BODIES WITHOUT INFORMATION

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In her 1999 book *How We Became Posthuman* Katherine Hayles made the eloquent argument that information had lost its body.[1] What she didn't say was that at the same time as information begins to lose its body, so too does the body begin to lose its mind—outsourced to a technological host that promises better capacity, accessibility, and shareability. In the hype about the twenty-first century being the information age, the human body has quickly been left behind.

This could be clarified through an analogy that Jean Baudrillard has described as the "transparency of evil": the counter-intuitive notion that disappearance in a digital world is a function not of scarcity but of excess.[2] The destiny of information is to disappear into ubiquity, to become first an authority on the statistical value of experience, then to become a commodity seeking to shape experience, and finally to disappear from perception while becoming the embodied condition of cultural life itself. As a result, at stake in understanding the question of information—and by consequence technology in a larger sense—is not just the ways in which we use and engage with various forms of information media but how we also understand media as something that uses us.

1 N. Katherine Hayles. *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.

2 Jean Baudrillard. *The Intelligence of Evil or the Lucidity Pact.* London: Berg Publishers, 2005.

Bodies Without Information

Bodies without information? That's the body that tries to cross the border without a passport; tries to purchase alcohol without a driver's license; sits in a classroom without student identification, registration numbers and other informatic markers of legitimate digital identity. Those lucky enough to have necessary credentials must always remember to bring them, or else they are not part of the body anymore. In fact, it is up to the body to prove that it belongs to the credentials: to look enough like its picture, to purchase the price of admission, to register itself to the tracking gaze of officialized living. This is the virtualization of information—what some theorists like Arthur & Marilouise Kroker eloquently call the "terrorism of the code" which actually (and sometimes violently) strips information from the bodies it once belonged to.[3] This informatic condition begins in a language of security and facilitation but quickly becomes, in our times, a generalizable system, an ideological relationship, a default status of the body itself: without information but with the expectation that verifiable documentation can be produced when the situation demands it.

We must remember not to depersonalize the question however, for the body without information is also my body and your body and all the other bodies on the streets we live in and inhabit, the bodies on the bus going to work, the bodies that make up our communities in local as well as virtual ways, most of them readily complicit with the informatic dream that

3 Arthur & Marilouise Kroker. "Code Drift." In Arthur & Marilouise Kroker, eds. *Code Drift: Essays in Critical Digital Studies*. Victoria: CTHEORY Books. Available online: http://www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=632

is—for Hayles, Baudrillard, the Krokers and others—a looming technological nightmare.

These are also the students' bodies in the classrooms where we teach, many of them exuberantly passionate about the digital possibilities of the world in which we live. For these bodies, our lived technological condition is not just a real-time manifestation of the science fiction fantasy of downloadable and transferable consciousness.[4] This is a university classroom populated with students who have their own YouTube channels, whose minds are already transferable—streamed, downloaded and absorbed by the networked community that reinforces the legitimacy of their digital identities. At the same time as minds upload themselves in real time to sharable databases, something else happens too. These same minds out-source the very expression of their individual voices that was the whole point of the experiment to begin with. Passport citizenship. State-registered identities. YouTube personalities. It's as creative as it is complicated; enabling and restrictive at one and the same time.

Education in a state of vertigo

That's why so many technology theorists — Hayles included — look to artists to help determine possible courses of action and interaction in a media-saturated world. Artists have historically spent time getting to

4 This is a fantasy shared by many artists, technologists and engineers, among them Ray Kurzweil (see *The Singularity is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology*. New York: Penguin Books, 2006), Hans Moravec (see *Robot: Mere Machine to Transcendent Mind*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) and Roy Ascott (see *Telematic Embrace: Visionary Theories of Art, Technology and Consciousness*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2007).

