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The king sat on one end of the scale and the other end was filled with gold until a balance was reached. The king's worth was measured by his weight in gold. Presumably, this made him happy. He *said* that the gold on the opposite end of the scale made him happy, but we only have his word and monarchs are famously devious. In any case, whether the king *said* he was happy and even truly *believed* that he was happy when he said he was happy is beside the point. The point is: *Was he really happy?*

Most likely, the king also thought of his seesaw, happiness mechanism as a scale of justice whose balance would make his blind subjects happy. This, too, is questionable. His courtiers undoubtedly proclaimed that no amount of gold was worth the noble fatso, but, again, neither justice nor flattery is the point here. The point is: *There are those who believe happiness can be measured.*

Though numerous other problems orbit around this point, the measurement of happiness remains the central problem.

How do we go about *measuring* happiness or well-being?¹ And, if happiness can be measured, is this the best way to understand happiness itself or if a person is happy?

¹ This difficult question is made even more difficult since we are groping in the dark without an acceptable definition of "happiness." Substituting "well-being" or any other synonym for "happiness" ("beatitude," "warm-and-fuzzy," "pleasure," etc.) does not light a candle against the darkness, but is merely a rhetorical trick. "A rose by any other name would smell as sweet," Juliet informs Romeo. Whatever that

Is it possible to measure happiness? If happiness is a *subjective feeling*, how does an outsider get to it in order to do the measuring? Barring the unlikelihood of telepathic communication and mind reading, let's stipulate that adequate knowledge of another person's happiness can only be acquired *indirectly*, ordinarily by *asking* a person what makes him or her happy or observing various, non-verbal reactions.

We need to be very clear on this at the very beginning. To repeat the obvious, the measurement of subjective happiness is a replacement of knowledge of the subjective *feeling* of another's happiness itself by his or her *expression* of happiness. We are forewarned. A sleight-of-hand, intellectual trick later on in this discussion that equates *feeling* and *expression* is not acceptable. Perhaps happiness *only* exists in its expression, which is a fascinating possibility, but we leave that for another time and place. For the moment, we limit ourselves to consideration of the subjective feeling of happiness and its expression.

Inarguably, questions that seek to get to an understanding of another person's happiness by soliciting and recording his or her *expression* of happiness are once removed from the answerer's subjective happiness.

The problem is even more complicated when we look at the expression of happiness in its own terms. Two seemingly insurmountable problems arise when we deal with a person's expression of happiness.

First, unlike subjective feeling, expression is open to the possibility of deception. The subjective feeling of happiness is open to self-deception, of course, but the outsider has no

word may be, can an eidetic abstraction (in this case, "happiness") be squeezed out of existential experience? A philosopher on Jonathan Swift's floating island in the clouds, Laputa, in *Gulliver's Travels* busied himself with a project for "extracting sunbeams out of cucumbers." I suppose that we, too, could manhandle our discussion of experience of the real world so that it yielded an abstract, hot-house, eidetic flower that we call "happiness." Even so, we hear Spinoza whispering in our ears, "The concept of a dog doesn't bark."

more access to this deception than to the Other's subjective feeling itself. Another fascinating possibility, but not one we have space for here.²

Expression is intersubjective, not subjective. Feelings are subjective. As uncomfortable as it makes us, people can lie about their subjective feelings ("I love you," "I believe you," "I think you are beautiful," etc.) — including whether they are happy or not. Psychometricians and statisticians believe they have additional, corrective questions that account for deception. They accept that *reiteration* of a question in a different form is a way of checking the veracity of the person answering deceptively. These researchers fail to recognize that what they hold as a corrective for their own methodology, *variable reiteration* of a question, can also be the tool of the deceiver. Reiteration belongs to all. A deceiver is a clever rascal and always has a backup lie if he or she is worth his or her weight in gold.

