



Virtualized Subjectivity in Contemporary Art Practice



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||| 0. Abstract |||

This paper will attempt to address issues of individuation with respect to the mass new media technological landscape, as well as issues of the production of subjectivity in relation to art. By looking at art as a machinic process necessarily employing diverse technologies in order to come into being, I will examine how art is entangled with the production of subjectivity — itself being a technology guided by the virtual territories opened up by art. The first section will look at the individual with respect to the current technological landscape. In this context, the individual is the one confronted with the screen and the eye of technology. By looking at the technology–fueled realities that surround the individual, we can attempt to locate the “objectified subject” within the socio–political domain.

The second section examines subjectivity in terms of a process of production — how subjectification both employs, and recursively assimilates into, technologies of narrativity and framing. As subjectivity production is come to be seen in terms of its related art production, I will examine how both mutually traverse and share machinic registers of autopoietic processes. As technologies are extensions of our selves, art becomes a component of the extensions of our limits of consciousness. Further, art comes to occupy the intersubjective domain of our social relations. Here the individual is contemplated as the subject within the frame, or within multiple frames. In this context, we can attempt to locate the “subjectified subject” in the realm of poïesis.

For my research, I have examined art works that span various mediums as well as exhibition contexts, drawing primarily on exhibitions that have occurred at the 54th Venice Biennale, and in De Appel and W139 in Amsterdam. Through this research, I hope to reveal certain directions in art and the situations of new medium categories in the contemporary art discourse. Subsequently, I hope to explore and delimit new territories revealed by art for the emancipated subject.

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|||| 1. Introduction ||||

In the first section, I will explore the virtual aspects of the relations of individuals to the socio-political aspects of new technologies. Identity, in this sense, follows the stable core of what makes an individual — how the exterior world can look in on an individual and recognize the self-same entity. In this section, I will locate the individual as an entity within recent developments in the proliferation of cameras, surveillance and sousveillance technologies, and within increasingly defined socio-political borders. Looking at the individual in this necessarily material-oriented aspect, is therefore a way to look at their exteriority, to the boundaries of the individual in relation to the world. This examination of the subject in front of the mirror-frame could be regarded as looking at today's "objectified subject".

Subjectivity, on the other hand, is a more fluid concept, wherein the individual is constantly involved in the ever-changing production of it. With respect to subjectivity, the individual is always in relation to how they are determined by an imagination of the external, but as imagined from the within. The virtual aspects of subjectivity is what I will explore in the second section, with a more specific focus on the production of art. The reason for focusing on the production of art specifically, is that art and subjectivity are inextricably linked, as I will come to determine in this section of the thesis. Art, in the wider sense, and subjectivity — both the results of productive forces as well as amounting to forms of technology — symbiotically inform each other towards modes of operation and of surpassing their respective delimitations. This examination of the subject as being behind the frame from where they realize their self to be within the mirrored lens-frame could be regarded as looking at today's "subjectified subject", drawing on Foucault's notion of subjectification.

Following these two sections, I will examine a number of works of art, as examples of the manifested dissonance between the two perspectives. Additionally, works of art are inherently capable of presenting alternative modes of perceiving the world and new ways to inhabit these virtual territories, without necessarily colonizing physical ones. My research has largely been drawn from extensive notes taken over the past months while visiting art exhibitions. I have chosen these mentioned works of art in a somewhat random sampling, particularly for the fact that I have been drawn to revisit most of the works and examine them in-depth during the courses of their exhibitions. I have visited various art exhibitions and artist studios in Amsterdam and Venice during the recent 54th Venice Biennale, although I may not have used all of the sources for this thesis. Due to my explorations of artworks as exhibited in physical social spaces, I have largely not accounted for artworks that primarily exist or propagate on the Internet. Thus my research primarily combines content analysis with contextual analysis of the artworks and their exhibitions.

//// 1.1. literature review ////

For the first section, I have drawn from authors Anne Helmond, for her insights on the relation between individuals and networked software, and the resulting “identity 2.0”; and danah boyd, for her studies on teen use of social networking sites, and what those sites come to represent for the population at large. I also draw on Walter Benjamin, who eloquently relates the conditions of the modernist-era laborer confronted with “the apparatus”, while Rob Shields’ notion of liminoid virtual spaces, where functional changes brought about to identity through the various subtle rituals of everyday life, leads me to use this to discuss effects of the new rituals brought about by new technologies, such as of digital cameras on privacy. I then bring up Judith Butler’s conceptualization of the body as the locus where culture is inscribed, to look at the social network profile, where culture is also inscribed, as a part of the performative body. I then refer to Anne Friedberg’s discussions of the virtual window in relation to the subjective consequences of the interfaces between humans and technology. Benjamin’s Author–Producer is updated by Domenico Quaranta’s use of the term “transumer”, who is essentially and Author–Producer–Product — the sole progenitor–offspring of “cult narcissism”, who exists between the interface. Examples of the progenitors of this cult narcissism in art are gleaned from Edward Shanken. Returning to Shields, we receive the idea of “metaxis”, as a sort of interface between the physical world and the virtual mind. This leads us to the next section, where art and subjectivity are mutually produced.

In the second section, I begin with Félix Guattari’s “machinic heterogenesis” to look at both subjectivity and art as productive processes that follow the characteristics of machinic autopoiesis. I also place Roland Barthes’ diagrammatic ordering of the semiological systems comprising mythologies in this context of autopoietic mechanisms. I then draw on Boris Groys’ differentiation of contemplating art in terms of aesthetics or poetics to infer that in the light of poetics, art, as a production of *things*, can be contemplated as a technology. Adding to this, Marshall McLuhan’s notion of technology as extensions of the limits of our bodies and consciousness, as well as Donna Haraway’s theory that we are all cyborg beings, art becomes a technological extension of our selves. I then counter Barthes’ assertion of the “death of the author” with Nicolas Bourriaud, who posits that “the individual does not have a monopoly on subjectivity” — hence, art’s entering the space of intersubjectivity trivializes the author’s existence in the first place. Here, Michel de Certeau’s description of how memory emerges from the space of the other correlates with Slavoj Žižek’s enunciation of Lacan’s idea of the “decentered subject”. Next, I look at the subject of framing, in accordance to Audre Lorde’s notion of the “biomythography”, as cited by Haraway,

along with Erving Goffman's stating that people frame the situations they are in to act accordingly, and Anne Friedberg's description of framing as an "ontological cut". I also draw on Henri Bergson on perception and memory being virtualities, and Brian Massumi's idea of the "thinking–feeling" of events as the thinking of perception in perception as it is felt, in terms of this framing of experience. Following this, I invoke Boris Groys' refutation of Walter Benjamin's notion of the loss of aura to determine that in the contemporary age, there is a complex interplay of de–auratizations and re–auratizations. Further, citing Okwui Enwezor who draws on Édouard Glissant's "poetics of relation", that networks of relations constitute the heterochronical pathways that altermodern art occupies, and Henri Bergson's concept of the multiplicity of *durée*, I put forward that the aura exists through the perpetual translations and referrals of perception. Finally, I incorporate Michel de Certeau's concept of the narrativities endowed to daily practice and Slavoj Žižek's "unknown knowns" to define the total space outside of such narratives as the "extra–diegesis of machinic narratives". Thus art, emerging from the metaxis, allows us to realize the extra–diegetic domain of subjectivities through a function of self–reflexivity. From this starting point, I begin in the following section to look at works of art.

||| 2. A Socio–Political Consideration of the New Technologies of the Self |||

New technologies, in step with humanity's aspirations for the spatio–temporal extension of the body, are developing, blurring the boundaries between the body and where identification of the self begins. The ways in which we identify ourselves have always included a virtual component, occupying various social and cognitive registers through rituals and memory.

With the near–ubiquity of cameras in communication devices, the ways in which we see and present ourselves, relate to others, and remember events are constantly being appended. Concurrently, information about peoples' identity in relation to state authorities and institutions that grant official identification status, and the ways in which that information is stored by those institutions, have moved into a space particularly vulnerable to heavy surveillance. In this sense, in an age of "net–narcissism", is there a taking back of surveillance apparatus used to define in a ground–up way who we are as cultural entities, as opposed to normative notions of who we should be according to the state and social expectations? To what extent are our interactions online, acting as a passive sousveillance, affected by the limits of the cultural software being used? What are some of the implications of the newly extended and augmented limits of identity to our understanding of being?

//// 2.1. a shift in the socio-political scene ////

I remember staring bewildered at the rising plume of black smoke above the Twin Towers on an otherwise clear sunny day, trying to grasp the historical weight of what was happening. That day, all the major news stations seemed to have shifted their aesthetic *en masse*, starting to resemble the fragmented framed layout of web pages. There were one, two or three frames of video, with at least one of them looping footage of the burning or falling towers; there was at least one major headline on-screen, sometimes with related sub-headlines in a column in the left margin, changing every five seconds or so into the next broadcast-friendly sound bite; and there was a marquee of other news headlines panning across the bottom of the screen at a steady clip, giving the impression that the news station was working extra hard, committed to their service of making sure the public was kept up-to-date with all their deserved urgent information, the incessantly “breaking news”. Thus, in the period following the events of September 11, 2001, there was an intensification of corporate media-induced paranoia in the United States’ population, and to an extent in the rest of the world.