know their media, and while we are no longer living in the representational world of the art historical past, the general methods that artists engage still have promise for helping us to see the world a little bit differently. Sharing this ideology are philosophers and media theorists such as Martin Heidegger, Marshall McLuhan and Arthur & Marilouise Kroker who write about how some artists conceptualize new ways to intuit technology. For McLuhan artists are often "the barometers of their times"—signaling ways to creatively engage and resist what he beautifully describes as "the buzz saw of technology"[5]. For Heidegger artists promise methods of "turning" technology—acknowledging that every technological moment already implies a certain type of (scripted) human interaction;[6] And for the Krokers artists are the embodied hackers of digital experience, embracing the complexity of technological living over the imperative for enlightened understanding, and in so doing revealing that in a post-information world understanding isn't really worth that much anymore.[7] These thinkers agree that artists bring to the question of technology a certain form of *medium reflexivity*, gesturing towards the concept of poetics as the embodied meta-study of media—framed, for instance, as the question of "why we write *how* we write" or "why we make *how* we make," in contrast to the simpler question of *what* we write or make. What is needed then are not proposals for how to correct the already-futurist vectors in which we are implicated, but how to teach within the state of vertigo where contemporary bodies find themselves.[8]

5 Marshall McLuhan. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man.* New York: Signet Books, 1964.

6 Martin Heidegger. *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays.* London: Harper, 1977.

7 Arthur Kroker. *Exits to the Posthuman Future.* Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014.

What follows are three accounts of bodies without information, bodies that know and understand the new relational territory they are increasingly called upon to navigate. Against bodies tasked with the accumulation of information, a thesis on forgetting; against bodies objectified and automated by informatic systems, thesis on oblivion; and, against bodies taught to defer to the authority of logistical knowledge, a thesis on imagination.

This essay is a meditation on digital bodies without clear directives or predictable futures and on forms of educational vertigo that might be developed to accompany the spirit of the times.

1.
I want to be a machine

In 1963 Andy Warhol famously declared that he wanted to be a machine, that everybody should be a machine, and that through being machines we would all realize our creative individual capacity.[9] It was a prescient but somewhat counter-intuitive way of thinking—the idea that regulated activity and repetitive production would bring people together, making us more alike and more efficient while uniting the social and the productive potential of human engagement. Warhol's prescience was to observe not just that automation speeds up production, but that automated tasks also take the least amount of human effort (we

8 This is the premise, for instance, of the MFA in Creative Writing and Poetics at the University of Washington Bothell, a program designed to foreground the question of "why we write how we write." See: http://www.uwb.edu/mfa

9 Andy Warhol, "Interview with Gene Swenson," *Art News*, 1963. Available online: http://www.mariabuszek.com/kcai/PoMoSeminar/Readings/WarholIntrvu.pdf

do them almost without thinking about it) and for Warhol that was also an opportunity to optimize the potential for creative experimentation and collective economic production. Automation frees the mind to engage in other types of thought. Being a machine was not about standing out as an autonomous producer, but just the opposite: it was about disappearing into the explosion of collective creative output, putting to an end to the myth of a genius author or artist while at the same time refashioning the world around us in ever more creative ways. In Warhol's words, "I think it would be so great if more people took up silk screens so that no one would know whether my picture was mine or somebody else's."[10] And the same for any activity—whether silkscreen, photography, painting, music or anything else—the destiny of media-enabled living, in a sense, begins to push past questions of authorship and to foreground the idea of collective creative expression.

It is not too difficult to map Warhol's dream onto the contemporary state of personal digital media, regulated and enabled in equal spirit by platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and others. With the stream of images saturating daily experience, the status of digital authorship is suspect, subjected to trends as easily as expert assessment, and just as likely to disappear without being seen than to be considered in any particularly thoughtful way. It's also not that hard to link this to Marshall McLuhan's famous insistence that "the medium is the message," a concept taken up more recently in the realm of "software studies" and "media ecology" by

10 Andy Warhol, "Interview with Gene Swenson," *Art News*, 1963. Available online: http://www.mariabuszek.com/kcai/PoMoSeminar/Readings/WarholIntrvu.pdf

Lev Manovich, Matthew Fuller and others. Fuller argues, for instance, that in a software culture it is necessary to consider the types of thought and activity that software (as a phenomenon) makes possible[11]—in other words, the ways that software actually *authors us*. Thus if we acknowledge the way our creations are facilitated by software (or by any form of media) it is worth considering the ways in which the platforms we use impact—and sometimes overshadow—the particularities of what we use them to create. Digital platforms make images more social and less individualized; more automated and less authored, exactly as Warhol predicted.

