

ESCAPING THE MEAT

When I surf the internet, where does my body go?

Sigríður Þóra Flygenring
Gerrit Rietveld Academie 2021-2022

Sometimes it takes a while to disconnect from the internet state. It's like travelling between two different countries on a plane, you're neither here nor there. When you finally land at the airport, you haven't adjusted to your destination yet. In your mind, you are still in your country of departure, but different laws apply in the new country you're actually in. I might turn off my phone and put it in my pocket, but I don't really feel like I'm in the "real" world yet. My body is only a device I occupy at the moment, a website to experience things through. "Me" is merely a floating consciousness looking out through the holes I call my eyes. I look at my hands; they are my cursor. I can click and tap and grab and swipe and stroke. But touching feels different before I fully adjust to it. It feels... disconnected. The signals from the touch receptors in my fingers travel a longer way than usual. Instead of travelling through my sensory nerves along my spine and straight to my brain, the signals get lost. They travel all the way to my feet before they realise they made the wrong turn. They hurry back to my hands and shoot out my fingertips like arrows. Then they float in the air around my head until they finally enter my brain through my ears and I feel the softness of the cat's fur I'm stroking. My flatmate says something to me, but the volume isn't turned on in my ears yet. I rewind the sound a couple of seconds back to understand what he says. The buttons in my brain all look the same so I jumble my words before I find the right ones in the bottom corner. I am embarrassed about my delayed answer; "I'm sorry, I feel so... outside myself today". I go to my room to clear my head but the buffering wheel is still spinning. I grab my laptop from my desk, plop it on my lap and open it up, maybe I'll just stay in the internet today.

THE VIRTUAL GIFT ROOM

I was around ten years old when I became an active user of the internet. I had of course surfed the internet before, but it was the first time I interacted with others through it. I made a blog and joined an Icelandic gaming website; for the first time I *existed* online. The gaming website was a sort of social media site that hosted online games for users to play with each other. The website had an age restriction, which I got past by lying about my birth year and faking my parents' email address. I played Scrabble, Pictionary and other games with users I had never met. My favourite game was not really a game at all. It was a sort of *gift room*, where people could anonymously gift you virtual *objects*. I embedded this game onto the blog page that I had created for my friends. My friends gifted me (the concept of) dogs, flowers and cupcakes; useless and intangible "items". One day, a strange gift arrived in my gift room; a lingerie set (a digital lingerie for my digital body had appeared in my digital room). It was not from one of my friends, but a stranger from the gaming website. I felt violated as if my room had been broken into and my 10-year-old body had been sexualised. I quickly deleted my account hoping it would erase the situation. I was confused. My gift room wasn't a *tangible place* and the lingerie wasn't *wearable*. The stranger didn't

even know who I was, what I looked like or how old I was; the account could have been *anybody* – or nobody. But still, it felt *real*.

When talking about the internet, one often describes what exists within it as “virtual” and outside it “real”. But how can one distinguish them from each other when the two things collide? Chinese philosopher, Yuk Hui, writes about the distinction between the two in his book *On the Existence of Digital Objects*:

“To understand the “real,” we must compare it with what is commonly understood as virtual. The idea of the virtual, which was popular some years ago as a descriptor of certain kinds of community and interaction dependent on digital media, such as online forums and cyber-sex, has since receded into the background, as you can no longer say today that someone using Facebook or Second Life is living within a virtual world (considering that he is interacting with his real friends and engaging in activities like providing his credit card number and personal information to order a Swedish Visa online.)¹

Virtual gifts sure aren’t wrapped in gift wrapping cut up with scissors and tied with material ribbon bought from the store, but the gesture of giving still happened. Events, whether they happen online or not, are real. Perhaps, the only difference is the materiality and tangibility of the setting, objects, and people involved?