Lie detectors and the art of reading facial microexpressions, as well as questionnaires, have also been offered as quantifiable, objective methods to alert the researcher to deception. But if we accept either procedure (and courts have determined that these methods are not full-proof, therefore are unacceptable in the eyes of the law), we must admit that they only *note the possibility* of deception. Though advocates of these methods maintain that their possibilities are probabilities, it cannot be argued that they uncover the truth. Recognizing deception does not uncover truth. Those who practice these popular, "naïve" arts should know that the subjective kernel inside of the objective, deceptive shell may be another deception.

Second, since the expression of happiness in a sociological or psychological survey is an answer to a question, it is a *reflexive expression*, a reaction. It is not a *spontaneous expression* of unsolicited joy, that is, happiness. For example:

² I have dealt with this possibility as inherent in the antagonism between the transcendental and existential egos elsewhere. See: "The Selflessness of Transcendental Deception," *Deception: Essays on Deception*. Zeta Books. Bucharest, Romania, August, 2010. 175-198.

Question: What makes you happy?

Answer: My weight in gold.

Clearly, a reflexive expression is not the same as a spontaneous expression. The reaction of a child to her/his mother is not one of reflexive thought. Answering a question on an examination or survey or questionnaire is not the same as an unplanned, non-reflective response. Further, spontaneous expression of happiness or joy may not be one that is uttered. It may take the form of a kinetic reaction without words: a smile, a sudden brightness in the eyes, a disclosure of joy in bodily comportment, and so on, and non-linguistic responses to situations that appear to elicit happiness may be too subtle to notice by the social scientist — or, if uttered, a spontaneous reaction of happiness often comes not as a grammatical statement of subject and object, but as a pre-linguistic, discourse-breaking grunt or squeal or exclamation: “Oh, wow!” “OMG!” “Oooo!”

Making surveys to measure subjective feelings (in this case, happiness) attempts to *objectify the subjective*, a fool’s errand, at best—a devil’s details, at worst. Objects can be measured; subjects cannot be measured. Subjects are ineffable; all objects are objects of knowledge. But the reduction of happiness to answers or *expressions* of subjective happiness is essential in the *quantitative* methodology of bourgeois, analytic social science. These static sciences have no other recourse than quantification and, ultimately, the collection of *Big Data*.

In order to objectify anything, that “thing” must be *countable*. Answers given in surveys of subjective happiness must be collected and collated before they can be analyzed. Since the questions that psychometricians and social scientists collect are themselves woolly (as we

know from their embarrassing history of fraud, racism, and mad-scientist obsession with certitude³), their answers must be coerced into a reasonable discourse.

I say a “fool’s errand” for at least two reasons.

First, quantification of the subjective is impossible because the subject is *the knower* (*cogito*) by definition; the *knower* of all things—not what is known (*cogitatum*). The knower of all things known cannot be known. The subject-as-subject can only be known by the Other when it is converted into an object, which seems to justify qualification of the feeling of happiness. Of course, when the subject is objectified, it is no longer a subject. The “knowable” subject has been transformed into a knowable object that reflects or responds to the quantifier’s inquiries.

Second, questions used to elicit answers about subjective states of happiness are themselves open to critical analysis in terms of their appropriateness, prejudices and blind spots, and so forth. “Objectivity” and, more importantly, *critical thinking* demand that the questioner be questioned. But this is an endless interrogation. Those who quantify subjectivity often consider those who question their methodology as annoying harpies. They become frustrated with interlockers who keep repeating to every objective clarification, “What does that mean?” The quantifier even becomes angry and, in a last defense of the indefensible, dismissive. Those of us who question the questioner believe that questioning the question is an *intellectual right given to us by the questioner who introduced questioning as a methodology*. What is good for the goose is, after all, good for the gander or, to invoke another long-established philosophical principle of argumentation: freely asserted, freely