The U.S. government and military industrial complex capitalized on the opportunity of a world in shock to hurriedly perpetrate physical and ideological wars both abroad and on native soil — actions that were implicitly condoned and won-over in the hearts and minds of the masses by the mainstream media (Klein, 2008, p. 295). The passage of the “Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act of 2001,” also known as the USA PATRIOT Act — which was later officially exposed to have conducted massive illegal surveillance, of the scale that most had already suspected as happening — legitimized the culture of fear and inflamed an already-proud American nationalism, along with any latent xenophobic and micro-fascist elements (see Solomon, 2007).

At the same time, cellphone and computer hardware manufacturers began introducing devices with webcams built-in above their screens. As the use of these devices increased, so did the number of cameras in front of and in the pockets of the larger public. Further, these digital cameras, over and beyond their analog counterparts, inherently contain the advantage of effortless mass distributability. Thus the large-scale introduction of the means of surveillance was introduced to a culture where neighbor-to-neighbor suspicion was explicitly encouraged and any critical voice was deemed “unpatriotic” and threatened with indefinite detention-without-trial. As was seen from the infamous Stanford prison experiment, when individuals are placed into situations and appointed roles, there is a tendency for those people to perform or act to fulfill the perceived archetypal or stereotypical aspects of those roles (see Zimbardo, 2010). So when panicked citizens are encouraged to police, and at the same time find themselves possessing the tools for policing, a

repressive tension contributing to social alienation can be created within the society. The panopticon, after being first internalized as the police–within, then becomes externalized as the eyes of the very people being watched become employed and integrated back into the pan–optical entity. While extending the instruments of surveillance, though not yet approaching the broader implications of *sousveillance*, this new form of governmentality came in with the tide of new technologies of the self.

Also in the early 2000s, there was a reconfiguration of cultural software, with data moving from our desktops to the “cloud,” namely, off of our personal computers and on to off–site servers in order to be accessed from any computer. Although webmail had been around for a few years by that point, services like Gmail and Friendster offered places to store significantly larger amounts of data online for free, letting people become untethered from their local storage mediums. Another computer hardware manufacturing trend may also be attributed to this shift — namely, the advent of wireless internet connectivity that enabled people to be online and outside at the same time. As Anne Helmond mentions:

“The shift from desktop to web occurred after the bubble and marks the beginning of the Web 2.0 era. According to O’Reilly (2005) ‘Web 2.0 is the network as platform’ and denotes the shift from desktop software to software running natively on the web, webware. The web as platform hides the software itself and the continuous updates that lie underneath” (Helmond, 2010, p. 4).

The obfuscation of the location of the social software we use along with that of our personal data complicates matters of the ownership and control of identifying data. This identifying data, especially once it is relinquished to the servers and databases of the companies operating the cloud software, is vulnerable to manipulation and exploitation, for example, by marketing companies and government authorities.

As airport and border security tightened over the past decade, the climate of infrastructurally induced and institutionally supported nationalism and xenophobia thickened. At the same time, the phenomenon and usership of social networking sites blossomed. The reasons for this could be scaled from those given by danah boyd (writing before Facebook opened itself up to the space outside of university affiliations) to explain the dynamics of youth participation, referring to Manuel Castell’s notion of the *networked publics*:

“In the United States, the lives of youth – and particularly high school teenagers – are highly structured. Compulsory high school requires many students to be in class from morning to mid–

afternoon; and many are also required to participate in after-school activities, team sports, and work into the evening... Given the overwhelming culture of fear and the cultural disdain for latchkey practices, it is likely that teens are spending more time in programs than on their own. Meanwhile, at home in the evenings, many are expected to do homework or spend time with the family. While the home has been considered a *private* sphere where individuals can regulate their own behavior, this is an adult-centric narrative. For many teens, home is a highly regulated space with rules and norms that are strictly controlled by adults.

Regardless of whether teens in the United States have the time to engage in public life, there are huge structural and social barriers to them doing so. First, there is an issue of mobility... for many teens, even if they want to go somewhere they are often unable to do so.” (boyd, 2007, p. 18.)

Similarly, as public spaces become increasingly regulated and under surveillance, as mobility is hampered by increased travel regulations and higher difficulty for many to get visas, and as older generations warm up to the new technologies surrounding them, the space of the networked publics becomes an attractive place for larger segments of people to “hang out”, to socialize in new ways, and to keep in touch across physical barriers.

Despite the inherent containment of online activity within the limitations of the cultural software, virtual reality and life online is experienced as a “border-free”, free public space, through the illusion of boundlessness.

//// 2.2. recognizing the new territories of the self ////

“Well, he didn’t know what to do so he just decided to watch the government and see what the government was doing and then kind of scale it down to size — and run his life that way.” (lyrics from *So Happy Birthday*, by Laurie Anderson.)

In an America already fraught with the mythos of the Individual and the Pioneer Spirit, where the World Series includes only one other country still within the same continent, the newfound ability to create a virtual identity as an extension of the presence of the self — a highly controlled representation of how others may see you through your online profile — suddenly allowed anybody possessing the means to indulge in their fantasies of the cult of stardom.

The entity in front of the camera has to, as stated by Walter Benjamin in the context of the film actor, “preserve one’s humanity in the face of the apparatus”. He continues:

“...the majority of city dwellers, throughout the workday in offices and factories, have to relinquish

their humanity in the face of an apparatus. In the evening these same masses fill the cinemas, to witness the film actor taking revenge on their behalf not only by asserting *his* humanity (or what appears to them as such) against the apparatus, but by placing that apparatus in the service of his triumph.” (Benjamin, 2008, p. 31.)

Meaning, the modern industrial worker would change positions in relation to “the apparatus” for recreation or entertainment, defending the image of the screen actor who has temporarily taken their place, thus vindicating the conditions of their own existence. But now, when the postmodern office worker seeking entertainment remains in the same location in relation to today’s apparatus (facing the networked screen) we have a conflation of the two sides — the cults of stardom and spectatorship coincide and the performer is at the same time a part of the masses he or she is performing for. The performer–spectator may feel an affinity to the objective “mirror image” and identify their self *virtually* (as in, *existing in the same essence or effect*) as such. This hybridized performer–audience, as when in confrontation with a film camera, may still experience an estrangement before his or her own detached image, within a cascade of ontological cuts, as digitally represented within the virtual frame of the screen.

Rob Shields reminds us that there has historically been a succession of virtual worlds, embodied in rituals which inaugurate liminal zones of the performative space of symbolic identity. An example he provides is of the wedding ritual, where two individuals emerge as one socially recognized couple. He continues:

“[These] virtual spaces are ‘liminoid’ in that they are participated in on a temporary basis, and distinguished from some notion of commonplace ‘everyday life’.” (Shields, 2003, p. 13.)

In this sense, several aspects of performed identity can be considered virtual, that, as social beings we are constantly navigating virtual spaces, brought about by ritualistic functions such as gaining citizenship, obtaining visas, or being the star of your 16th or 18th birthday party into “adulthood”. In the light of our current technological apparatus, being able to be “always online” brings the virtual out of the liminoid space and into a hybridized commonplace everyday life. Are these tensions between estrangement and virtual identification the symptoms of a mass self–alienation? I can imagine someone being at a necessarily social event, such as an art opening, yet not being inclined to socialize, feeling the need to set their status to “away”, or “invisible”.

The persistent and massive penetration of new technologies into our social landscape has its own implications for performed identity, as they introduce grounds for new micro–rituals. If one of

the priorities of the old mass media industry was to distract the masses with entertainment in order to sell them both useless products and the implicit ideology of progress-through-purchasing power, the new step seems to be to let the masses distract themselves so that they can be further exploited, at the accelerating pace of having to keep their devices up-to-date. The distraction is aided by the increasingly fragmented media landscape, where those who have stopped believing in the (old) media (Lovink, 2008, p. 23) are instead looking at themselves and others in the networked publics.

Companies do not even try to hide the planned obsolescence of their technological products any more — people are expected to have the hot new item *today*, as if there is no tomorrow, and updated iterations of the same product are released annually or sooner. Being reliant on technologies tied to these product cycles, bottom-up surveillance is no better than its alternative, in spite of its illusion of user-control — now consumers' tastes and habits are indexed as never before, demographics are fragmented to the point where every desire can be targeted with laser-precision and accommodated to with a marketing attempt.

Online anonymity was rampant in the days when Internet Relay Chat was popular in the early years of the World Wide Web, when the then-common question, “a/s/l?” could be responded to with any imaginary answer with no webcam to provide immediate evidence (a/s/l : “age, sex, location”). Faceless anonymity is still an emboldening device primarily for trolling people who leave distasteful comments on blogs today. Of course online anonymity is very important for those who fear negative socio-political repercussions for their taboo or unpopular ideas, opinions and beliefs, as well as the large segment of the population who have no desire to divulge their information to the prying eyes of the internet. However, internet protocol addresses can always be traced, whistleblowers à la WikiLeaks exposed and reprimanded — an aspect addressed by Thomas Hirschhorn in his installation for the Swiss Pavilion at the 54th Venice Biennial. Large banners strung across the rooms were painted with the statements, “WE DEMAND FOR ALL THE RIGHT TO OPACITY”, and, “WE MUST FIGHT AGAINST TRANSPARENCE [sic] EVERYWHERE”, calling for the right to privacy for the individual, and the simultaneous need for transparency in authoritative institutions.

Nonetheless, for the most part, all the new digital cameras that have found their way into peoples' possessions over the past decade, coupled with the multitudes of newly available distribution channels (i.e., online profiles, sites like flickr and Picasa), contributed to a new paradigm in how people see themselves, each photo a new point of perspective, and a germ for the creation of self-narratives.