THE FRICTION OF THE INTERNET

I like to imagine what the internet would feel like, could I touch it. The smooth and flat screen would feel warm as I dug my heels into it. Every now and then I would feel a slight static which would go away once I moved my toes a bit. The occasional vibration would feel exciting and give me a quick burst of energy. The search bar at the top of the screen would be spongy and bouncy, much like memory foam. Words would sit securely in the cushioned search bar until you’d hit enter and they’d slowly sink into it. My cursor would feel like thick plastic, slightly rough and heavy. The point of the arrow would seem sharp at first glance but would reveal to be quite rounded upon touch. The plastic would slowly bulge in as I clicked on links and images on my screen, but it would not feel aggressive. Instead, it would feel like a curious nudge, almost clumsy. The scrollbar would be cold and soft and it would move smooth and steady as I dragged it down the webpage. I would feel in control as the bar would be light, making slowing down or stopping easy. Buttons and links would be diversely textured depending on their purpose and landing place. Advertisements would be soft to the touch but matted and slightly greasy, giving you that icky satisfaction. Buttons leading to scams would give you a mini shock when poked. Loose and rusty, they’d look dangerous to the touch. Links to trusty websites would, however, feel sturdy. They would slowly draw

¹ Yuk Hui, *On the Existence of Digital Objects*, 48.

back when pushed and bounce open up to their original position when released, like a spring attached in the back of them. If I ever tried to run, the friction of the internet would slow me down.

Friction, pressure, temperature, vibration, pain – Touch is thought to be one of the first senses humans develop. It is essential for interacting with the world and seems to play a fundamental part in a person's well being.² Lorde, a singer-songwriter from New Zealand, writes in one of her newsletters to fans: “If there’s one thing I know right now, it’s how drawn I am to the sensual, things that make me feel like I’m a person in a body on a planet, things that feel alive. . . . I want next year to be the year of friction. Physical, emotional, spiritual. I want to rub up against everything, and see how it feels.”³ The quote follows a contemplation on her decision to step away from social media, as well as pandemic restrictions moving all social events online. The way Lorde writes about friction is quite intimate and affectionate and shows her appreciation for physical experiences *offline*. She addresses touch as an emotional tool to connect to her body and feel alive, which in comparison makes the internet seem quite depressing. Touch is often spoken about in this way; relating it to spirituality and interconnectedness - between the body, the mind and the earth. It also plays an important role in human development; “babies use it to understand their own bodies. At first, touch establishes a sense of self.”⁴ Touch connects you to your own body; your self, and your body to the social world. “Touch comes before sight, before speech. It is the first language and the last, and it always tells the truth.”⁵

The internet doesn’t actually possess any materiality for touch and friction to exist. Swiss-German philosopher Byung-Chul Han writes “The digital order *deobjectifies* the world by *rendering it information*. It’s not objects but information that rules the living world. We no longer inhabit heaven and earth, but the Cloud and Google Earth. The world is becoming progressively untouchable, foggy and ghostly.”⁶ Is the lack of the fundamental sense of touch online parallel to a lack of connection and intimacy? In the article *Close to The Metal*, published in the Real Life Magazine, Emma Rae Bruml Norton writes about how friction, or the lack of it, defines our relationship with the computers we interact with. She explains how the physical work of programming computers in the 1940s constructed an embodied understanding of the computer. With the invention of the mouse in 1968 “the computer became an extension of the body” and users’ contact with the computer itself became more distanced, all the while becoming more intimate: “As the mouse brought users into a more intimate symbiosis with the

² Joe Moran “The Power of Touch: Is This the Sense We’ve Missed Most?”

³ Ella Yelich-O’connor (Lorde), “Just Ella things.”

⁴ “Touch and Human Development,” East West College of the Healing Arts.

⁵ Margaret Atwood, *The Blind Assassin*, 256.

⁶ Byung-Chul Han, *How Objects Lost their Magic*, translated by Gesine Borchardt in book review.

machine, offering direct command over it, it also distanced them from the metal — from the computer as a physical, material object. It brought us into a world where the computer can appear as an immersive world in itself. Users were not close to the metal but at one with it.”⁷ Norton continues to describe the intimacy between the computer and its user and contemplates how the material interfaces affect one’s experience. She continues on to mention touch devices as “another step toward the forgetting of the body as it merges with machine”⁸ and concludes that we must re-prioritize bodies as we continue to live with and through computers.