³ As in fraudulent studies of another subjectivity, intelligence, which reduces “smartness” (the popular culture synonym for “intelligence”) to a quantifiable quotient (IQ): Sir Cyril Burt, an educational psychologist, disgraced for his fraudulent twin studies that argued the heritability of IQ; Arthur Jensen’s racist psychometric research that argued for the genetic transference of intelligence; William Shockley, the beanbag engineer, who advocated sterilization for those with IQs under 100 and who donated his sperm so that humanity could be recreated in his image; countless eugenicists and quantifiers in our own time, not only Nazis, who treat ideas as though they were beans to be counted in their collection of “Big Data.” The bean counters of the world apparently enjoy their work.

denied. The problem is that a Socratic question is not at all the same as a question on a psychometric survey. Socrates was nicknamed “the gadfly.” His questions were meant to annoy.

At what point the qualitative is transformed into the quantitative or the quantitative into the qualitative is a question that remains, but, like the interesting idea mentioned above that happiness *may only exist in its expression*, we again leave this discussion to another forum.

Disagreement on methodologies would be little more than academic bickering if *policy* and *action* were not to follow from the quantitative method of bourgeois social scientists, but often their findings are accompanied by a call for policy decisions that involve the public economy. In the digital age, this means making people happy by spending more and more public and private money to buy software and hardware *to make* them happy.⁴ As a consequence, not only are we faced with algorithmic idiocy, “likes” and “dislikes” that cast the unaware into depression, but *the quest for happiness is recast as consumerism*, as a question of the marketplace, of “free market” capitalism. Corporate digital profiteers, then, are happy, but as my grandmother used to say, “When fools have money, merchants are happy.”

Neo-Luddite that I am, allow me to enumerate a few dangers of uncritical quantification, especially in its current digitalized form—and address the possibility or impossibility of happiness in the digital age.

Technologism

In a recent review in *The New York Times*, Leon Wieseltier delineated the danger of digital “technologism.” Technologism, he explained, is the *ideology of technology*, not the

⁴ Digital gamification has been proposed as a cure-all to human woes in health, education, finance and budgeting, romance, etc., and the greatest game is shopping.

tools themselves, some of whose agency is well-intended, some mindlessly invented for the sake of invention itself, and many specifically designed as tools with bad intentions in mind.

Some of us have never accepted the possibility of going “beyond” good and evil and consider *ethical happiness* a worthy goal that is itself “beyond” the reductionism of personal perspectival and cultural constructions. For us, it is not so much going “beyond” ethics in the Greek sense of “meta-,” but one of *reaching* an ethical goal. We may have that debate later on at a house party hosted by Nietzsche—the kind of dinner party Luis Buñuel portrays in *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*—where we come to understand that ethics and politics (ethics writ large) are not a matter of talking but one of doing.

Wieseltier laments, “Economists are our experts on happiness! . . . Quantification is the most overwhelming influence upon the American understanding of everything!”⁵ If something can be quantified, it can be counted, and if it can be counted, it can be bought and sold. But the arbitrary assigning of a price or number to what would be quantified does not mean that that price or number reflects the worth of that thing. Is ethical worth determined on the “free” and open market?

Specifically, one fundamentalist school of economics prevails in the United States—and, by extension, the rest of the world if it can afford the ideology: “free” market capitalism, the Austrian School and its offspring, the Chicago School. Of immediate concern, philosophers must be suspicious of the historical involvement of phenomenology and hermeneutics with fascist political-economic ideologies easily found in Paul de Man, Alfred Schütz and his mentor, the Austrian fascist, Ludwig von Mises, and of the anchorite of the Schwarzwald, Martin Heidegger, among others.

⁵ In the past, I have argued that we live in “the Supermarket of Everything.” (Monster, 26)

Mediated Happiness (“Well-being”)

Can happiness be mediated or is the term nonsensical, one beyond capture by the question, “What is happiness?” Let us restrict our attention to *digital happiness*—or, better, the *possibility or impossibility* of digital happiness—that is, *hyper-mediated* happiness.