However, at the same time as this dynamic between automation and collectivity solidifies as the operating social ethos of our times, something else happens too. The more images and media we see and the more ubiquitous these images become the less we pay attention to any given individual image. While the hype of machines—especially digital machines—is that they prioritize, optimize and even fetishize memory capacity, perhaps there is a reversibility to this relationship. Perhaps memory is not the destiny of the digital archive but just the opposite: a form of human forgetting. One might pause to think about our own relationships to devices and memory and what is often seen as a complaint against digital dependency. One might wonder whether we haven't learned Warhol's suggestion all too well—dreaming collectively in ways that act as a prescriptive method for allowing ourselves to forget. To foreground the individualized implications of such a perspective, I admit that ten years ago I remembered the phone

11 Matthew Fuller, ed. *Software Studies: A Lexicon*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2008.

numbers of everyone who mattered in my life. Now I remember just one—my own—as if my lifeline to memory now depends only on knowing how to locate myself (and thus access my own personal archives) within the digital wires. This is the case for many things, not just phone numbers. My devices remember much more than that: calendar appointments, birthdays and meetings, notifications of texts and emails in case I do not always have the time to check. And other information too, from news reports customized to my own particular interests to music and book suggestions—even friend suggestions—as well as what effectively amounts to an on-demand repository of anything I might need to know. It might seem like stating the obvious, but I'm not sure I'm any sort of exception to the daily interpenetration and integration of media, memory and post-information living. What's notable about this backing up and organizing of memory is that, as much as it seems motivated by utilitarian function, it also has the strange side-effect of allowing a state of forgetfulness to emerge—a digitally enabled forgetfulness that is the reward for immersive engagement.

This is why Warhol is the perfect teacher for helping to contextualize this relationship. Warhol may have seen machines as a way to build communities through automation, but he also saw them as a way to compensate for his own imperfect memory. By surrounding himself with machines, he was able to willingly embrace his own absent-mindedness by entering into, and sustaining, a state of enabled forgetfulness. As Warhol himself put it:

> I have no memory. Every day is a new day because I don't remember the day before. Every minute is like the first minute of my life. I try to remember but I can't. That's why I got married—to my tape recorder. That's why I seek out people with minds like tape recorders to be with...[12]

Marshall McLuhan liked to remind us that technology tends to turn the body inside out—externalizing the nervous system (and memory) while accelerating the new forms of virtual connections between bodies that are no longer simply physical.[13] But Warhol wanted to be inside-out from the start; and perhaps we do too. We have all become digital Warhols, fulfilling what turns out to be not simply an eccentric turn of character but a cultural prophecy of humans tethered to their machines. What is really at stake in the question of information culture is not information at all, but the human capacity to forget.

Pedagogies of forgetting

Speaking pedagogically then, despite the fact that it appears backwards to say so, it seems that what one human can teach another human is precisely this consequence of living in a system of distributed digital bodies—how to abandon oneself to the absurdity of the technological system while at the same time understanding the creative and political leverage this is capable of contouring. How to selectively forget, to forget on purpose, as a process or an activity or a conscientious delusion.

Insofar as technologies remember for us, the information it archives is made to be forgotten.

12 Andy Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol: From A to B and Back Again*. Carsen: Harvest Press, 1977.

13 Marshall McLuhan. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. New York: Signet Books, 1964.

But the experience of having encountered it sometimes stays with us. It is not really information any more. Instead it's an opportunity perhaps to be moved (rather than simply informed) by the archive encounter. I pause to remember the story of Nietzsche's cow:

> A human being may well ask an animal: "Why do you not speak to me of your happiness but only stand and gaze at me?" The animal would like to answer, and say, "The reason is I always forget what I was going to say'" — but then he forgot this answer too, and stayed silent.[14]