FEELING THE SUN ON YOUR FACE

I bend my legs and move my feet up onto the sofa chair I am sitting on. My body is seated on the edge of the chair, but I scoot my butt back to make just enough space for my feet to fit on there as well. My back is hunched and my arms rest on the laptop. The only thing moving is my right wrist and a couple of fingers. I tap on my mouse pad twice with my thumb and move my hand up to press the “enter” button. Suddenly, the scenery looks completely different and everything changes colour. I move my finger in circles on the touchpad and tap; “click”, until it all goes back to normal. Occasionally, my whole body moves and I change positions. Maybe I stretch out my leg to scratch my calf, readjust my shoulder or straighten my back. “Click” “click” “craaack”... I can sit like this for hours and hours. Sure, my butt will start to go numb, my wrist will start to ache and the curve in my back will slowly increase, but I won’t notice it too much. I am not really here, I am in the internet.

“Designing space is about touching things, smelling things, and feeling the sun on your face.”⁹ says designer Michael Yarinsky. The internet is commonly referred to as a space, or places; highways, sites, clouds, libraries, webs, railroads and more. These spatial metaphors have not only shaped the language used for interactions with, on and through the internet but our perception of it. Designers and programmers dealing with user interfaces often design based on these frameworks, which further reinforces the idea of the internet as a separate space from the “real life world”. The internet does in fact not possess the abilities of touch, smell or the warmth of the sun. These UI designs have created hostile public “spaces” online, a blurred line between offline and online experiences and, I imagine, halted research on the effects of the internet on the mind and body. In the last ten years many technologists, such as Édouard Urcades, Brett Frischmann, Aaron Z. Lewis and more, have become aware of the effects of

⁷Emma Rae Bruml Norton, “Close to the Metal.”

⁸Norton, “Close to the Metal.”

⁹Michael Yarinsky (in conversation with Samantha Weiss Hills), “In Bushwick, a designer’s own home embodies a quirky, open ethos.”

these metaphors and have proposed to replace them with other terms. Changing our language could change the way we think, navigate and connect to each other online.

My own view of the internet as an entity changed when I wrote a short essay on defensive architecture online for theory class in the spring semester of 2020. I had started writing and reflecting on defensive architecture within public space when the Covid-19 pandemic hit and my plan changed. That spring, my time spent in public space dramatically decreased and my time spent online increased. I began to compare the two together and realised that the internet couldn't really be talked about and used in the same way as physical space. After this revelation, I tried to make sense of the internet and saw it in everything: Astral projection; an intentional out-of-body experience – an "astral body" separate from the physical body and capable of travelling outside it throughout the universe. A temporary body; an extension of one's senses. A spiderweb; an extension of the spider's cognitive abilities. The ocean; an everflowing sensorium and storage of memories and history. Mycelium; an underground network of fungal threads.

ESCAPING THE MEAT

In the same way that I walk barefoot in the grass to ground myself, letting the energy of the earth transfer into my physical body, I intentionally let my fingers rest on the keyboard of my laptop. My internet addiction is really just a form of meditation (or that's what I tell myself). As I re-enter the online state, the pain I feel in my body slowly decreases and the never-ending worries in my head quiet down. I feel a sense of calm like time doesn't matter or exist. Maybe I am not leaving my body behind in the "real world" while exploring the virtual world through my mind, but rather letting the internet merge with my physical body?

The future of the internet is often thought of in relation to transcendence; an existence beyond the physical level.¹⁰ Take for example the film *Transcendence*, where an AI researcher's consciousness is uploaded to a computer as his physical body dies,¹¹ or the movie *The Lawnmower Man*, where virtual reality is used to enhance a gardener's intelligence until he transcends the limits of the human form.¹² Although virtual reality technology is well on its way to becoming a part of the daily internet experience, humans still have a long way to go to achieve actual online transcendence. Sadie Plant, philosopher and author, speaks about this idea of transcendence, or what she calls "getting out of the meat", in her lecture *The Feminine Cyberspace* delivered in 1994 at the conference *Seduced & Abandoned: The Body in the*

¹⁰ Oxford's Advanced Learner's Dictionary, "Transcendence," Accessed December 20, 2021, <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/transcendence>

¹¹ Wally Pfister, *Transcendence*.

¹² Leonard Brett, *The Lawnmower Man*.