//// 2.3. Identity version x.0 (beta) ////

Identity is a multifaceted, dynamic *bricolage* of who we believe ourselves to be, the noisy feedback between how we imagine others to perceive ourselves and how others actually perceive us, through the actions and roles we perform, the spaces we occupy, and the set of (non–static) characteristics that distinguishes the self–same entity from others. Physical aspects include the self–sameness of the biological entity (DNA) and spatio–temporal uniqueness, which are often coded and registered with a state authority — the date and place of birth, address, fingerprint and photograph on an ID card, for example. But in the sense that identity is largely based on perception, self–perception, and the creation of narratives through connotative rituals and subjectively selective memory, identity has always involved a largely virtual component. Further, taking note of the augmentation and expansion of identity with the tools of today, these new technologies of the self are essentially expanding the scope and presence of this virtual component, rendering identity a *work in progress*.

New York Times Magazine’s *Consumed* columnist Rob Walker points out that people are increasingly identifying themselves through the products they purchase and the brands they align themselves with, inclusive of their connotations and the ideas they represent (Walker, 2008). This manifests in society through what brands people choose to wear, display, or not display, what devices they use and flash about, what clubs and societies they are members of, where they choose to go and what they do in those places. Social networking sites include sections on the profile page for people to announce their affinities to products and places. Given that this idea of distinguishing a self from others through objects and the ideas they represent is a very materialistic perspective, it is not very different from the displays of wealth and social status through ornamental and ceremonial objects as has happened through the ages (see MacGregor, 2010).

Judith Butler brings to our attention the performative aspect of identity: it is so in the sense that we are made up of the actions we commit and the roles we play in situations. This gives us a better sense in how our identities are non–static, and how we can *be* many different people to accommodate to various situations. If we follow Butler’s logic that “the body is figured as a surface and the scene of a cultural inscription” (Butler, 1990, p. 129), then the profile, existing in either its ephemeral or archived–forever state on the Internet, could be considered a supplement to one’s individuality, a constitutive part of the identities of the networked public. Complicating this is the growing number of examples of the online social profile as “interface/scene of a cultural inscription” — as a place of convergence for the (extended) body and interface, as I will discuss later.

In her analysis of social-networking profiles, danah boyd mentions how for the typical user, through the combination of the statement of interests, comments by contacts and impression management, their profile page “can be seen as a form of *digital body* where individuals must write themselves into being” (boyd, 2007, p. 13). It is the accessible point of entry for others into the expressive space of the user, albeit within the boundaries and limitations of the software. Add to profile aesthetics the infinite possibility of coded messages re-presented via the choosing of photos, videos and text to post on a user’s profile page, and an association is provided to their real-life aesthetic.

As Dick Hardt points out in his OSCON 2005 keynote speech about “Identity 2.0,” the next generation of identity consists of a whole different set of factors than in-real-life identity, contingent on the spaces navigated online (Hardt, 2005). In order to prove our identity in real life, we need to possess some kind of official photo-document that corresponds to our face, provided by an accountable authority, one that is usually the state. Online, we use passwords, build reputations on sites (e.g. eBay & Amazon rankings, social networking testimonials), and in the space of webcam communication, have begun to use our faces.

Since identity is also constituted by how we are perceived by others, the building of people’s portrait databases, employing the latest facial recognition technology in (cultural) software such as iPhoto and Facebook, adds a new dimension to the issue. This is the movement of impression to outside the managerial power of the user, and under the control of the entities which possesses the databases. When considering the implications of this to the purposes of surveillance, an aspect of the user’s identity is surreptitiously created — who they are as seen by an authority, unbeknownst to themselves.

The social and biological impulse for self-preservation also manifests itself on social networking profiles. In a world where people’s bodies die before their profiles, the confused desires of eternal youth and immortality come into being as the fallacy of “e-mortality”; conversely, when one’s profile is taken down, for violating terms of agreement for example, having to build up an online presence from scratch may feel like having to regrow a limb.

The arbitrarily large amassment of the banal minutiae of peoples lives — including all the tweets, geolocation updates and instantly uploaded camera-phone pics — might passively contribute to the purposes of sousveillance, additionally helping to inform ethnologists and shed light on outmoded laws. But as long as those databases are kept behind closed doors, the locus of control will still remain with the authorities. People need to be able to own the components of their self-narratives to claim authorship (and privacy) of their own identities, and not let it be possessed by faceless extra-authoritative entities (who espouse secrecy). (A counter-example to Facebook’s

style of server–side social networking would be the functioning of Diaspora, as a peer–to–peer social network.) Therefore, it is in society’s better interests to raise awareness of the possibilities of *equivallance*, of “going both ways in an up–down hierarchy” (Mann, 2005).

//// 2.4. inter–face ////

As with any tool, when interacting with the computer, there is an extension of the body taking place through its expanded capacity for engagement. Device interfaces have moved from architectural through to ergonomic scales, and are now entering a phase of invisibility, as virtual interfaces. A commercially–available example is X–Box’s Kinect interface, where the controller which once took the form of plastic cradled in the user’s hands, is now virtualized, and the user becomes the controller, directing the computer by moving their body. A stereoscopic camera mounted over the screen detects the presence of people in the three–dimensional space in front of it, can identify individuals using facial–recognition and authenticate them to their profile information, and interprets the physical gestures of the user as commands. This flattening of the user–as–virtual–controller will eventually find itself occurring in more devices, as all that is required is a screen, camera and processing power.

Further, this stereoscopic digital camera has vast implications for surveillance, as streaming images from multiple stereoscopic cameras can be synthesized within a computer to create a total virtual representation of the space. Where the field of vision of one such camera is obstructed, another camera placed at a different angle can fill in the gaps, and the combination of all these filled in gaps can render a virtual navigable space. As such networked stereoscopic cameras become increasingly defined in resolution, real spaces can be navigated in hyper–real ways in their virtual incarnation. One can imagine, for example, a World Cup match being filmed in such manner from all angles of the stadium, where the spectator can log in to the footage online and manipulate a virtual camera, a *virtual kino–eye*, as if through the eyes of a fly or a ghost, and see the action from any point at any time.

In describing the “virtual kino–eye” in her essay regarding virtual subjectivity in Second Life, Lori Landay cites Lev Manovich’s reflection of Dziga Vertov’s “kino–eye” as representing new techniques to “decode the world” (Landay, p. 3). However, our current technologies are quickly approaching a re–transposition of the virtual camera within virtual worlds such as Second Life, onto the virtualized real world constituted of physical objects and their real–time videographic representation — a re–dematerialization of subjective space.

The camera, being an aid to extending both the eye and memory, will continue its role in

consciousness expansion as it finds its place on the human body. Adding to it is the extended life of the image, which can now be available across the globe at the instant of production. Steve Mann's EyeTap, providing electronically aided vision, is essentially a combined camera and screen. As Anne Friedberg implies in her book, "The Virtual Window," the experiencing of life through the frame of this flattened mirror-cum-window carries with it subjective consequences, contributing to new philosophical paradigms and aesthetic devices (Friedberg, 2006, p. 98).

In the virtual space where real-time webcam communication (social exchange) and the online personal profile as a scene of one's cultural inscription (cultural exchange) are conflated within a unifying frame, looking at the world and looking at ourselves becomes a co-mingled act. This profound change in the apparatus of apperception corresponds to the larger global shifts from the industrialized to an informational economy, as even our identities are becoming informationalized. The virtual component of our identity is also increasingly composed of infinitely reproducible and globe-spanning media — language, imagery, and the use of audio-visual recording to document and transmit ideas, supplementing every other form of art and expression that has existed to this day while supplanting their dominance.

As the means of media production have been democratized into the masses, Walter Benjamin's idea of the socially aware, fascism-fighting Author-Producer (Benjamin, 2008, p. 79) has surpassed their manifestation as the late-modernist *Prosumer* to become the *Transumer*: the Author-Producer-Product. This transumer, an offspring of the posthuman and postmedia (Quaranta, p. 8), is distracted from class consciousness by the spectacle of their own actions, stuck in a onanistic vicious loop of self-entertainment, of the "self-as-ikon". An example of this in art can be seen in the works of Ryan Trecartin and Lizzie Fitch, in whose films the characters occupy myriad personas, always in relation to the screen and the camera, living in multiplicity within and beyond the frame. As can be seen in their films, such as *I-Be AREA* (2007), *(Tommy-Chat Just E-mailed Me)* (2006), and in the *Trill-ogy Comp* (2009), as the characters (often called "roamies" — a portmanteau of "roaming", as connotative of portable-technological lifestyles, and "homie", an informal genderless term denoting an acquaintance from one's own neighborhood or social background) communicate via mobile phones and the Internet, their identities are constantly morphing as their bodies and avatars fluidly intermix (Trecartin and Fitch, 2010). Indeed the avatar, originally the flesh-and-blood manifestation of a deity descended to earth in Hindu mythology, has returned to its disembodied form in the virtual omnipresence as a pixellated apparition, the icon. This self-iconization via transumer technologies returns us again to the fascination with the cult of stardom.

Another example worth noting of this is Ahmed Basiony's posthumous work at the Egyptian

Pavilion at the 54th Venice Biennale. The exhibit, curated by Aida Eltorie, consists of five video projections, placed consecutively, frame to frame, along a long dark room. The videos, all playing simultaneously with their soundtracks overlapping, intersperse video documentation from a performance by Basiony, titled *30 Days of Running In The Place*, where he jogged within a transparent cube erected in January 2010 in Cairo's Tahrir Square while connected to heat and moisture sensors that translated the input and relayed it as data visualizations on a large screen within the cube, with sousveillance footage by Basiony and others taken in the same square a year later during the Egyptian Revolution. During the first four days of the revolution in January 2011, Basiony had been documenting the demonstrations in the square and uploading them nightly to foster support for the revolution. On the fourth day he was killed by the Egyptian police, and immediately became a martyr figure for the revolution.

