The Embodied Self in a Digital Age
Possibilities, Risks, and Prospects for a Pluralistic (democratic/liberal) Future?

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In the following, I seek to address three major but interrelated questions. First, how do emerging information technologies interact with our sense of self/selves, i.e., who we (believe we) are as human beings? Second, what sort of Good Life – including what sort of *polity/polities* – might be possible for these (changing) selves, both individually and collectively? Third, what sorts of choices and decisions will we need to make *regarding the sort of self/selves we will become* through our interactions with new media, in order to realize the better possible futures available to these sorts of selves?

I develop responses to these questions by taking up a well-known communication theory developed by Harold Innis, Elizabeth Eisenstein, Marshall McLuhan, and Walter Ong, and more recently elaborated by Naomi Baron (2008). This framework illuminates important correlations between a particular modality of communication – orality, literacy, print, and/or Ong's "secondary orality" of electronic media – and *conceptions of self and community*. I then revisit these correlations and conceptions by way of a *philosophical* framework from information ethics, one that foregrounds crucial correlations between conceptions of self and our basic starting points regarding *ethics* and *politics*. This highlights a strong correlation between the sort of individual self *qua* autonomy affiliated with literacy, print, and privacy expectations of citizens in modern liberal democratic polities. At the same time, however, what Ong has called the secondary orality of electronic media (1988) appears as a new form of communication that shifts from an atomic individual to a networked or "smeared-out" self – one whose *political* implications are currently up in the air.

Much appears to depend on how we understand the relationship between secondary orality and the previous stages of literacy and print in terms, i.e., as either (a) a radical dualism, such that secondary orality will extinguish literacy and print – and with it, the individual autonomy that undergirds modern liberal democracies, or (b) a relationship of complimentarity, such that secondary orality will supplement rather than replace literacy and print. Should the latter be more true than the former, then there is some hope for preserving the sort of self historically foundational to modern liberal democracies.

To examine these possibilities, I first review the emergence of computer-mediated communication, highlighting a *dualism* characteristic of 1990s' discourse. This dualism

underlies the presumed opposition between secondary orality, on the one hand, and literacy and print, on the other – along with a correlative insistence on a postmodern, *disembodied* self engaged in cyberspace, i.e., a Cartesian mind radically sundered from the body. More recent research and reflection, however, shifts to *non-dual* understandings of the relationship between our offline and online lives. This shift is further accompanied in information ethics by a (re)turn to *embodiment* as crucial to how we know the world and thereby what sorts of selves we are. These shifts, finally, are promising from a *global* perspective, insofar as they entail a shift to a *relational self* that further requires a *virtue ethics* – thereby resonating with similar understandings of self and ethics in Eastern and Indigenous traditions.

Lastly, I explore the possible futures implied by these developments, with a focus on the central question: will such a networked self – while highly relational, more fully interwoven with a larger, indeed global community – be able to sustain the basic skills and capacities of free rationality, deliberation, etc. required to justify and sustain viable democratic societies?

I argue that an unreflective embrace of secondary orality and its correlative self risks abandoning the skills and habits of literacy, print, and the sort of reflective self they foster, and thus threaten the loss of the liberal state. By contrast, the (re)turn to the body – in conjunction with an emerging global information ethics that brings to the foreground *virtue ethics* – can foster the sorts of self-cultivation required to make careful choices regarding the design and use of new media that might thereby sustain the democratic self and the liberal state.

1. Remember the 1990s?

1. A. Media Theory

The emergence of the Internet and then the World Wide Web inspired what Maria Bakardjieva characterizes as "the early euphoria surrounding everything 'cyber' and the effervescent speculations about how the Internet will transform society as we know it" (2010, 59). Stephen D. O'Leary and Brenda Brasher represent this early enthusiasm, as they see the new media ushering in what Walter Ong characterized as the "secondary orality" of electronic media, thereby resulting in a revolutionary *cultural* shift: "The transformation to secondary orality is no less momentous than the shift from primary orality to literacy, and the full implications of this transformation will take centuries to appreciate" (O'Leary & Brasher 1996, 256).