This is a doubly difficult study because not only does digital, hyper-mediated experience demand close attention to the technological limitations and distortions of the medium.⁶ These defacements are inherent in the digital tool, but we must also give attention to the contentious concept of “happiness” itself.

We may consider *mediation* in different and contradictory ways: as game-playing, as a noetic modality of consciousness (like calculative reason, memory, imagination, and so on), even as an addiction, but to find in it a vehicle to convey happiness is to overstate the usefulness of a digital tool. Even if we accept ourselves as humans in the strictest Marxist sense as *Homo faber* (“man the tool-maker”), we posit this “maker” not as a construction worker or engineer or subcontractor of happiness, but as an Aristotelian “poet” (*poetes* in the original sense of a “maker” in the Stagirite’s *Poetics*).

As such, we locate *happiness* in the “creative maker,” not merely in what is made, and we are reminded of Aristotle’s suggestion that politics is “ethics writ large” and that *Homo sapiens* is *zoon politikon*. The ethical good is a creative activity, not an act of emotional bricolage. As a consequence, when we speak of “man” in the sense of *Homo faber*, the notion “post-human” is not applicable. The term and concept “post-human” can only have meaning and, in my view, be productively used in reference to the Early Modern or Renaissance sense of “human” and *humanism*, which serves as an historical pivot, not in reference to other ideas

⁶ I prefer to call them media *defacements*, following a notion of the Oxford scholar of medieval manuscripts and early print, Alfred William Pollard. See: *Smallest Mimes: Defaced Representation and Media Epistemology*.

of “man” (*Homo sapiens*, *Homo ludens*, *Homo symbolicus*, etc.). “Post-human,” therefore, is a variety of *human*. Above all, it is a term created within the modernist historical narrative

In what sense can happiness be mediated? Can happiness be digitally mediated?

If we avoid the truism, *argumentum ad absurdum*, that reduces all life and experience to inescapable mediation (the air is a medium, a psychic is a medium, the skin is a medium, ad nauseam) and accept a common-sense use of the term “mediation” as “in-between-ness” and, further, regard digitalization as hyper-mediation, that is, excessive mediation (mediation of mediation ad infinitum), we understand mediation as the distance between (a) a subject and a subject, (b) a subject and an object, or (c) an object and an object (if the subject has been quantified and, therefore, itself transformed into an object). In consequence, we understand this “distance” as a barrier placed between the subject and the subject (intersubjectivity).

We question whether happiness is in any sense mediated or is, rather, *im-mediated*—that is, *not mediated*, *spontaneous*, a state-of-affairs that is acting or being without the intervention of another object, cause, or agency. Happiness, in this case, is direct experience, not indirect.

Digital mediation is an extreme form of mediation, hyper-mediation, in which *intersubjectivity* is replaced by interobjectivity. The interactivity of interactivity-as-interobjectivity should not be conflated with interactivity-as-intersubjectivity: You click this digital object (a “button”) and you are taken to another website. In this case, interactivity becomes a mechanical process of I-do-this-and-it-does-that-in-return. I put a penny in the gum machine and the gum machine gives me a gumball. To study this phenomenon, we must properly give attention to its technology, specifically, the ways in which a medium limits and distorts human relationships. In another place, we may study the phenomenology of gumball machines.

It follows that the necessary and *im*-mediate foundation of empathy/love, the intersubjective bridge that unites subjects, is destroyed or blocked by digital interactivity.

Big Data

Big Data is a misleading concept employed by those who promote quantification as a way of knowing the happiness of another. The term is nonsensical. Quantification is counting. Objectified data is composed of “bits” of information to be counted, but the numerical representation of “objective” reality (quantified happiness, in this study) is infinite, as are numbers. There can be no “big” data, only ever-expanding *bigger* data in an insatiable and infinite quest to quantify all aspects of reality. What is quantitatively *big* today is numerically small tomorrow. There can be no *big data*, no biggest number—only always *bigger data*.