To teach in such an environment is to realize that the bodies in the classroom are no longer physiological archive machines tasked with learning course material. Instead, such a classroom must begin to ask what we will do now that we are freed (sometimes forcibly) from the ambitions of information. What do we do with the strange urgencies that linger, haunted emotions grafted from forgotten data sets that move us even if we no longer care to remember what they were about? Bodies that no longer care about information but who nonetheless experience the informatic presence of memories that used to be their own. Bound in digital forgetfulness, as Sherry Turkle puts it, the contemporary body is inevitably cast into a state of being "alone together" with its community of device-enabled friendships and streams of ubiquitous media, circulating at the speed of networked indifference.[15]

14 Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life." *Untimely Meditations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

15 Sherry Turkle. *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*. New York: Basic Books, 2012.

2.
In search of the miraculous

It may have turned out that while Warhol dreamed of being a machine, the machine dreamed of becoming him too—of replacing him even, until nobody else would even know the difference. Consider the story of Pia Farrenkophf whose body was discovered in early 2014, mummified and seated in the back seat of her car, parked in her home garage.[16] She had been dead for 5 years. But she had also been alive in a certain informatic sense of the word. Nobody knew she was gone. All her bills were set to autopay. She had recently quit her job and was estranged from her family, so nobody was really expecting her to be anywhere. Her neighbors mowed her lawn for her and collected her mail—assuming she was away traveling. The cause of death was unknown, but what makes the story strange is that by all external accounts she was still around, forgotten in a way that can only be mediated by an adequate appearance of presence. When her credit cards expired her story was revealed, an ironic reversal of the impersonal creditors now redeeming a story they didn't even know was being told:

> Farrenkopf also had a bank account with a very large sum in it, and—this is the postmodern crux of the story—she had set up her mortgage and utility bills to be paid automatically from it. As her body decomposed in her garage, the funds went out regularly. Last year, Farrenkopf's money finally ran out. Her mortgage payments stopped, and the bank foreclosed on the

16 Carmen Maria Machado. "The Afterlife of Pia Farrenkopf," *The New Yorker*, March 27, 2014. http://www.newyorker.com/business/currency/the-afterlife-of-pia-farrenkopf

> house. Earlier this month, a contractor employed by the bank was examining the home when he discovered Farrenkopf's body—which has been called "mummified"—in her car in the garage. Since then, police have been attempting to piece together the details of her life and death, to find some answers to the mystery of who she was and why she is gone.[17]

It used to be that you had to go off-grid to be forgotten—like the artist Bas Jan Ader who in 1975 refurbished a sailboat as a performance project, one he called "In Search of the Miraculous" and then sailed away, never to be heard from again. Jan Ader's boat was found a year later wrecked off the coast of Ireland but Jan Ader himself was never found. We can assume that his assets were immediately dealt with by the authorities, who would have disregarded the ambiguity of his performance. Ader's body and material presence disappeared, but his memory lives on in art schools. It's easy to think of this as a metaphysical challenge—the artist's attempt to "hold himself out into the void" as Martin Heidegger prescribed for the task metaphysical enlightenment, embracing both the insecurity and the exhilaration of the unknown.[18] But in a digital age the new void is not necessarily outside of us as a geographical territory to discover or explore. Instead, we have different economic, political and personal attentions to negotiate that make the question of the

17 Carmen Maria Machado. "The Afterlife of Pia Farrenkopf," *The New Yorker*, March 27, 2014. http://www.newyorker.com/business/currency/the-afterlife-of-pia-farrenkopf

18 Martin Heidegger. *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*. London: Harper, 1977.

disappearing act that much more complicated. If Bas Jan Ader disappeared by sailing away in search of the miraculous—holding himself out into the void—Pia Farrenkof disappeared by doing just the opposite. She found her oblivion right at home, having set sail metaphorically on the back of life's automated functions. Her body was found later, lying on the shores of a social imagination that didn't even know she was gone. She died but her automated activities lived on.

