cubitt, 2014) or human minerality underlying our information infrastructures. As with other materials, the digital attempts to decouple from this

corporeal form, abstracting it away and into the language of informatics (24, Chapter 4), software processes (drones, Chapter 4), data-streams (SMS, Chapter 4) or other proxies. For the postdigital however, ignoring this particular materiality - just like the resources of electricity, water, labour, or metals - perpetuates an unchecked and ostensibly immaterial digitality detached from any real-world fallout. The airy operations of 'digital' labour and the 'information age' have delivered a quietly concealed set of political, social and environmental catastrophes.

In June 2011, Freetheslaves.net released a report on working conditions in the mines of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Tantalum, tin, gold and tungsten are four of the main metals extracted for the production of a wide variety of electronic devices, including mobile phones, gaming consoles, and computers. Deep in the subtropical wilderness of the DRC, open pit sites are scraped by self-employed miners, selling them onto traders "with warlords and militias extorting the players along the way" (Dwoskin, 2012). The profits on these metals allow militias to reap hundreds of millions of dollars per year, financing weapons purchases and fueling bloody conflict, with allegations that these groups also utilise mass rape to intimidate and control local populations. Working conditions are brutal and cramped, with miners sometimes forced to sleep in the mineshaft, leading to extensive drug use and sexually transmitted diseases (Freetheslaves.net, 2011).

One of the participants stated that after five years working in the mines, his lungs and spinal column were damaged and “his body was completely deteriorated”. In a very tangible sense, this is the disembodiment brought about by the digital.

Conclusion:

How does digital capitalism remap the body? Digital technologies provide both the model and means for updated forms of (dis)embodiment which function frictionlessly with the demands of late-capitalism: a somatic self which is hungerless, self-optimized, disintegrated, discrete and sleepless. Digital technologies functionally epitomize the hyperfocused always-on productivity and distributed connectivity desired in this framework. Just as importantly, however, they provide powerful paradigms for reframing the body: a mutable self-brand or an optimizable code-base, an informatic entity or a distributed content package.

How can contemporary art strategically and critically respond? The artworks documented in this research utilise a spectrum of strategies which fall between entangled accelerationism and post-digital materialities. The accelerationist art posited here adopts and embraces digital capitalism, intensifying it to the point where criticality becomes collusion and artistic agency evaporates. In contrast, postdigital practices operate primarily as a negation of our current digitality, recovering the body alongside other materials as vital structures for a digitality so often predicated on the surface and the screen.

Glossary:

The Posthuman:
Stemming from post- or transhumanism, this term envisions the body as a cyborg, a cybernetic organism which successfully blends informational infrastructures with somatic processes. One of the main problems with the posthuman from a late capitalistic perspective is that it is actually an inherently fleshy idea, a subcutaneous insertion of the computer into the carnal. Stelarc's *Ping Pong Body*, one of the seminal performance works within the posthuman space, exemplifies this corporeal/chip mashup, implanting nodes and sensors within the skin, hooking up a mesh of network cables that entangle the flesh. The digital remains a prosthesis, a means for extending the capabilities and properties of the body which is nevertheless undergirded both cognitively and physically by a somatic structure. Despite the ushering in of a new age that the term suggests then, the posthuman remains an augmentation of the biological, leaving the body firmly intact.

The Nonhuman:
A term used in fields ranging from object oriented ontology through to zoosemiotics and ecomaterialism, but broadly denoting some 'thing' within the non-Anthropocene - the sphere of objects and entities which sit outside or alongside the human. The difference here between the digital disembodied human and the agency, creativity and autonomy imparted to these objects is arguable. What makes us distinctly human? The clearer distinction is that this digital body is always understood to stand-in for, symbolize, or represent a single human body, a unique identity. However mediated or abstracted, the expectation is that the actions and information presented to one body represent those of another human, rather than a nonhuman agent.

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