In the exhibit, the videos are differentiated with subtitles denoting the time and date of the footage. Scenes jump between footage taken of himself, within a sort of observation chamber with the biometric read-outs which render him as a kind of laboratory specimen, with footage taken in the other direction, looking at the results of an irresponsible government, in the same historic square. Here, "narcissism" is stripped of its often negative connotations, as a figure tragically becomes an emblematic icon for a people's emancipatory movement.

//// 2.5. *cult narcissism: icon* <—> *ikon* <—> *avatar* ////

Contrary to what might be implied from the numerous studies of youth social-networking behavior, "net-narcissism" does not reflect a strictly generational characteristic. Instead, I would argue that the technologies have arisen to facilitate a degree of narcissistic impulse that has always been present in society. The phenomenon is not confined within certain age groups any more than the use of the technologies themselves have been taken up within different age groups. There may be generational predispositions, such as how younger generations, comfortable with electronic devices while growing up under constant surveillance, might be less hesitant to divulge their personal information online (boyd, 2007), but for the most part the online component of an identity is ageless. In an era where all internet media is potentially available to all kinds of people, identity based on cultural inclinations traverses the old boundaries of location and time that had given previous cultural entities a historical grounding. Examples of such postmodernized culture can be seen in the subcultures that have emerged exclusively online, where viral internet-memes go global and enter the mass media space, under the wing of the the traditional culture industries.

Edward Shanken reminds us of artworks in the late 1960s, such as Nam June Paik's

Participation TV, and Frank Gillette and Ira Schneider's *Wipe Cycle*, both exhibited in the Howard Wise Gallery in New York in 1969, as early examples of works that touch on the individual's fascination with their own represented image. In *Wipe Cycle*, participating spectators would see their own image as captured via video cameras, fed back to monitors after durational manipulations and interspersed with television broadcast and pornographic video footage; and in *Participation TV*, visitors to the gallery would see live video of themselves, with the images manipulated into multiple colors and layers in realtime. "At the time, these installations offered the public an unprecedented opportunity to see itself as the content of television, to become integrated into the electronic environment of mass media; in other words, to establish a unity between subject and object, viewer and viewed" (Shanken, pp. 30–31). In the fusing of the spectator as information with the novelty and feeling of importance of massively distributable images, both of these examples prefigure the contemporary relation between the broadcast camera and the people in front of the lens.

Thus, it would be wrong to say that people of this generation are inherently more narcissistic than in the past. A certain degree of self-love has always been necessary for individuals, even if it may be construed as the love of the universe—including—the-self. Yet pure narcissism also has the component of an incapacity to love others. If the opposite of love is indifference, then the indifference towards those beyond the digital divide and those lost in the multitudes online may help fulfill that narcissistic component. However, the potential for connecting with the latter, indicates a counter-possibility — as in real life, the spirit who loves all in the universe does not have to encounter everything in the universe to love it. Even more so in the networked publics, an individual is who they are in relation to others — for any computer that wants to be "on the net", by definition isolation is impossible. On the internet especially, the aphorism holds true: "no man is an island".

The comparison with Narcissus' uncontrollable self-absorption with his reflected image can be made with the transuser today absorbed with the co-existing self-and-world images within the frame of the flattened mirror-window (that of the camera-laden screen). However, the counterpart-component to his total indifference to others is simply not there. What was Narcissus thinking as he saw his reflected image? Did he recognize the image as a representation of his own and therefore fell in love with himself? Or did he, as in the story of the greedy and envious dog dropping its bone in the water while attempting to obtain the "other dog's bone" in the reflection, fall in love with the image as that of a mesmerizing other? For the purposes of this discussion, I contend that in our current paradigm, the fascinations with the self and with the beyond have become superimposed, each extended into the space of the other, flattened by the same unifying frame. The world outside

the frame, threatened as it is to be cut from the ontological space, is waiting until somebody comes along to frame it into existence.

The distance between actual and virtual reality is referred to by Rob Shields as “the space of ‘metaxis’: the operation of the imagination which connects the perceptual environment with the virtual and abstract world of meanings which over-code our perceptions” (Shields, 2003, p. 39). As with the above-mentioned virtual interfaces that are supplementing the physical ones between humans and technology, there are various virtual interfaces or “metaxes”, during the perception of reality between the mind and the actual world. The technology we use to navigate and that derives from this space of metaxis is art. Thus, looking next at the role of art in the process of subjectification will involve a conceptual leaping through the frame from in front of it, to now be simultaneously on the other side (behind) and within it.

||| 3. Art and the Virtual |||

“The machine’s proto-subjectivity installs itself in Universes of virtuality which extend far beyond its existential territoriality... For the machine’s diverse registers, there is no univocal subjectivity based on cut, lack or suture, but there are ontologically heterogeneous modes of subjectivity, constellations of incorporeal Universes of reference which take the position of partial enunciators in multiple domains of alterity, or more precisely, domains of alterification.” (Guattari, 1995, pp. 44–45.)

In the chapter ‘Machinic Heterogenesis’, in Félix Guattari’s *Chaosmosis*, we are asked to “consider the problematic of technology as dependent on machines, and not the inverse”, to thereby regard the machine as being a precondition for technology instead of being a result of it. Guattari invokes Norbert Wiener’s perspective of living systems as cybernetic machines, and takes Humberto Maturana’s and Francisco Varela’s notion of autopoiesis out of solely the biological domain and into the context of the machinic assemblages of society, technology and human beings, in order to examine the specific enunciative consistencies of the various incarnations of machinism: its “technological, social, semiotic and axiological avatars” (Guattari, p. 34). Thus, a perspective of the machine that expands its limits allows us to recognize multiple components of the machine: its material, cognitive, affective and social components, as well as the other machines and proto-machines that comprise it, including abstract machines which “[install] themselves transversally to the machinic levels previously considered” (Guattari, p. 35).

However, if the machine prefigures the technology, the distinction should be made that the

technology is a specific culmination of machinic conditions, while the machine itself is the abstract medium from which the technology not only arises, but also into which the technology can assimilate to propagate further mechanisms. I propose to use this notion of technologies being not only derived from machinic systems, but recursively re-entering the machinic system as rhizomatically related proto-machines, as a framework to look at art and its forms. In this way, art can be seen as a dynamic manifestation that transversally occupies all of the aforementioned incarnations as an abstract machine, and therefore as resulting from the prerequisite condition of machinic autopoiesis.

The art machine, in terms of its material components, may include the presence of an object — as a painting or sculpture, for example — along with the various mechanisms involved in the production and transformation of materials into an art object, and the physical space that it occupies. This may also include the material space of a performance, the theater or exhibition space, and the displacement of matter over time. In its social avatar, art may occupy the various registers of social engagement, including the network of biomass needed to produce a work, partake in a work on the aesthetic end, and maintain the operation of diverse institutions, markets, and art industries.

On its cognitive and axiological levels, art as a myth-medium that inherently communicates *something* — be it a dance or a website, image, object or sound, physical or durational — necessarily has dimensions of ethical and aesthetic value which insert themselves (following Roland Barthes) as signs in nested degrees of semiological orders. Indeed, Barthes' diagrammatic ordering of the staggered semiological systems in myth can be seen as an allopoietic machine, which in turn, considering the frame of reference of its conglomeration with social orders, becomes autopoietic (see Barthes, 2009, pp. 137–138.)

Insofar as these machinic nexus are composed of both actual (e.g. physical, objective) and virtual (e.g. socio-psychological, semiotic, subjective) aspects, the machinic assemblages constituting every dimension of art can be also seen to have actual and virtual — both nonetheless real — aspects. However, it is specifically the aspect of virtuality in the art-machine that I would like henceforth to explore.

//// 3.1. art as component in machinic autopoietics ////

Following Boris Groys' notion that “art should be analyzed not in terms of aesthetics, but rather in terms of poetics”, while considering “there is a much longer tradition of understanding art as poiesis or techné than as aisthesis or in terms of hermeneutics” (Groys, 2010, pp. 15–16), art can

be contemplated in the same way as technology — the production of material and immaterial *things* which contribute to the ways in which humans reconcile their relation to the world. Merging this idea with Marshall McLuhan’s notion of media and technologies being extensions of human beings (McLuhan, p. 7), and with Donna Haraway’s notion that “we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short... cyborgs” (Haraway, p. 150), art becomes representative of the extensions of ourselves, as materialized extensions of our bodies, as well as externalized manifestations of our consciousness.

For the art machine — made up of the interconnected components of energy, materials, mediums and new mediums, artists, art institutions, the bio-flow of the art-going public, the art market, individually and collectively rendered signs, values, art-world discourses, and their total internal and external relations — art enters into its assemblage as a technology, the technology being that of the artwork itself. In this sense, the work of art as representative of the dual extensions of body and consciousness inhabits registers of virtuality inherent in both.

Hence, I believe an aesthetic approach should not be altogether discarded. Especially considering the reincarnation of a machine as a component proto-machine in an expanded machinic assemblage, art’s aesthetic values may be re-instituted into the poïesis of its prolonged, virtual being. Aesthetics and poetics can thus complement each other in a loop-and-branch system — in a combination of ontogenetic self-enunciation and phylogenetic diversification.