To contrast these two stories is to suggest that any new conceptualization of a space off-grid must take into account the increasingly hyper-connected and automated world in which we live. To conceptualize a space off-grid, in the style of Pia Farrenkopf, is to realize Warhol's dream of becoming a machine to the extent that the machine itself takes over the task of creating a social presence for us. A space off-grid opens up, but the demands of the social network must be satisfied first. Against the social and political anxieties that often result in a request to slow down the speed of technological advance (or return to a more holistic and humanist view of the world) there is perhaps strategic possibility catalyzed by the attempt to simply become a machine, to realize Warhol's dream and to set off into the forgotten spaces that automated living is capable of creating. Consider another story—this time of a young art student named Zilla Van Den Born, who recently collaborated with her computers to disappear into the local in much the same way as Farrenkopf—only this time intentionally:

> A 25-year-old student from The Netherlands packed up her bags, drove to the airport, waved goodbye to her family, and then...

> she went home. Zilla Van Den Born of Amsterdam spent the next 42 days holed up in her apartment using Photoshop to create fake vacation pictures of herself in Thailand, Cambodia and Laos. She even made a fake background to Skype her parents at odd hours of the night.[19]

At home, Van Den Born was also actively creating her presence elsewhere, cultivating a performance that was her life for that period of time and creating memories of a vacation that happened in her mind and in the minds of those she loved. They may have felt deceived in the end but the joke was not on them—if it was even a joke at all. Much better to think of it as a space where we are given permission to forget where we are, while allowing others to forget the usual things they would ask if we were just where we always are anyways. Spaces that allow us to be forgotten and which in turn create a surrogate digital presence that frees us up to forget about where we might be. It might be strange to think of this as a disappearance or as a moment of being forgotten. In the case of Zilla Van Den Born this would be to suggest that the important part of the story is not the ruse she created for others but the imaginative space this allowed her to create for herself. She remained at home in Amsterdam but without the usual expectations actually being present would involve. Instead, for all intents and purposes, she freed herself from the expectations of integrated social life such as to spend time in a mode of concerted play and misdirection.

19 Rebecca Perring. "Student convinced family she was on trip around Asia — despite NEVER leaving her bedroom," *Sunday Express*, September 10, 2014. http://www.express.co.uk/news/world/509243/Student-convinced-family-trip-around-Asia-despite-never-leaving-bedroom

Pedagogies of disappearance

To treat this series of anecdotes pedagogically would be to acknowledge that we have all grown digital bodies, automated appendages that are not clearly distinct from material bodies but that somehow overlay the material world. But to say that we are all Pia Farrenkopfs is too easy. As long as our profile information remains alive, we are allowed to forget about it until something disturbs the smooth function of algorithmic flows. In some ways we then allow ourselves to be forgotten too. Our data lives this part of life for us so that we don't have to. As a result we become digital Jan Aders, pushed into a metaphysical (even 'pataphysical') void with simply the promise of technologically enhanced friendships and memberships to keep us afloat. The condition of this new "streaming miraculous" is simply the relinquishing of data operations to the systems designed to take care of this for us. The new void is on the inside—a heart broken by machines who no longer want us as collaborative companions.

If the experiential correlative to forgetting is embodied disappearance then the irony of digital living is that it is appearance itself that demands automation. Just as technology becomes the guarantee of pervasive memory archives, so too does it become a requirement for social and economic participation. Warhol's dream was about a coveting of absence—the ways that a forgetful mind encounters new cognitive spaces to think and live differently, whether in the intensity of the forgotten moment or in the shadow of devices that remember for us. Seen as a sequel to the first, this story is one about embodied disappearance—first building a surrogate digital body by the design of technological culture, then mobilizing the off-grid possibilities such

a guarantee of digital presence creates. Embracing disappearance for the ways it liberates a body from the necessity of accompanying the digital on the processes of automation.

To teach in such an environment is to realize that the bodies in the classroom are already part of the integrated circuit of social living—not minds waiting to be influenced but already under the influence of automated production. Smart bodies. Enabled bodies. And consequently bodies whose first and perhaps only challenge is to think about ways to creatively disappear in excess of the roles they already occupy.

3.
Thoughtographic Studies of an Extraordinary Mind

While the digitally-enhanced mind may begin to dream of an ability to go off-grid and disappear—enabled by the technological persistence of automated identity that fills the roles of social obligation—at the same time technology finds itself personified and begins to dream of a body and a mind of its own. This is the strange consequence of the automated animation of lives, a form of concomitant anthropomorphism that we project onto technology and which it then adopts as its own, appearing for all intents and purposes on our behalf. It takes on not just the mundane tasks of paying bills and keeping records and accounts organized, for as our mediated lives continue to evolve so too does the capacity of technology to speak for us, animate our experiences and even teach us how to think and experience differently.