Virtual World: “The tendency to make cyberspace [...] into a matter of metaphor or representation is really a matter of repeating the great idealist project which has characterised the Western patriarchal culture, which has always been an attempt to somehow climb out of matter, to get into some immaterial zone.”¹³

Throughout history, humans have always seemed to be dreaming of transcendence of some sort, the soul being separate and independent of the body¹⁴ (at least in western culture). We have looked to religious and spiritual practices to find a connection to a higher being or to rise beyond human constraints. Religion, meditation, astral projection, psychedelics and drugs are all things that man has used, and abused, for the goal to escape the meat and enter some kind of spiritual transcendent plane. Plant believes that cyberspace is also seen largely as the fulfilment of this dream: the dream of getting out of matter, away from the physical body and “its visceral activity, its blood and guts and all the messy stuff that man would always rather have left behind.”¹⁵ She, however, presumes that even with the invention of the computer and cyberspace, man is no closer to escaping the meat than before:

“Cyberspace fed this dream, for total control, for autonomy [...] the point at which the soul would finally be united with itself, finally make it to an omnipotent sense of identity. But no one, it turns out, actually escapes from the meat. Instead, it’s a matter of getting caught up with it. The body is never left behind, instead it’s the body itself which begins to learn how to disentangle itself from all constraints... Ecstasy is no longer the state of escaping matter, but instead a matter of escaping the state, be it of the art, the nation, or the mind itself.”¹⁶

Plant goes on to compare the appeal of drugs to the appeal of computers, referencing Marshall McLuhan’s quote on psychedelics: “It is not uncommon for people on these trips, especially with new chemical drugs, as opposed to organic ones, to develop the illusion that they are themselves computers. This, of course, is not so much a hallucination as a discovery.”¹⁷ McLuhan again comments on drugs in an interview with *Playboy*, stating that “One turns on his consciousness through drugs just as he opens up all his senses to a total depth involvement by turning on the TV dial.”¹⁸ Correspondingly, Plant concludes that drugs can’t grant this wish of escaping the meat that so many dream of, but rather the opposite; they collapse the body onto the mind or the soul: “It’s never a transcendent exit from the body, instead it’s a headlong

¹³ Sadie Plant, “The Feminine Cyberspace.”

¹⁴ Plant, “The Feminine Cyberspace.”

¹⁵ Plant, “The Feminine Cyberspace.”

¹⁶ Plant, “The Feminine Cyberspace.”

¹⁷ Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *War and Peace in the Global Village: an inventory of some of the current spastic situations that could be eliminated by more feedforward*, 73.

¹⁸ Marshall McLuhan interviewed by Eric Norden for *Playboy Magazine*, “The Playboy Interview: Marshall McLuhan: a candid conversation with the high priest of popcult and metaphysician of media.”

acceleration into his substance.”¹⁹ The use of psychedelics can often cause changes in mood, visual distortions, physical changes and hallucinations. Users have also reported feeling that the senses mix and melt together, perhaps similar to how the internet can replace and alter our senses; the body and computer collapse on each other.

TEMPORARY BODY

My laptop becomes my body; an extension of my senses. The advertisement popping up on my screen, directly relating to the google search I did 10 minutes prior, is my bellyache. My email inbox is my hair that needs to be combed through and my Instagram draft my fingernails that need to be trimmed. I copy a snippet of an article and paste it onto the back of my hand; my cursor. I then stuff a song into the back of my ear and scrub away an unwelcome pop-up window from the bottom of my feet. I open Facebook to see a three week old message I forgot to reply to. I start typing but I have a cough stuck in the back of my throat that I just can't seem to lose. My eyes, my ears, my nose, tongue and skin are replaced by other senses. I no longer really need to use my physical body, I have every little thing stored in my internet database and I don't need to feel the texture or smell the aroma of any of them.

The first metaphor for the internet that sparked my interest, and perhaps the one I relate the most to, is the *temporary body*. I discovered the term when reading Aaron Z. Lewis' article “Inside the Digital Sensorium”. In the article, Aaron, a digital designer and internet researcher, writes on the importance of adapting to the mindscapes of the internet. The article includes eight imaginary stories, written by Aaron and based on real virtual experiences, about “what it feels like when our minds merge with software.”²⁰ The stories are written from a first-person perspective on the new sensory experiences and digital psychology of the internet. To back up the stories, Aaron references technologist É. Urcades and his opinions on the spatial metaphors of the internet; “i disagree deeply with the premise that web interfaces are 'spaces' or 'land' or 'architecture'. websites are absolutely not places or architecture, they are temporary bodies — interfaces are limbs and sensory organs”.²¹

My physical body has no purpose on the internet, besides maybe serving as a representation of me in my accounts' profile pictures. But even then, there is no feeling, no gestures, no physicality and no function. My online body is only a replica of my physical one, a photograph that can be manipulated. When I surf the internet I can experience hundreds of different emotions and events, but my body feels disconnected from those experiences. While the replica of my body is playing on a beach in Albania, my physical body

¹⁹ Plant, “The Feminine Cyberspace.”