Observations of these dangers inevitably warn us of a tangle of epistemological and ontological digressions, but also lead us out of the metaphysical labyrinth of quantification and back to the reality of the economic world, that most abstract yet concrete of phenomenon, not as a matter of quantifiable existence but one of the quality of life.

My discussion here is a follow up and reaction to a recent trip to Israel, where I serve on the Steering Committee of the UNESCO Forum on Digital Well-Being.⁷

At the forum, some agreed that happy faces reflect digitally-happy idiots, consumers obsessed with commodity fetishism and what Max Weber described as the “ostentatious display of wealth,” whether true riches were behind the wealth or not or whether the display

⁷ “Well-being,” incidentally, is inexplicably used as a synonym for “happiness,” but both are sloppy terms open to wildly subjective speculations of the sort prized by those who find hermeneutic ramblings entertaining.

was a petit-bourgeois pretense of “keeping up with the Jones.” Of course, consumerism, in its many historical forms, is a form of quantification.⁸

Marx discusses this social phenomenon in detail in “Money and Commodities” and “Commodity Fetishism” in *Capital*:

A commodity appears, at first sight, a very trivial thing, and easily understood. Its analysis shows that it is, in reality, a very queer thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties.

He speaks of “the mystical character of commodities,” this most abstract yet concrete of things, a unity of opposites. No longer interested in German idealism or Hegelian metaphysics after *The German Ideology* or in French political philosophy after his exchange with Proudhon, Marx has become an English philosopher, a follower of Adam Smith: metaphysics to politics to economics (political-economy).

Which brings us to Ned Ludd. Who was Ludd and what is his connection to technology and digital happiness—and why am I a philosophical neo-Luddite?

Although the origin of the name “Luddite” is uncertain, a popular theory is that the movement was named after Ned Ludd, a youth who allegedly smashed two stocking frames in a textile factory in 1779. His name is now emblematic of machine destroyers, but this is unfair to a character who has more in common with Robin Hood—both said to have lived in Sherwood Forest—than a bomb-throwing anarchist.

Ludd was not a technophobe, nor are neo-Luddites.

The first factories of the industrial revolution that fueled the growth of mercantile capitalism, textile mills, were filthy and disease-ridden places of extreme exploitation of weavers. In reaction to their oppression, handloom weavers burned mills and pieces of factory

⁸ In my own family, we are generations descended from peasants who descended from serfs, so the form of consumerism that I inherited is *hoarding*, though the impulse to “keep my money under my bed” has been contextualized, because of my present petit-bourgeois life, as *collecting*, that is, the accumulation of things (potatoes, onions, money, etc.) at home not because of need, as was the case of my ancestors, but because of class habit.

machinery beginning in Nottingham and spreading rapidly throughout England. Reaction to the weavers' revolt was swift. The House of Lords passed the "Frame Breakers Bill," mandating the death penalty for offenders. Alone in the House of Lords, the English poet, Lord George Gordon Byron, protested:

But while the exalted offender can find means to baffle the law, new capital punishments must be devised, new snares of death must be spread, for the wretched mechanic who is famished into guilt.

Luddites and neo-Luddites are not technophobes. Luddite destruction of new weaving technology was not aimed at the technology itself, but at the oppression created around the new manufacturing. In other words, the revolt was not against the *means of production*, machines and technology. It is aimed at the *mode of production*, the way labor is organized around that technology, that is, capitalist exploitation in what today are known as sweat shops that have been moved to Southeast Asia. In Europe, Japan, and North America, we have our own exploitative machines, digital technology, and the impact of the misuse of digitalization on happiness is profound.

Recently, the term "Neo-Luddism" emerged to describe opposition to many forms of technology. According to the "Manifesto of the Second Luddite Congress" in 1996, neo-Luddism is "a leaderless movement of passive resistance to consumerism and the increasingly bizarre and frightening technologies of the Computer Age."⁹

How does neo-Luddism contribute to an understanding of the possibility or impossibility of "digital happiness"? Is happiness for the neo-Luddite found in the destruction of oppressive digitalization? Are neo-Luddite hackers the Robin Hood heroes of a digital forest, believing that those lost in it cannot see the trees for the forest?