//// 3.2. *art production/subjectivity production* ////

The purpose of *techné* — referring to art, craft, and the knowledge of those principles with the intent of making or doing (as opposed to the kind of knowledge denoted by *episteme*, that of a disinterested understanding) — for Aristotle, “was to create what nature found impossible to accomplish” (Guattari, p. 33). However, it also represented to Aristotle the impossibility in any instance of human imitation of nature, of arriving at perfection, that being found only in the domain of nature. Here we find a twofold approach to looking at the position of the arts: as the products or results of authored acts of artifice, of certain degrees of will; and, in a continuous striving-for-perfection, an immortal *corpus* never attaining its final place of rest.

It is worth considering for a moment Roland Barthes’ notion of the death of the author, which can be used to look beyond only the author of a literary text, to the author of any work of art:

“The Author, when believed in, is always conceived of as the past of his own [work] : [the work] and author stand automatically on a single line divided into a *before* and *after*. The Author is thought to

nourish the [work]... exists before it, thinks, suffers, lives for it... In complete contrast, the modern scriptor is born simultaneously with the text... there is no other time than that of the enunciation and every text is eternally written *here* and *now*.” (Barthes, 2006, p. 43.)

But precisely because, as Bourriaud suggests, “the individual does not have a monopoly on subjectivity, the model of the Author and his alleged disappearance are of no importance” (Bourriaud, 2002, p. 93). So not only does the Author as archetype “die” the Freudian “death of the father” when the work comes into its own being, the concept of the Author dies as the contemporary work suffers a condition of immortality by continually being revived by repeated encounters within the intersubjective space it exists in. As Boris Groys states, in the case when technology is considered to be functioning as art, “[there] is no progress in art. Art... immortalizes here and now. Art consists of a technology that no longer serves finite life, but infinite, immortal life” (Groys, 2010, pp. 158–159).

Thus, through this poetic undertaking of art’s reconciliation of thought with matter and time, and of humans within the world, artworks themselves may provide a lens through which to find ontological clues toward what constitutes subjectivity. As Bourriaud puts it, “Artistic practice forms a special terrain for this individuation [that is the end purpose of subjectivity], providing potential models for human existence in general” (Bourriaud, 2002, p. 88). Elucidating Guattari’s relationship between subjectivity production and art, Bourriaud states that art for Guattari, rather than being a distinct class of global production, is “a process of non-verbal semiotization” around the fulcrum of subjectivity production through which can be explored the “laws of the *socius*”. In this way, “Guattari’s version of subjectivity... provides aesthetics with an operational paradigm” (Bourriaud, 2002, p. 92) based on *sign language*. Thus, not only does artistic practice provide potential models for subjectivity, subjectivity provides art functional patterns.

Guattari’s notions of how subjectivity is produced — being “the set of relations that are created between the individual and the vehicles of subjectivity”, “permanently off-centre”, and “in a relation of delimitation with an otherness that is itself subjective” (Bourriaud, 2002, p. 91) — correspond with the characteristics which Michel de Certeau describes of memory — that it “receives its form... from external circumstances... [possesses] alterability... [is] without a fixed locus... [and] forms itself... by *emerging from the other*” (de Certeau, p. 40, emphasis de Certeau’s). This also corresponds with Jacques Lacan’s notion of the “decentered subject” — that the subject is “deprived of even [their] most intimate subjective experience... the fundamental fantasy that constitutes and guarantees the core of [their] being, since [the subject] can never consciously experience it and assume it”, and that what characterizes human subjectivity is the gap

between the inaccessible fundamental fantasy and the objective mechanisms that regulate one's phenomenal experience (Žižek, 2007, pp. 53–54).

All this points to the notion that subjectivity is constituted of the narratives one creates regarding their distinctive experiences, as well as its relation, known and unknown, to the external conditions that circumscribe them.

//// 3.3. *virtuality in framing* ////

Subjectivity, whether “defined by the presence of a second subjectivity” (Bourriaud, 2002, p. 91), or as a process of the accumulative self–narratives comprising “biomythographies” (Audre Lorde, as quoted in Haraway, p. 174), involves a level of *framing* of the self — a way for people to define the situations they are in in order to act accordingly (Goffman, p. 149). This framing can also be seen as an “ontological cut”, referred to by Anne Friedberg in her discussions of the separation a frame demarcates between the material dimension and the image contained within (Friedberg, p. 5 & p. 157).

To Friedberg, the ontological cut of the frame represents both a philosophical paradigm and aesthetic device. She refers to Heidegger, to whom the transformation of the world into “world–image” indicated the metaphysical shift into modernity, an event the lineage of which he located to the moment when Descartes' subject represented, thus *enframed*, the world through thought. Friedberg continues: “in a series of lectures he gave in Bremen in 1949–1950, Heidegger introduced a new component of the picture — the frame (*das Ge–stell*) — as metaphor for ‘representational thought.’ For Heidegger, the *Ge–stell* became a key figure in his portrait of the world ‘conceived and grasped as a picture’ — a world picture in a world set–before (*vorstellen* [represented])” (Friedberg, p. 95). Thus, framing becomes a way to organize perception and to order the world.

As the image contained within the frame is cut off from a potentially infinite expanse of reality, it, in its perceived isolation, is always a virtuality. Georg Simmel, discussing the work of art in its self–enclosed world (frame), says that it “leads its life beyond reality... the work of art draws its content from reality; but from visions of reality it builds a sovereign realm” (Simmel, quoted in Goffman, p. 165). Thus, the very act of framing, of the imposition of a perspectival boundary to facilitate representation, is a virtualizing act.

Virtuality, the condition of “being *functionally or effectively but not formally* of its kind”, denotes the “register of representation itself — but representation that can be either simulacral or directly mimetic” (Friedberg, p. 8, emphasis Friedberg's). The “virtual” can refer to both representations that do or do not have a referent in the real. Therefore, in this true sense of the term,

all representations that are mimetic (e.g. reflections in a mirror, the projection in a camera obscura, images reproduced through a lens — made of glass or in the eye, *physically framed*) as well as simulacral (e.g. an image imagined in the mind, the fictions of narrative, an entirely computer-generated image made of 1's and 0's, *mentally enframed*) are virtual.

Returning to Rob Shields' notion of the liminoid virtual space where symbolic identity is performed (as I have mentioned in section 2.2.), one can add to the list the navigable domain of memory, as is used to inform the self-narratives that comprise self-enunciative aspects of subjectivity. Memory and recollection, being components in the process of self-narrativity, also appear as intermediaries between consciousness and the world as materialized. In the words of Bergson:

“Perception is never a mere contact of the mind with the object present; it is impregnated with memory-images which complete it as they interpret it. The memory-image, in its turn, partakes of the ‘pure memory,’ which it begins to materialize, and of the perception in which it tends to embody itself... Whenever we are trying to recover a recollection, to call up some period of our history, we become conscious of an act *sui generis* by which we detach ourselves from the present in order to replace ourselves, first, in the past in general, then, in a certain region of the past — a work of adjustment, something like the focusing of a camera. But our recollection still remains virtual...”
(Bergson, pp. 124–125.)

Brian Massumi talks about the virtuality of perception in similar terms — when one perceives an object, they see beyond just the shape or physical dimensions of the object's actual form, and additionally see through to the invisible qualities of its abstract form. This potential or capacity to see in an object more than what is directly presented is an aspect of the perceiver's sense of being alive, that they are reminded in the very act of perception of the virtually “lived relation” between them and the perceived object. Hence, there is always a subjectivity inherent in perception itself, or as Massumi puts it, “We don't just look, we sense ourselves alive” (Massumi, p. 5). The self-referentiality of this double perception, of the thinking of perception in perception as it is felt, is what Massumi calls the “thinking–feeling” of events (p. 6).

As subjectivity is therefore rendered virtual in the double acts of perception and of the framing of self-narratives (*autobiomythologies*), these very domains of intersubjectivity become a virtual space of meta-narratives. Hence, the work of art is held aloft by the accumulative subjectivities and narratives imposed upon it by the collective of observers — apart from being merely a configuration of materials, it is imbued with the axiological presence of an aura.

//// 3.4. *the locus of aura* ////

Massumi uses the example of a chair, in its “immediate doubleness” of being not only a chair but also looking like one, to illustrate the presence of aura in any perceived object (p. 6). The object’s potentialities reflect a relation to the “dynamic unfolding” of life itself. But Massumi then posits what distinguishes art from other forms: although perception always occurs relationally and processually, “art makes us see that we see this way” (p. 7). Echoing Guattari’s conflation of subjectivity and art, Massumi continues:

“There is a certain artfulness in every experience. Art and everyday perception are in continuity with one another. But in everyday experience the emphasis is different... Art foregrounds the dynamic, ongoingly relational pole... Art brings back out the fact that all form is necessarily *dynamic form*. There is really no such thing as fixed form — which is another way of saying that the object of vision is virtual. Art is the technique for making that necessary but normally unperceived fact perceptible, in a qualitative perception that is as much about life itself as it is about the things we live by.” (Massumi, p. 7, emphasis Massumi’s.)

Boris Groys, referring to Walter Benjamin’s premise that the mechanically or technologically reproduced work of art beyond the “here and now” results in a “loss of the aura”, states that our contemporary condition cannot be reduced as such: “Rather, the contemporary age organizes a complex interplay of dislocations and relocations, of deterritorializations and reterritorializations, of de-auratizations and re-auratizations” (Groys, 2010, p. 65). Groys accuses Benjamin of perceiving the sphere of mass circulation as “a universal, neutral, and homogeneous space”, whereas in our contemporary culture, the permanent circulation of an image from one medium to another results in the copy becoming “a series of different originals” in each new context, losing old auras while gaining new ones along the way.