²⁰ Aaron Z. Lewis, “Inside the Digital Sensorium.”

²¹ @flowerstructure, tweet.

is crammed in a bus in Eindhoven. While I run around alien headquarters in search of a killer among me and 9 other strangers, my body is laying flat in my boyfriend's bed. While chatting to my friends halfway across the world, my body sits lazily on my wooden chair by my desk. These digital *spaces*; the beach, the headquarters and the chatroom, "replace our physical bodies with cursors, keyboards, and avatars whose abilities are constrained by the decisions of designers and developers."²² Not only is the control of the digital body limited but the connection to our physical bodies feels quite lost. But of course, as stated in the previous chapter, the physical body doesn't disappear. "It is merely, to different degrees, bracketed, covered over, in certain of its aspects. It's still there, typing, having emotional reactions, longing, being involved, being mad."²³ Your consciousness is not shifted into the computer either, leaving your body behind - although it can often feel that way.

The idea of a *temporary body* suggests rather that computer interfaces possess *secondary* sensory organs that can be used to perceive information. Online, where senses like smell, taste, touch and spatial orientation don't exist, they are replaced with text and information. Of course, the terms *body* and *organs* are just metaphors for a complicated idea of how people perceive things online, but how and why does the *body* play a role in something the *mind* normally does, like perceive and present information? Most dictionaries' definitions of the *body* describe it as a "whole physical structure that forms a person or animal"²⁴. Furthermore, definitions of the body often contrast it with the *mind*. Artist and writer Gordon Hall writes about this contrast in an article published in Monday Journal:

"To speak of "the body" is to distinguish it from what it is not: "the soul," "the spirit," or, most commonly, "the mind." Rooted in Judeo-Christian religious thought, this way of thinking has even been discredited by Western biological science, which over the last couple of decades has had to grudgingly admit that thoughts, emotions, and experiences have bodily effects that are every bit as real as viruses and pathogens."²⁵

Hall's text suggests that the binary made up of "the body" and "the mind" is empirically inaccurate. This connection is actually a part of a theory called *embodied cognition*. "Embodied cognition is the theory that many features of cognition, whether human or otherwise, are shaped by aspects of the entire body of the organism," that is, the body influences the mind. What is felt with the body is felt with the mind and vice versa.

²² Aaron Z. Lewis, "Inside the Digital Sensorium."

²³ Sarah Perry, "Social Media Consciousness."

²⁴ Cambridge Dictionary, "Body," Accessed December 20, 2021 from: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/body>

²⁵ Gordon Hall, "Why I Don't Talk About 'The Body': A Polemic," 98.

THE SPIDER'S WEB

I check the notes on my phone and scroll through my old posts to remember what I am all about, what I stand for. If I didn't have the internet to store my memories, my interests, my thoughts (and other people's memories, interests and thoughts that I aspire to have) I wouldn't be anything but some meat and bones - a portrayal of a human. My body sure doesn't say anything about me or who I am. It no longer feels like the "center of gravity" of my identity. My sense of presence is forever fractured and distributed all over the place²⁶. When talking to people, I often prefer video chat to IRL convos because I can easily reference my external brain without the other person noticing. If I ever lost access to my database, I'm not really sure what I'd do²⁷ – When I don't have my phone with me I don't know who I am or what I want.