⁹ *Le Monde Diplomatique*: <https://mondediplo.com/1997/02/20luddites>

The UNESCO Forum of Digital Well-Being, organized by the Israel National Commission for UNESCO and its National IFAP Committee,¹⁰ came at the right time.

According to Getachew Engida, UNESCO Deputy Director-General,

We are living through times of incredible changes with new opportunities for addressing development challenges.... But, we are also seeing new digital divides and new forms of exclusion that raise hard ethical questions about balance, rhythm and harmony, indeed, about well-being. So we must give all people, particularly young women and men, the tools and opportunities to ensure that they are not controlled by technology but rather harness its full power for their own fulfillment and the benefit of all. Furthermore, as we look towards the post-2015 period, I think the outcomes of the Forum can help to shape more effective strategies and frameworks for enlisting information and communication technologies to implement the global sustainable development agenda.

The challenge is great, indeed, but finding digital happiness or happiness *in* digitalization is a task better suited to Sisyphus's hill than a hard- or software shopping mall. We can buy improved digital technology, technology that the flimflam men of the marketplace insist will make us happier, but the only guarantee that consumerism gives is that we will need to buy again. All but algorithmic idiots know that happiness cannot be bought. Nor can Martin Seligman's positive psychology, the "science of happiness," do much to alleviate human suffering. It is not neither new nor surprising that pseudo-science is shamelessly invoked by salesmen to shore up wild claims. "I'm OK. You're OK" is a rather brave tonic in the face of misery experienced or caused.

Increasingly, studies find digital cyberspace a place of isolation, loneliness, narcissism, and violence (*Cf.* Bruckman, Gelder, Michals, Trebillock, Turkle). These disorders are perhaps demonstrative of contemporary hi-tech society in general, but another explanation is that the troubling consequences of sophisticated technology are rooted in an epistemological inability

¹⁰ Along with the Department of Education of Ben Gurion University, the Sammy Ofer School of Communication at the Interdisciplinary Center, IDC Herzliya, and the Open University of Israel. The Forum was held from February 17-19, 2015 in Beer Sheva, Israel.

inherent in the medium to convey empathy, a medium-structured noetic deficiency that denies the certitude of an intersubjective bridge, suggesting a general inadequacy in digital and Internet communication, one central to each disorder in its own noetically-mediated fashion, whether visual perception, memory, imagination, or other mode of experience.

Without argument, each medium shapes its own distinct disorder. Still, descriptions of these disorders do not fully account for the poorly- and partially-constructed, hyper-mediated experience of *the Other* in cyberspace, *even while they accompany or are inherent in it*, nor do they allow for the possibility that the digitized Other is the consequence of mediation as well as social malfunction. Such manifestations of alienation appear as the consequence of communicative distance, indicating that distortion of the Other is rooted in technological mediation. Within its own physical limitations, each medium places subjects at a distance by objectifying the subjectivity of the Other. Digital hypermedia, as is to be expected, has its own set of conventional distortions.

Mediation is a way of handling the object at a distance, a form of objectification. Rendered as informational data, that is, discrete statements about the Other, the objectivity of such statements resides in the realm of analytic reason, where *quanta* are accepted as end-all descriptions of material reality. Digitization is inherently quantified representation. What is lost in the exchange of *thing (re, res)* for representational object is not the raw data of the transcendent world, but the empathy that accompanies the knowing of that data. Empathetic certitude is lost in this perception because *digital* transformation, as Don Ihde points out, “lies embedded in the preferred quantitative praxis of science” (Ihde 91). Because of its quantified structure as numeric representation, it is questionable whether digitally-mediated knowledge that requires mathematical translation of underlying code formulae can inform us intersubjectively about the world. In this sense, digitized knowledge of an object is not

perception but *decryption* of that object, generating endless speculation concerning the translation itself. In no medium is *epistemologically distancing* as formidable as in digitized cyberspace.