Adding to this, is the perspective of Okwui Enwezor, for whom Bourriaud’s idea of the altermodern “reflects precisely Édouard Glissant’s theory of the ‘poetics of relation,’ an idea predicated on linkages and networks of relations rather than on a singular focal point of practice... [addressing] the cultural geography of relations of discourse and practice... The altermodern is structured around trajectories, connections, time zones: heterochronical pathways” (Enwezor, 2009, p. 32). Taking from Thierry de Duve’s stance, that the modern work has always been “an allegory of the practice to which it belongs”, as an abstract painting “comments via painting on the conditions

of painting” (de Duve, pp. 401–402), the altermodern is inherently an offspring of this aspect, as it naturally reflects on its relational conditions. However, today the aura itself, following the multifarious locus of contemporary art, exists in such heterochronical domains of subjectivity, corresponding directly to the multiplicity of *durée*, of subjectively lived time (Bergson, p. 208). Consequently the notion of the aura, far from seeing its demise in technological reproduction, exists through the perpetual translations and indefinite referrals of perception itself.

/// 3.5. *extra-diegesis of the machinic narrative* ///

What I refer to as *autobiomythologies* — the dynamic set of narratives one creates and refers to, unconsciously or deliberately, in the process of forming their subjectivity — arise from a narrativity endowed to daily practices. To de Certeau, these narratives appear in “fragmentary and metaphoric forms” (de Certeau, p. 29). The knowledge of technical activities has been conveyed through such narrativity over the course of history — including, I must add, the technics of art, subjectivity–production, and narration itself. These fragments of technical know–how have diffused themselves into everyday life to occupy a place “between practice and theory... nondiscursive, primitive, originary”, as a knowledge that “cannot be *known*... an unconscious knowledge... upon which individual subjects do not reflect” (emphasis de Certeau’s). He continues:

“This knowledge therefore in the last instance belongs to nobody: it circulates from the unconsciousness of its practitioners to the reflexivity of its non–practitioners without finally depending on any individual subject. It is an anonymous and referential knowledge, a mere condition of possibility for technical or learned practices.” (de Certeau, p. 29.)

When Guattari writes, “[the] machine always depends on exterior elements in order to be able to exist as such... [and] is itself in a relation of alterity with other virtual or actual machines” (p. 37), does he not mean that not only does the machine exist in complement to the known exteriority of universes, but also that its own inherent, unenunciated characteristics imply an unknown exteriority?

Taking into consideration what Žižek refers to as “the ‘unknown knowns’, things we don’t know that we know... the Freudian unconscious, the ‘knowledge that doesn’t know itself’, as Lacan used to say, the core of which is fantasy” (Žižek, 2007, p. 52), this might imply the existence of a machinic counterpart — a machinic unconscious encompassing a machinic fantasy which presupposes a machinic capacity to desire.

The virtual domain of meta–narratives within which the aura operates can be formulated as the diegetic space which circumscribes the realm of total intersubjectivities. Considering this, one can imagine a universe of possibilities beyond it, the “radical elsewhere” of the *hors–champ* (out–of–field) that all framing determines (Deleuze, in Friedberg, p. 201), which I shall refer to as the extra–diegesis of the machinic narrative.

Within narratives, it is at the moment of leaping out of the frame, from the diegetic to the extra–diegetic (or non–diegetic) space, that self–reflexivity is imparted. “Self–reflexive reminders that what we are watching is a mere fiction... thus ruining the illusion of the autonomous space of the narrative” are “escapes from the Real, desperate attempts to avoid the real of the illusion itself” (Žižek, 2007, p. 58–59).

When Jackson Pollock challenged Clement Greenberg’s doctrine of flatness by moving the canvass off the wall and onto the floor, thereby expanding the picture plane into the “optical third dimension” (Krauss, 2000, p. 29), he effectively made such a extra–diegetic leap, establishing a new delimitation of the frame, a new contextual boundary. Similarly, the transversal of entities into an extra–diegetic space might merely be a transposition of one form between dimensions, the kind of consciousness a Flatlander might acquire during the process of their flipping via the dimension beyond (Abbot², p. 122). In this sense, the frame is removed to reveal another frame, another contextualization, and accordingly, the framing machine’s functional identity remains consistent, while its material consistency enters a domain of alterification.

As subjectivity is defined in relation to an external subjectivity, a narrative always posits the narrativity of an order beyond, the diegetic space circumscribing the narrator — the diegesis is nested within a higher–order diegesis. Out of the metaxis, art brings to the foreground the processes of perception that are layered into such subjectivity–producing narratives, from the self–reflection that can only be brought about through an acknowledgement of the extra–diegesis. Thus, in order to discover new universes within which subjectivities can find the freedom to be established, I find it necessary to examine works of art through the various dynamic frames of its content, context, aesthetics and poetics.

|||| 4. Case Studies ||||

//// 4.1. *Mika Rottenberg’s Squeeze* ////

Mika Rottenberg’s *Squeeze*, a 20 minute, single channel video installation and a digital C print shown at De Appel in February, 2011 as part of an early–career retrospective of the artist’s

work, depicts an abstract machine, in a quite literal sense. Winding through a brief corridor lined with carpeted walls that decreasingly baffle a loud drone, one enters the chamber where the video is projected onto a recessed screen. In front of the screen is presumably encased a large subwoofer speaker emanating the bass-heavy ambient sound, all under a very “corporate” white drop-ceiling. The video depicts an elaborate contraption made of wood, plastics, plants, water, humans, their sweat and their toil. I shall attempt to describe the video as tersely as possible while still conveying the events necessary to provide a coherent picture of the work.

Through a montage of stationary-camera shots depicting various components of the machine in motion, a spatially referential schema is developed: a large wooden drawer, upon which a woman is lying prostrate, is shoved between the wooden floor boards of the architectonic sculpture; the next shot shows a close up of lips protruding through a hole in the wood, presumably belonging to the woman in the previous shot, after a pause spurting out a trickle of water; another wall moves, causing an ample, uncomfortably seated woman to be squished between two vinyl cushions, squeezing droplets of sweat out of her face, which then land as pink sparkling sprinkle dust into a receptacle resembling foundation make-up; receptacles of this pink sweat powder are shoved into another receptacle; arms appear through holes; on the other side, a team of sari-clad women in an Indian rubber plantation produce latex, and feed it into the machine by sticking their arms into the ground of India; another group of women within the machine massage and wash the arms that have just appeared; behind them naked buttocks protrude from holes in the wooden wall; yet another team of women, lettuce farmers in Arizona, introduce lettuce, then their arms to be massaged via holes in the ground of Arizona; in another location within the machine another ample woman meditates on a rotating platform, emanating electricity that is presumably powering the vast machinery; a managerial-type woman in a room with “corporate” white drop-ceiling, adjacent to the meditating woman, is simultaneously hot and cold, sitting by both an air conditioner and an electric radiator, her feet soaking in warm water while table fans gust at her; while the owners of the protruding buttocks compact the mixture of the receptacles of pink sweat powder, lettuce and rubber into a detrital cube — all the while accompanied by the heightened industrial sounds of these activities, approaching an oppressive volume and pace in the enclosed viewing room.

We come to realize that we are observing the fiction of a fantastical machine, employing various modes of assembly-line production to industrially churn out an abstract product which ultimately resembles a junk object — a commodity with questionable value, if any, that is a result of a vastly networked machine. The obvious allusions to the functioning of the art market, and globalized capitalism are confirmed by the digital C print that hangs entirely outside of the entire installation: a life-size photograph titled *Mary Boone with Cube*, of New York art dealer, Mary

Boone proudly holding one of the detrital cubes against a blue photo-studio backdrop.

The video-enabled sculptural space depicted in *Squeeze* is an allopoietic machine of production that has subsumed humans within itself, primarily women (there is one male depicted in the entire schemata, pouring liquid latex in the rubber plantation scene). This cyborg machine incorporates both entire bodies as well as isolated body parts into its system, where the bio-flow even assimilates the sweat that is squeezed out as one of its raw materials, so that even its assembled product is the result of an assemblage. Further, this machine — albeit existing in its space of fictional diegesis with the help of “movie magic” (montage, composition and duration) — extends across geographic and temporal limitations, inhabiting heterogeneous spatial and temporal domains. As this “telekinetic machine” (as Rottenberg calls it) can only “exist” through videographic representation, the work is simultaneously a mimesis of simulacra (as a physically produced representation of a mind-image) and a simulacra of mimesis (as the received virtual construct emanating from the material conditions of video production).

The individual shots of the video relate to each other via causal links, albeit within a dream-world logic of relations. The video is looped, with no distinct beginning or end, imbuing a sense of infinite interminability, the immortality of a perpetual machine. As the audience comes and goes, tapping in however momentarily to the diegesis of the work, they perceive it individually, their perceptions impregnated by their own memories — thus the work, by default, exists in the intersubjective domain. The work is an extension, but an offshoot, of Mika Rottenberg — out in the world “a child on its own” in this sense, but also dependent on the “nurturing” of the institutions and the public it lives through. Further, being a video, with its inherent capacity for eternal looping, manifests an extension as an immortal body.