“All media are extensions of some human faculty – psychic or physical. The wheel is an extension of the foot. The book is an extension of the eye. Clothing, an extension of the skin. [...] The extension of any one sense alters the way we think and act – the way we perceive the world.”²⁸ suggests Marshall McLuhan in his book *The Medium is the Massage*. McLuhan believed that media extends our capabilities and therefore the way we think and interact with each other. Similar to both McLuhan's theory and the metaphor of the internet as an extension of one's senses, philosophers Andy Clark and David Chalmers proposed a theory that the computer is an extension of one's mind. The “Extended mind thesis” suggests that the computer is not just a tool anymore, but a part of our brain: "The conservative view would be [that] this is just a tool the mind uses, but I think the more radical view, and the view of the extended mind that I endorse, is that this phone is actually becoming part of your memory, google maps is becoming part of your spatial navigation system."²⁹ Although it uses a different name, the extended mind theory presents practically the same argument as the temporary body metaphor: that the computer is not a tool nor a medium but an extension of ourselves. "There's no privileged border of the skin and the skull when it comes to the mind. What matters is the role that it plays." (David Chalmers)³⁰

The idea that the computer is an extension of one's mind is very similar to the relation between the spider and its web. New research suggests that “spider webbing is an essential part of these creatures' cognitive apparatus. The animals don't just use their webs to sense with; they use them to think.”³¹ Naturally, the spider's web plays an important role as a sensory apparatus for the spider, to sense different vibrations throughout the web. Additionally, research has shown that when threads of the web are cut, the spider

²⁶ Aaron Z. Lewis, “Inside the Digital Sensorium.”

²⁷ Aaron Z. Lewis, “Inside the Digital Sensorium.”

²⁸ Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage: an inventory of effects*, 18-25.

²⁹ “David Chalmers - What is Extended Mind?.”

³⁰ “David Chalmers - What is Extended Mind?.”

³¹ Bryan Nelson, “A Spider's Web Is Part of Its Mind, New Research Suggests.”

makes different decisions. It tugs and loosens strands of the webbing, filtering the information it receives.³² So the spider uses its web just like we use our computers and phones to take notes, store photographs and memories or organise our living spaces to remember where things are. One question comes up when thinking about these newly discovered capabilities of the spider and its web, and it can also relate to the internet: What is the web in relation to the spider? Its body? Its mind? Its home?

THE INTERNET IS TO ME WHAT THE OCEAN IS TO A FISH

I can scroll mindlessly for hours. I flow through the internet like a fish in the ocean – and the ocean flows through me. It's strange, I feel quite at home. It is comfortable. Wherever my body goes the internet can follow -as long as I have my phone with me. It doesn't matter what country I am in, I can connect to anywhere, anyone and most importantly myself. When I was a kid, I used to say that the left part of my body was the Norwegian part and the right part Icelandic, but now I think all of it is just Internet. It is a home I've built for myself through liking and posting and sharing and saving. Suddenly, the website I'm scrolling starts glitching and I lose the wifi connection. I feel misplaced before I manage to connect to my neighbours working wifi and I'm home again.

When asked to explain the theory of the extended mind, Andy Clark gives an example of Alzheimer's patients whose living environments played a great deal in memory and routine:

“...When they filled in the questionnaires and did the tests there was no way that they should be able to function alone in the environments that they were nonetheless living in. But when she went to their houses and looked, their houses were very beautifully structured with post-it notes in the right place, lots of routines... Routines for going out and getting the bus, to go and pick up food and come back with the food. So what she ended up thinking was that, in a way, these well functioning patients' minds were distributed across their environments.”³³

He concludes that in the same way computers and webs are extended minds, so is our living environment.

I, therefore, wonder if the internet can serve as some kind of habitat? Philosopher Hannah Arendt writes:

“And just as one inhabits an apartment, and makes it comfortable, by living in it instead of just using it for sleeping, eating, and working, so one inhabits a city by strolling through it without aim or purpose.”³⁴

Perhaps, one also inhabits the *internet* by *scrolling* through it without aim or purpose?

Inhabiting the internet is not a new idea. The term “cybercitizen” or “netizen” describes an internet user who participates in political discussions about online issues such as net neutrality. *Sursiendo*, a Mexican organisation contributing to social change on the internet, reveals in an article on their website various

³² Bryan Nelson, “A Spider’s Web Is Part of Its Mind, New Research Suggests.”

³³ “Andy Clark - What is Extended Mind?”

³⁴ Hannah Arendt, Introduction to Walter Benjamin’s *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, 21.