In his book, *Exits to the Posthuman Future*, Arthur Kroker writes about new trends in biofeedback interfaces that allow for the synchronization of hearts to cellphones—as though we want our technology to

know we love it—while at the same time providing a surrogate heartbeat for the devices.[20] At the same time as the device reads a heartbeat, the possibility for a networked social heartbeat emerges—from Apple Watch heartbeat-synchronized text messages to a wide range of biofeedback devices designed to monitor exercise and health performance. These are not uncommon interfaces and they are increasingly becoming part of the destiny of wearable computing. Some of them promise to help their hosts improve physical well-being by sending an alert when the body has been idle for too long. Others track activities such as running and sleeping and provide feedback on the body's actual performance. Many also offer suggestions for how to improve and optimize the body—and here the physiological loop folds back on itself. Seen most literally within the budding field of brainwave sensors, these are technologies that promise to actually read our minds—and some of them will even teach us how to think or feel or exercise differently—first as an electric measuring of neural activity and then by catering to the desire for performance enhancement. A regime of optimization begins to saturate the experiential spaces of material bodies as an informatic liaison to imagination itself.

The fact that technology reads our minds simply means that there is one less distraction for us to attend to—and indeed these biofeedback loops are designed to help us exactly focus on everything except the technological relationship. It's like the new collaboration between the Neuro Sky Mind Wave brainwave headset and Google Glass which allows us

20 Arthur Kroker. *Exits to the Posthuman Future*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014, pp. 7-9.

to photograph the world with the power of the mind alone. This is from an Engadget news report:

> Up until now you can only navigate Google Glass by touching or talking to it but a London-based firm just made it possible to control the device using something else: your brainwaves. The company just released an open-source application that gives you something akin to very, very limited telekinetic abilities—so long as you have both Google Glass and Neurosky's EEG biosensor headset. See the app serves as the bridge that connects the two, translating the brain activity from the EEG biosensor into executable commands for the high-tech eyewear. The software can take pictures and upload them to either Facebook or Twitter.[21]

Digital pictures—using only the power of the mind. It's like that spectacular story from the 1960's of a man who claimed he too could take pictures using the power of his mind alone. The man was Ted Serios and he was most famously written up in a book by psychiatrist Jule Eisenbud: *The World of Ted Serios: Thoughtographic Studies of and Extraordinary Mind.* For Eisenbud, a "thoughtographer" is one who projects images directly from the mind onto a photographic surface, and the book contends that Ted Serios had exactly this power.[22] Serios would concentrate intently, then hold a Polaroid camera to his forehead, thereby completing the neural feedback loop between device and imagination. The

21 Mariella Moon. "Control Google Glass with your mind ... and a second headset," *Endgadget*, July 9, 2014. http://www.engadget.com/2014/07/09/mindrdr-google-glass-neurosky/

result would sometimes be strange foggy pictures, part ghost part recognizable reality, even if the reality of the process he used was never verified or disproven. The phenomenon is also referred to as psychic photography, and in many ways it's an artist's dream—the instant expression of imaginative vision—a straight channel from the mind onto a viewing surface. But what seems like a paranormal fantasy of the psychedelic 60's is a digitally-enabled matter of fact for the twenty-first century. Psychically enabled by the power of technology, minds that make images simply by thinking about it.