Rosalind Krauss refers to the intermedia condition as one being a hybrid of distinct mediums — as the assemblage of components in a rebus (Krauss, 2000, p. 12). Meanwhile, as Domenico Quaranta states, Krauss uses the term “post-medium” to reflect on “the decline of the Greenberghian concept of medium-specificity” (Quaranta, p. 5). Incidentally, discourses in terms of “new media” tend to embody the constriction of a return towards medium-specificity. As a video-sculptural conflation — a mashup of spatio-temporal territories — the aspects of video (temporal) and sculpture (spatial) deterritorialize each other. This double deterritorialization simultaneously affirms (intermedia) and reconciles (postmedia, in Krauss’ sense) their territorial dichotomies.

Although, as Josephine Bosma points out, Krauss had formulated these intermedia and postmedia aspects of art as “conditions”, in the sense of an illness or ailment, she later retracts her stance, claiming it was an unfortunately propagated myth (Bosma, 2011, pp. 48–49). However, it is worth noting Groys’ observation regarding the term for the one who chooses works of art to be

shown at exhibitions:

“In its origins, it seems, the work of art is sick, helpless; in order to see it, viewers must be brought to it as visitors are brought to a bedridden patient by hospital staff. It is no coincidence that the word ‘curator’ is etymologically related to ‘cure’: to curate is to cure.” (Groys, 2010, p. 53.)

The distinction between the choosing of art for presentation in public exhibitions, and the singling out of bodies of work for the intention of discourse and critical examination *is* slim. However, for our purposes, it might be worth settling on the definition for “condition” being more circumstantial than disorderly. Therefore, I prefer to refer to the “condition” as more of a “situation”, one not necessarily problematic but happening.

The video–sculpture hence more aptly fulfills Peter Weibel’s criteria signaling the arrival of the postmedia situation: that firstly, as mediums, they have achieved a leveling of hierarchical status and dignity as artistic media; and second, they have lost their distinct identities and have assimilated symbiotically (Quaranta, p. 6).

//// 4.2. Some Like It Hot — *Gelatin Pavilion at the 54th Venice Biennale 2011* ////

The Vienna–based art group Gelatin (also known as Gelitin) had their own pavilion at the recent Venice Biennale, having perhaps temporarily achieved the status equivalent to many a sovereign nation’s, if only for the few months of the Biennale’s run. The performance, which ran for six days, was held on their outdoor permanent installation, a site–specific work located at the far end of the Arsenale from the main entrance titled *Some Like It Hot*.

At the heart of their pavilion is a furnace for melting glass situated on one edge of a grassy knoll, a stone’s throw from the main artery canal leading in to the Arsenale. Over the six days of the performance, held during the first week of the Biennale’s public opening, glassworkers adorned in full–body fireproof gear poured broken glass from a pyramidal mound of Swarovski crystals into two crucibles and a tube in the furnace; into another opening of the furnace went the wood that provided fuel for the fire, taken from a heap of logs stacked large enough to contain a shack for the glassworkers to spend the nights needed to keep the fire attended to; on top of the hidden shack, a platform with a stripper’s pole, and the occasional hairy man in high heels and striped stockings dancing upon it; next to this a small wooden stage with speakers and musical equipment, a hydrophone cabled in to the mixing board from the nearby canal, amplifying the sounds of the lapping waves and motor boats passing by; further around the knoll two wooden circles cut into the

grass covered buried plastic tubs full of ice and wine; and two black gondolas with rubber wheels were being hauled in over the surrounding gravel by masked men in traditional Venetian gondolier garb, saving the lucky few riding in them from a long hike, while other spectators strolled in at their own pace to observe from makeshift benches and picnic blankets the unfolding scenery.

The main spectacle occurred about twice per hour, converting the crowd's chit-chats into mesmerized gasps as the glassworkers opened up the portals to the furnace, uncovering the brilliant inferno flaring inside from whence the molten glass spewed. Out of the exit of the tube fluid glass dribbled like saliva into a glob of part-molten, part-shattered glass, while the glassworkers emptied over it the liquid contents of the crucible from the other opening of the furnace. Following this, the crucibles were re-filled with shards from the pile of glass behind the furnace, then put back into the furnace for further digestion. The pile of pre-ingested glass itself, having started out as "pure" Swarovski crystals, was being replenished with glass broken from the used wine bottles that were amassing.

Occasionally, the Brooklyn post-punk band Japanther would play on the stage, and in between their sets, other musicians tinkered with the sounds of the hydrophone and other instruments, contributing to the ambience. Intermittently during all this, members of Gelatin and their entourage would unpredictably indulge or disgust visitors with impromptu Situationist-style performances amongst the crowd, such as dancing while urinating on each other, or attempting to have sex with a splintered log. All this, too, would stop during the monumental opening of the furnace gates.

As the accumulating blob of molten glass cooled upon grass in front of the furnace, it would start to slowly shatter, impeded only on the uppermost layers by each pouring of freshly liquified glass, which would re-melt and assimilate parts of the shattered glass for a moment before it shattered again. This process — of an enormous expenditure of energy to turn broken glass into, ultimately, broken glass — takes the focus away from the end product as commodity and places it on the event itself. Despite the attention given to the materials, and the intricate role of glass in the history of Venice, the artisanal process and the happenings around it take precedence over the material culmination, subverting typical notions of art market conditions. People basically showed up to what became quite a social event: sitting on the grass, chatting with each other, drinking wine and participating in the curious spectacle simply by being there, by *hanging out* in this temporary sovereign space.

Halfway back towards the entrance of the Arsenale, inside the Turkish pavilion, Ayşe Erkmen's *Plan B*, displayed certain similarities in concept: an arrangement of pastel-colored cacophonous machinery distributed around the room, interconnected by a network of pipes,

channeled water out from the adjacent canal, purifying it via their various filtration processes before dumping it back out into the canal. The seemingly wasted effort, the kind of recycling that ultimately spends more energy than can be conceived of as productive — filthy Venetian canal water, cleaned, then excreted from the mechanical body — is as ouroboric an event as is Gelatin's re-dematerializing of glass through wood burned in stone.

Both Gelatin's and Erkmen's installations make use of the exhibition space as the material support for their work. As Boris Groys asserts:

“The installation operates by means of a symbolic privatization of the public space of an exhibition... The material support of the installation medium is the space itself... the installation is material *par excellence*, since it is spatial — and being in the space is the most general definition of being material... The artistic installation is a way to expand the domain of the sovereign rights of the artist from the individual art object to that of the exhibition space itself.” (Groys, 2010, pp. 55–56.)

However, the primary difference lies in the conception of the audience's role amidst the artists' sovereign space of the installation. In Gelatin's, the audience necessarily partakes in the art, and their presence is inseparable from essence of the work. In Erkmen's, the audience makes no other contribution to the work besides their observation of it. Further, Erkmen's mechanical configuration can possibly be sold to an art collector, and the autonomous decision of the artist to produce a work they need not provide an explanation for is, in Groys' words, “trumped by the sovereign decision of a private buyer to pay for this artwork an amount of money beyond any comprehension” (Groys, 2010, p. 55). Although the occurrence of this situation is unlikely, given that *Plan B* would lose any of its contextual value if sold, it is even more implausible for *Some Like It Hot* to be collected, as its crucial determining moment has ephemerally passed.

The unwittingly participating visitors around the glass-regurgitating furnace had entered an autonomous democratic zone, a situation of which the script was being written as it happened. Although Gelatin was no longer being an “author” of the event, whatever did happen occurred in relation to their predefining the situation through their sovereign freedom. And although the idea of sovereign freedom may paradoxically appear to be anti-democratic, it is “a necessary precondition for the emergence of any democratic order” (Groys, 2010, p. 61). Or, as Žižek asks, “is there not something ‘toxic’ about the very idea of a parent, this parasitic mediator who subjects the subject to an authority in the very process of establishing it as free and autonomous?” (Žižek, 2009, p. 46). Just that in this case, the parents were more the toxic, likely to pee on you as well. As the visitor enters the space of the exhibition as an expatriate who must yield to the artist-legislated domain, the

situation is democratic due to the very reason that the “installation practice reveals the act of unconditional, sovereign violence that initially installs any democratic order” (Groys, 2010, p. 59). Further, as a “social aesthetic artwork... that gives a sense of purpose and direct involvement”, *Some Like It Hot*, over the course of its unfolding, becomes a context for “activity that is real, because social interaction and the observation of its effects are allowed without conceptual rigidity” (Larsen, p. 172).

Having met the fate we might hope all nations to encounter some day, that is, to disappear, the Gelatin Pavilion has left behind traces of their erstwhile sovereignty. The action is over, along with the scene of social encounters that had given it life. The furnace, its shattered globulous yield, the two gondolas and the pile of logs remain, with the addition of a small signpost in front of the furnace labeling the remnants of the work in traditional art protocol: artist, title, date.

I asked one of the four members of Gelatin, Florian Reither, what will become of what is left on the location. His reply was that after the end of this year’s Biennale, they will take the makeshift benches back to Vienna, together with the “glass sculpture”, if there is any possibility of moving it, while the furnace is up for grabs by anybody who wants to put it in their garden.

//// 4.3. *New Media Art Gatecrashes The Mainstream Art World: Haroon Mirza and Federico Diaz at the 54th Venice Biennale* ////

In his introductory survey for *Art and Electronic Media* Edward Shanken provides a thorough lineage for the intertwining of technology and artworks, tracing a line from early artistic explorations of light in chiaroscuro painting techniques through to the use of electronic mediums from the early 20th century till today. Despite artists having “always used the most advanced materials and techniques to create their work... [inventing] what was needed to realize their dreams” when the means or techniques needed to realize their vision were not available, in contemporary mainstream art discourses, the field of electronic art has largely carried on being under-acknowledged (Shanken, p. 11).