“reasons to inhabit the internet”. Their article speaks about the illusion of the internet as a “public space” and the reality of it as an “algebraic representation of private services”. They write: “Inhabiting the Internet means to think it, make it, build it and defend equal possibilities of access and development.”³⁵ (translated from Spanish to English by Sursiendo) It seems that the definition of the word “inhabit” has in this case been bent and moulded to fit Sursiendo’s agenda. Perhaps it’s easier to look at the word “home”.

What is a “home”? “Originally home meant the center of the world—not in a geographical, but in an ontological sense.”³⁶ Nowadays, a home is thought of as a house where someone resides. But as the world progresses and more and more people migrate from their “home” countries, the meaning of the word changes. Artist and writer Katarina Poliacikova writes: “A home, permanent or temporary, is not bound solely to the physical space we are occupying. Unless we are forced to flee our home, we can always move our physical belongings, but there is something that cannot be moved, something that has to be created anew. What is it? What is “at the heart of the real”? The essence of home is, more than anything, a constellation of relationships, of everyday rituals, of cycles. A feeling of home can materialise in a window from which you observe the world...”³⁷ I would like to propose that a feeling of home can, and does for many, take shape in the internet.

WHEN I USE MY BODY, WHERE DOES THE INTERNET GO?

My neighbour’s wifi connection is slow so as I wait for the images to load my consciousness is slowly transported back to my physical body. I stand up from the sofa chair and take a couple of steps to the fridge, but it feels different than normal. My body is numb from sitting down for so long but that’s not the problem. I look in the mirror to look for any changes, maybe my internet addiction has somehow affected my physical body. I look to see if my thumbs have become longer or my back become curvier, my eyes square or my ears become holes, perfectly shaped for earphones. But the changes aren’t exactly what I’ve imagined before. I am still dizzy from my online adventures so I decide to take a walk outside, which is when I fully gather what has happened to me: my body really has finally adapted to my digital experiences. My depth perception has evolved to become worse and my orientation and spatial navigation have completely de-developed. Instead, I have developed advanced selective listening and my brain doesn’t have (or need) any storage space for my memories. My touch receptors have vanished and I can’t taste or smell a thing. My eyes have grown out of my head and now sit on top of my body, forever perceiving myself in the second person. I no longer feel like I experience anything, I only observe.

³⁵ “Reasons to inhabit the Internet,” Sursiendo.

³⁶ John Berger, *And Our Faces, My Heart, Brief as Photos*, 55.

³⁷ Katarina Poliacikova (Eggtuition), “Soft Boiled #7.”

As the internet becomes more prominent and its role in society more dominant, it gets harder to imagine life without it. We start to feel like mushrooms dependent on the underground network of mycelium to keep us connected and nourished. But unlike fungi, the internet has never been an actual part of the human body. Certainly, many inventions, real and imaginary, have been designed to embed technology into our physical bodies. Google glasses and VR headsets come first to mind. But this cyborg “evolution” is created and designed by humans. This unnatural merging of technology and body doesn’t transform it into a part of our body, but could perhaps alienate us from it. “Your body isn’t a tool for delivering your experience: it *is* your experience.”³⁸ Therefore, I wonder if our bodies will instead naturally evolve and adapt to the digital experiences we are having? Or perhaps it will distort our connection with our bodies?

The gap between the two worlds has closed. The digital experience has merged with the physical body and created a middle ground. I no longer need to adjust to real life after having spent time in the internet. Touching isn’t expected as objects are only information and bodies only an idea. Everything feels like a holograph - the world really has become untouchable, foggy and ghostly. As I stroll aimlessly through my neighbourhood I decide to reach for my phone in my pocket. It doesn’t really make a difference whether I’m on it or not, I am always slightly disconnected. I don’t feel like a person in a body on a planet anymore, it’s all just mush.

³⁸ John Pavlus, “Your Boy Does Not Want to Be an Interface.”

BIBLIOGRAPHY

"Andy Clark - What is Extended Mind?." Youtube video, 13:16. Posted by "Closer to Truth," April 19, 2018. Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kc-TdMjuJRU>.

Arendt, Hannah. Introduction to Walter Benjamin's *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*. London: Pimlico, 1999.

Atwood, Margaret. *The Blind Assassin*. London: Virago, 2000.