When Joseph Beuys declared in 1973 that "everyone's an artist"[23] this might not have been quite what he was imagining: a world where imaginations find instant digital outlet through online expressions. For the version of the creative dream that we are living is one that is not just technological but corporate, not simply device-facilitated but enabled-for-profit. Expression is not simply expression anymore either; the more quickly and easily the images flow from minds to screens, the better the data for study and profit maximization. Think of the 2014 scandal over Facebook's use of social feeds to manipulate the moods of its users—a study controversial for the failure to secure permission for the experiment but equally noteworthy for the claim that users who were given more pessimistic news stories to look at also made more pessimistic posts of their own.[24] What

22 See Jule Eisenbud, *The World of Ted Serios: Thoughtographic Studies of an Extraordinary Mind.* London: Morrow, 1968.

23 Laurie Rojas, "Beuys' Concept of Social Sculpture and Relational Art Practices Today," *Chicago Art Magazine,* November 29, 2010. Available online: http://chicagoartmagazine.com/2010/11/beuys%E2%80%99-concept-of-social-sculpture-and-relational-art-practices-today

we encounter through media—whether devices or social platforms or advertising campaigns—changes how we think and feel, and in turn changes the very fabric of what we express in reciprocal gestures of engagement. One can respond to the pervasiveness and interpeneratedness of digital and personal living by claiming exemption—pretending that because we understand the nuances of these relationships we are somehow exempt from them. But it's not true and thinking differently is only a starting point for providing additional artistic and social responses to the state of digital affairs. Even the slogan "Think Differently" has in its history a series of Apple ad campaigns from 1997-2002 that forever link creative thought with a certain type of product platform.[25]

Instead, it is important to remember that there was a second part to Beuys' statement that is worth reiterating—not the realized fact that "everyone's an artist" but that by consequence we are collectively building an art project called the future (what Beuys called the "total artwork of the future social order"[26]). For the real lesson of artistic practice is not simply the skillful ability needed to realize a creative vision but the important realization that the things we make and do—and indeed the relationships we form with our media—are themselves generative. The consequence of artistically enabled social platforms is that the platforms themselves become generative of the futures we express through them.

24 Gregory S. McNeal. "Facebook Manipulated User News Feeds To Create Emotional Responses." *Forbes Magazine*. June 24, 2014. Available online: http://www.forbes.com/sites/gregorymcneal/2014/06/28/facebook-manipulated-user-news-feeds-to-create-emotional-contagion/

25 *Wikipedia*, s.v. "Think Different." last modified November 28, 2015, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Think_different

Pedagogical Devices

If the corresponding stories of the Google-Neurosky collaboration and Facebook's mood manipulation are any indication of the need to understand media as the sort of "extensions" of the human body that Marshall McLuhan predicted, we are definitely not in an era limited to bodies anymore but one that deeply implicates emotions, desires, minds and dreams. To treat these scenarios pedagogically would be to note that these are not just devices that perform tasks for us, but just the opposite—these are a new generation of pedagogical devices that teach us how to be different and better versions of ourselves, optimized minds, networked dreams, primed for direct synchronization to our devices. Networked at the level of thought, we will soon all be Ted Serios, with imaginations fully realized in the digital images of the world. In the meantime I can simply trust that inside my head all the relevant operations are being witnessed and implemented—my body the place where the cloud finally funnels down to touch ground and takes a picture to prove it was there. It's a perfectly tangled loop: creative, informatic, automated, enabled, pedagogical.

To teach in such an environment is to realize that we all have the potential to be digitally-enabled Serios—streaming our imaginations to the network in real time. Indeed, the device economy depends on it—each of us providing a unique and extraordinary instance of the captured imagination. Everyone is an artist, or at least an actor in an elaborate performance art venture called the twenty-first century.

26 Caroline Tisdall. *Art into Society, Society into Art*. London: ICA, 1974.

Conclusion

There is no real point in trying to smooth over the contradictions and paradoxes that digital living thrusts upon us. It's immanently enabling and ominously foreboding.

The tools of rational understanding are entirely inadequate for the understanding of such an environment. Instead, to understand the body without information it is necessary to abandon our deference to information altogether and to understand that, without information, that which is left for the body to rely on is the Imagination—paying attention to our own reflexive relationships with the media that use us as we use them. For certainly about the status of the body in a digital world is the body that is a truly interpenetrated complexity of creative and prohibitive possibilities. Without information of its own, yet nevertheless implicated in the networked identity of the emerging future—bodies without information, and with increasingly optimized opportunities to imagine. Perhaps it is only by allowing ourselves to think in increasingly imaginary ways about technological interrelationships can we maintain perspective in an increasingly vertiginous digital and virtual world.

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