Interactive reiteration in cyberspace, devoid of the empathy that is intersubjectivity in face-to-face action, becomes habitual, leading to boredom. While this state-of-affairs may be true of non-digital media as well, exaggerated and uncritical claims for *interactivity* made by some “virtual realists” are misleading. Note this one-sided comment by Michael Heim:

Programming ceases to be unilateral when interactivity arrives. Digital switching is, of course, under the hood of interactivity. The computer establishes a reciprocal relationship between sender, viewer and producer.... [T]he digital era splatters attention spans till the shared sensibility dribbles into fragmentary, disintegrative de-construction (Heim 74).

Heim’s technocratic enthusiasm overstates the power and the nature of computer *interactivity* by an uncritical use of terms such as *reciprocity* and *non-unilaterality* built on the shaky grounds of notions such as “shared sensibility,” implying that a simultaneous co-lateral relationship, one of intersubjectivity, prevails in computer interactivity. In face-to-face empathetic communication, the sender-receiver relationship is mutual and simultaneous. This is not the case in digital interaction, however rapid the communication. *Digital interaction is always unilateral*, though the speed of its power to switch the direction of the signal camouflages this unilaterality with an appearance of immediate-collateral intersubjectivity. The very speed of digital transfer deceives the receiver as “simultaneous” *im-mediated* intersubjective encounter. It is, the first and greatest of the digital deceptions, is not the only. At first, the exceptional speed of interactive reciprocity gives of a counterfeit sense of Heim’s “shared,” simultaneous empathetic experience. The user is easily deceived by switching speed into an intersubjective sense of primordial *im-mediacy*, “at-once-ness,” but, guided by Edith Stein’s reiterated empathy through outer perception, the deception is soon removed. The user of

digital technology soon experiences and learns the utter and tyrannical linearity of computer interactivity. The initial, deceitful spontaneity of the interactive click is replaced by recognition of the interactive trick, the quick epistemological sleight-of-hand, the tedium that characterizes the empty, non-empathetic relationship of man and machine, and leaves users in isolation imposed by the very troublesome sophistication of the medium itself. Unfortunately, as already noted, Stein's empathetic reiteration to find truth can be followed by reiterated deception. Reiterated empathy reveals interactivity to be one-sided, that is, unilateral, not collateral, because of the tyrannical "switching" linearity of online communication. The description of the structure of interactivity as the decentered nonlinearity of a matrix misidentifies the appearance of the high-speed sequentiality of hypermediated, unilinear communication provided by the digital medium as simultaneous "shared" experience of intersubjectivity. High-speed interactivity unwraps information sequentially at speeds that mimic all-at-once and face-to-face perception, which is "blurry," but "blurriness" may be understood as *natural precision* once terminological conflation of digital "sharpness" and "precision" are removed. The purpose is not to paint all "virtual realists" with the same skeptical brush. Heim's well-known positivist speculations are balanced by the less extravagant phenomenological descriptions of on-line consciousness made by Jarod Lanier, the scientist-artist who coined the term "virtual reality," and who convincingly argues against naïve realism and advises that "You Can't Argue with a Zombie." (2)The empathy of which Stein speaks is eidetic, so we may appropriately apply a term to intersubjective experience that is inaccurately attributed to hypertext interactivity: *non-linear*. Empathy not only epistemologically establishes the ontological reality of the eidetic Other, Stein's "foreign subject," as an apodictic pre-given, but also notices the absence of the Other when empathetic communion is not found in online communication. Heim's "virtual realism" is positivism in

realistic drag, though not as farfetched as the mechanism of Ray Kurzweil's claim in *The Age of the Spiritual Machine* that:

Over the next several decades, machine competence will rival—and ultimately surpass—any particular skill one cares to cite, including our marvelous ability to place ideas in a broad diversity of contexts (5).