Berger, John. *And Our Faces, My Heart, Brief as Photos*. London: Granta in association with Penguin, 1992.

"David Chalmers - What is Extended Mind?." Youtube video, 5:39. Posted by "Closer to Truth," April 19, 2018. Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jg00gK43ld4>.

East West College of the Healing Arts. "Touch and Human Development." November 1, 2018. Retrieved from: <https://www.eastwestcollege.com/touch-and-human-development/>.

@flowerstructure. Tweet. July 15, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://twitter.com/flowerstructure/status/1283424186690609154>.

Hall, Gordon. "Why I Don't Talk About 'The Body': A Polemic." *Monday Journal Vol. 4: White Pictures*. March 2020: 95-107.

Hui, Yuk. *On the Existence of Digital Objects*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016.

Han, Byung-Chul. "Byung-Chul Han: How Objects Lost their Magic." *Art Review*. (Quote originally from Han's book *How Objects Lost their Magic* translated from German by Gesine Borchardt). August 11, 2021. Retrieved from: <https://artreview.com/byung-chul-han-how-objects-lost-their-magic/>.

Leonard, Brett, dir. *The Lawnmower Man*. New Line Cinema, 1992.

Lewis, Aaron Z. "Inside the Digital Sensorium." *AZL.BLOG: re:media memory & metaphor*. January 17, 2021. Retrieved from: <https://aaronzlewis.com/blog/2021/01/17/inside-the-digital-sensorium/>.

Moran, Joe. "The Power of Touch: Is This the Sense We've Missed Most?." *The Guardian*. February 28, 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2021/feb/28/the-power-of-touch-is-this-the-sense-we-have-missed-most>.

McLuhan, Marshall. Interviewed by Eric Norden for Playboy Magazine. "The Playboy Interview: Marshall McLuhan: a candid conversation with the high priest of popcult and metaphysician of media." *Playboy Magazine*. March 1969, 1994.

McLuhan, Marshall, and Fiore, Quentin. *The Medium is the Massage: an inventory of effects*. Harmondsworth: Middlesex Penguin Books, 1967.

McLuhan, Marshall, and Fiore, Quentin. *War and Peace in the Global Village: an inventory of some of the current spastic situations that could be eliminated by more feedforward*. New York: Bantam Books, 1968.

Nelson, Bryan. "A Spider's Web Is Part of Its Mind, New Research Suggests." *Treehugger*. Updated February 18, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.treehugger.com/spiders-web-part-its-brain-suggests-new-research-4859403>

Norton, Emma Rae Bruml. "Close to the Metal." *Real Life Magazine*. October 15, 2019. Retrieved from: <https://reallifemag.com/bad-metaphors-close-to-the-metal/>.

Pavlus, John. "Your Body Does Not Want to Be an Interface." *MIT Technology Review*. April 24, 2013. Retrieved from: <https://www.technologyreview.com/2013/04/24/178706/your-body-does-not-want-to-be-an-interface/>.

Perry, Sarah. "Social Media Consciousness." *Ribbonfarm: Constructions in Magical Thinking*. September 7, 2018. Retrieved from: <https://www.ribbonfarm.com/2018/09/07/social-media-consciousness/>.

Pfister, Wally, dir. *Transcendence*. New York: Alcon Entertainment; DMG Entertainment; Straight Up Films, 2014.

Plant, Sadie. "The Feminine Cyberspace." Youtube video, 44:18 minutes, recording from lecture *Seduced & Abandoned: The Body in the Virtual World* held in March 1994. Uploaded August 4, 2017. Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=doL9mRMEUGw>.

Poliacikova, Katarina (Eggtuition). "Soft Boiled #7." Weekly email newsletter. <https://eggtuition.com/>.

Sursiendo (Derechos Digitales Colectivos). "Reasons to inhabit the Internet." (Translated from Spanish to English by Sursiendo). February 24, 2015. Retrieved from: <https://sursiendo.org/2015/02/reasons-to-inhabit-the-internet/>.

Yarinsky, Micheal. In conversation with Samantha Weiss Hills. "In Bushwick, a designer's own home embodies a quirky, open ethos". *Curbed New York*. April 22, 2019. Retrieved from: <https://ny.curbed.com/2019/4/22/18485074/brooklyn-new-york-home-tour-michael-yarinsky>.