An approach to blurring the divide is to purposefully not see the divide, and to talk about all kinds of art and ideas in the same undifferentiated discourse. Although at times the forced ignorance only exaggerates the disunity that is present, this is the stance I prefer to take in a hopeful attempt to move beyond binary oppositions of what is or is not included, to leave such separatist contextualizations behind in the dust. Every categorization, after all, tends to gloss over the distinct characteristics of members the set.

However, as Josephine Bosma points out, in her attempts to talk about net art as *just art*,

“essential fields of knowledge, a rich history and important critical debates almost instantly disappeared” without the qualifier “net” (Bosma, 2011, p.42). Therefore, these sub-categories within art allow us to look at the certain peculiarities between works of art bound by similar poetics, praxis or aesthetics, which otherwise get easily overlooked by collecting it under a broad nominal term. Shanken’s and Bosma’s undertakings allow us to focus on that which is left out of mainstream discourses *because* of the history of their exclusion — histories that have only started to be put in writing. It is a way of singling out the island within the archipelago, to borrow Bourriaud’s analogy (see Bourriaud, 2009, pp. 11–12).

Thus, in the frame of the history of new media arts (itself a broad term incorporating many types of art, but unifying in the sense that it has been largely excluded as a whole from mainstream art discourses), it is a triumphant event when an artist working in the field, using electronic “non-traditional” mediums, wins major recognition in the mainstream contemporary art field. Admittedly, this highlights more the disinterestedly slow uptake and near-impenetrability of the mainstream contemporary art world’s ivory tower, but an accolade for a “techie” work is still an accolade.

Haroon Mirza, whose sculptural installations variably utilize sound, LED lights, LCD screens and circuit boards to control them, won the Silver Lion award which is awarded by the Venice Biennale to “promising young artists”. For his installation in the Arsenale, titled *The National Pavilion of Then and Now*, spectators walked up a ramp of metal grating (past a little sign cautioning those with heeled footwear to mind their steps) into a triangular anechoic chamber. Hanging from the center of the chamber’s ceiling, a circle of white LED lights grew increasingly brighter in step with a crescendoing electrostatic drone. This swelling intensity within the confined space invariably led spectators to look up to the light, which, at the climax of its brightness and the drone’s volume, abruptly went dark and silent, briefly leaving both an afterimage temporarily burned into their retinas and a jarringly (relative) silence. Soon after, the loop gradually commenced again.

By naming it a *National Pavilion*, the work seems to try to downplay or deride its monumentality, despite the other sight observed within the work being that of other spectators also looking up at a brilliant halo. Conceivably, if one were to be experiencing the installation alone, they would be momentarily left not only in darkness, but also in the type of “silence” John Cage famously described from his experience of entering the anechoic chamber at Harvard University (Cage, p. 8) — that is, the spectator would be left with the sounds of their own biological workings: their nervous system, blood circulation and otoacoustic emissions from within the ear. Thus, the *Then and Now* seems to allude to this afterimage and “after-acoustic” effect, where in the absence of light and sound the spectator is confronted with simultaneously the immediate (chronological/

historical) present and their *being present*, an awareness from the external suddenly redirected inwards to their own body.

In Mirza's other piece titled *Sick*, installed within the Central Pavilion of the Giardini, a ribbon of color-changing LED lights were hung across a corner of the room, their circuitry exposed; against a reclining tabletop a dismantled LCD screen glowed; rhythmic sounds of static and noise from speakers on the floor and on the tabletop triggered a strobe light which sporadically back-lit a small mirror-surfaced LCD screen underneath the tabletop, erratically illuminating a video of throngs of pedestrians; while across the room, an upturned speaker with a clear hollow tube placed over the speaker cone animated a crumpled up piece of gold-colored foil which danced upon its membrane floor and within the cylindrical walls; all amidst sparse speaker wires exposed and strung through the room's wall supports. Unlike Mirza's previous piece, in this one all the objects are smaller than the spectator, and one has to be wary not to trip on them or knock something over. With its exposed wiring and circuitry, bare LCD screens, their edges and components vulnerable, the technology aspect is rendered somewhat naked and diminutive in relation to the human posture. Exhibition attendees, clothed and looking down upon the explicitly "techie" objects while immersed in the confusion of clockwork noise, are again reminded of their being a body, but this time through their outward and downward gaze.

It is not my place in this paper to judge any of the artworks subjectively, but I write about them to illustrate other points. In the case of this work, the point is that it is decidedly and unambiguously (contemporarily) technological — an aspect often dismissed in the mainstream contemporary art world. However, by being in this context, it risks being reduced to a techno-fetishistic specimen, a token nod, even technological child's play, considering the immense scope of contemporary technology-based work available yet unknown to the mainstream art world. However, my thesis for this section, that new media art has successfully gatecrashed the mainstream art world's party, yet has another example from this year's Venice Biennale.

Federico Díaz's contribution, *Outside Itself*, located in a large warehouse within the Arsenale, touted itself as an "Interactive installation assembled by robotic machines and untouched by human hands from concept to materialization." This "data sculpture" consists of, in the middle of the large hall, a projected white rectangle of light and, on one end of the hall, two robotic arms manipulating black plastic balls into a form. As visitors walk upon the lit rectangle, their movements are projected back onto the floor around them, as fading black dots tracing their steps. Data from this interaction is interpreted by computers and fed into instructions for the movement of the robotic arms, which then take the black ping-pong-size balls from a cache of a quarter million of them, and glue them into a sculpture based on the accumulating data set.

What makes this inclusion more notable is that it was curated by Alanna Heiss, founder of the much lauded P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center in New York, which was annexed to the Museum of Modern Art in 2000. Over the course of more than seven hundred exhibitions curated while director at P.S.1 from 1976–2008, Heiss garnered a reputation as a “radical” by championing fringe artists such as Jean–Michel Basquiat, Colette and Cai Guo–Qiang, who have all since come to be highly respected in their fields (Goldstein, 2008). Does her curation of Díaz at the Venice Biennale signal a powerful hand in the mainstream art world helping to further dissolve medium boundaries? After all, previous new mediums such as photography had taken generations before being accepted in the mainstream art world. As Josephine Bosma notes regarding this acceptance of technological leaning art, “Mainstream art institutions have been slow to respond to a present day emergence of a non–institutional and only partly professional art debate and practice” (Bosma, 2006, p. 37). However, now it seems there is sufficient institutional representation and discourse built around new media art for its arrival at the “plateau of acceptance” (Graham & Cook, p. 24). It is as if the invisible forces at work have picked at Lev Manovich’s reasons why “Turing Land” (that being the world of computer and new media arts) and “Duchamp Land” (that being the world of contemporary art) will never converge, and refuted them point by point (Manovich, 1996). Not to mention that it does not seem so incongruous today to see visitors using their smartphones to consult the Biennale map or take photographs standing next to interactive video projections and robotic arms.

||| 5. Conclusion |||

In Henri Bergson’s example of the man in the mirror, he states that the possible, the virtual image, does not presuppose the real:

“It is as though one were to fancy, in seeing his reflection in the mirror in front of him, that he could have touched it had he stayed behind it... One might as well claim that the man in flesh and blood comes from the materialization of his image seen in the mirror, because in that real man is everything found in this virtual image with, in addition, the solidity which makes it possible to touch it. But the truth is that more is needed here to obtain the virtual than is necessary for the real, more for the image of the man than for the man himself, for the image of the man will not be portrayed if the man is not first produced, and in addition one has to have the mirror” (Bergson, p. 230).

Art, being techné, becomes a proto–machine in its various heterogeneous registers of self–

enunciation. By transversing territories of intersubjectivity in the manner of an abstract machine, art exists beyond the here and now, occupying multiple domains of alterification. In this way, it becomes the “more” that is needed “to obtain the virtual than is necessary for the real”.

In her introduction to the catalog for *TruEYE SurView*, an exhibition of artworks exploring the relationship of information technologies with the human species at the gallery W139 in Amsterdam, artist/curator Katja Novitskova evokes Manuel de Landa’s three-step historical lens to consider our contemporary situation in terms of material, genetic and semiotic flows (see de Landa, 1997). She writes, “we are approaching an uncanny valley where life and technology co-exist in a blurry commonality of their informational origin and material essence, each propagating an agenda of their own” (Novitskova, pp. 2–3). In this sense, artworks are constituted by both the physical manifestations of material and genetic flows — whether a dance, sound, website, object, or whatever, being dependent on structures of hardware and society — and the virtual manifestations of semiotic flows — the meaning derived from a history of *sign language*. As a technology of the psyche, art can reveal ways for the subject to locate itself in the intersubjective space of social relations.

Lars Bang Larsen asserts, “In the construction of the subject’s interaction with culture... social aesthetics discusses a notion of the lasting phenomenon that substantiates a critical cultural analysis, a reason for one’s existence” (Larsen, pp. 172–173). This is not to impose a utilitarian purpose to art and say that art *should* have a function, but merely to highlight that art *can* fulfill purposes — especially by providing entry points for the emancipation of the subject. Thus, taking to heart Joseph Beuys’ famous aphorism that “everybody can be an artist”, the subject can create their own premises for being, and their own “technologies of the self”, unencumbered by the the spaces defined by technologies imposed by mainstream commercial and political agents.

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