Stein, to the contrary, describes the communion found in the expression of empathy as “the subject entirely absorbed” (Stein 98), not replaced or “surpassed,” and Husserl, along the same line, suggests that:

[Objectivity] does arise, however—in a preliminary stage—in understandable fashion as soon as we take into consideration the function of empathy and fellow mankind as a community of empathy and of language (*Crisis* 360).

The empathy of which Edith Stein speaks is eidetic, so we may appropriately apply a term to intersubjective experience that is inaccurately attributed to hypertext interactivity: *non-linear*. Empathy not only epistemologically establishes the ontological reality of the Other, Stein's “foreign subject,” as an apodictic *pregiven*. It also notices the absence of the Other when empathetic communion is not found in digital communication. Heim's “virtual realism” is bourgeois positivism in realistic clothing, though he is not as farfetched Ray Kurzweil, who claims:

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[Objectivity] does arise, however—in a preliminary stage—in understandable fashion as soon as we take into consideration the function of empathy and fellow mankind as a community of empathy and of language (*Crisis* 360).

The rigid linearity of “on-line-ness” inhibits the expressive communion that is the hallmark of face-to-face intersubjectivity for, according to Husserl, “The intersubjective world is the correlate of the intersubjective experience, mediated, that is, through ‘empathy’.” (*Ideas* I 387)

Social and cultural phenomena are experienced socially and culturally. As a consequence, the phenomenological *flâneur* at first removes himself from his existential individuality, the “self “of the limited psychophysical observer (perceiver), and becomes the generalized “man of the crowd,” a social being, not an isolated, distinct, existential man in a Sartrean sense. This move is accompanied by the phenomenological reduction of the object. At the same time that the existence of the object of social and cultural phenomena is placed in abeyance, so too is the existence of the psychological and psychophysical ego put in *epoché*. The phenomenologist, Husserl warns, must always be on guard against “phenomenological residuum” that remains in the form of a “psychological ego” after the operation of the *epoché*. But is the appropriate *displacing* of the existential, psychophysical *cogito*, in order to grasp the phenomenological *noemata* of lived experience, in fact merely a *replacing* of that psychological perspective with an existential sociological perspective that formulates an equally ungrounded self? If so, this is simply a repetition of the same ungrounded perspective that was problematic in terms of certitude at the beginning, precisely the reason for the phenomenological reduction in the first place. It is not the place of the phenomenologist to become embroiled in the debate over the genesis and composition of the self, whether it is personal, social, or cultural. The question is *not* how to *embody* (engender, racify, and so on), but how to *disembody* experience yet still explain that experience.

Stepping aside from these debates does not dismiss the problem. If a social-cultural icon is experienced, must the experiencer also be social-cultural? Nothing is lost in the phenomenological reduction, Husserl holds, but much is gained.

Hence if anyone loves a paradox, he can really say, and say with strict truth if he will allow for the ambiguity, that the *element that makes up the life of phenomenology as of all eidetical science* is “*fiction*,” that fiction is the source whence knowledge of “eternal truths” draws its sustenance (*Ideas* 184).

Digitalized cyberlight extends from object to subject, from known to knower, reversing the direction of the phenomenological intentional flow, and *interactivity* in practice is *interpassivity* within the context of *interobjectivity*. Of interest here are questions of “intercorporeality” within the structure and functions of digitalized space, questions that deal with the problematic of digital bodies, specifically avatars and zombies. We will not here treat the intriguing disorders of social and cultural construction of the self that occur in gender-bending, ethnicity-bending, and other deceptions now commonplace in digital space, except to note in connection to a remark made above concerning zombification a pertinent comment made by Husserl:

The corpse bears in itself the representation of a human soul but no longer appresents it; and thus we see precisely a corpse, which was a man, but now no longer is. (*Ideas II* 352)

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