O'Leary and Brasher refer here to the communication theory initially developed in the second half of the 20th ct., by Harold Innis, Elizabeth Eisenstein, and Marshall McLuhan. These highlight how different modalities of communication – orality, literacy, and print – as a communication *technology* correlates with a specific stage of culture. Briefly, orality is the communication technology of pre-agricultural, tribal peoples. Orality relies on repetition, rhyme, and performance as ways of encoding and remembering important cultural information. Literacy emerges with agriculture and is subsequently affiliated with the emergence of critical reflection and logic among the ancient Greeks. The rise of print enables the Protestant Reformation, for example, and with it, "the individual" conceived us as an atomic isolate, one whose identity is unitary, stable, and, most importantly from the standpoint of political philosophy, *free*. Such a free self, as we shall

see in more detail shortly, undergirds and legitimates modern conceptions of democratic, liberal states (see Chesebro and Bertelsen 1996; Baron 2008, 196f.).

This view is further bolstered in the late Foucault, who highlights the role of literacy and specifically, the practices of writing diaries and letters as technologies of the self. As Marika Lüders points out,

> … Foucault strongly emphasises the *virtue* of self-development, bringing the Greek philosophical idea of *epimeleia heautou*, or 'care of oneself', into the limelight, arguing that *an ethical way of life* concerns a certain, meditative way of considering life, behaving in the world, acting and relating to other people. (2007, 48; emphasis added, CE)

I understand 'virtue' here in the sense taken up in virtue ethics. 'Virtue' (*arête* – "excellence") refers to the qualities or capacities (e.g., patience, perseverance – indeed, reason itself) seen to contribute to our living the good life in its broadest sense, i.e., a life of individual well-being (*eudaimonia* or "happiness") in harmony with the larger community. The central insight of virtue ethics is that these capacities, like those of the skilled athlete, dancer, or musician, are not given, but acquired, and only through a long and often difficult *practice* of cultivating these abilities so as to make them matters of habit and ever more facile or excellent. Virtue ethics thus requires of us the *choice* to develop specific habits and practices that foster excellence in these capacities and abilities as part of an on-going lifetime project of self-cultivation and development. In this light, Foucault's point is that the *virtue* (or excellence) of a specific kind of self-development seems to depend crucially on the sorts of reflection and self-representation – and thus self-construction – that writing makes possible.

Foucault's focus on writing as facilitating a specific sort of virtuous self then occasions our central question: *what happens to our sense of self* as we shift – via multiple electronic technologies, but most certainly the internet and world-wide-web – from emphasis on literacy and print to the prevalence of such secondary orality?

1. B. Literacy, print and the modern self: political implications

The force of this question is heightened as we turn to political philosophy – specifically with regard to the kind of *self* that both requires and legitimates the modern liberal democratic state.

Most briefly, such a self is characterized, in Kantian terms, as a rational *autonomy* – i.e., a rationality capable of self-rule (rather than rule by others). Such a self, in part by expressing and reflecting upon itself via the technologies literacy and print, is able to rationally deliberate, posit and critique alternative ends and courses of actions. Thereby, it is enabled to freely choose and *judge* (in the technical senses of *phronesis* [the Socratic/Aristotelian conception of a kind of practical judgment or wisdom] and Kant's reflective judgment) *what is to be one's own conception of the good life*, (including political, religious, career, and other personal choices and commitments (in Kantian language, one's *ends*) and thus the appropriate and necessary *means* for achieving those ends. In this light, it should become clear that the technologies of literacy and print thus facilitate the emergence of a sense of self that is foundational to the justification of modern liberal democracies (cf. Berlin 1969, 131).

Moreover, this self simultaneously funds the modern sense of *privacy*, including in the contemporary world, *information* privacy. Broadly, such a self requires privacy first of all as a freedom *from* the interference and surveillance of others: this private space allows us to freely reflect, express, and revise our thoughts and sensibilities – as part and parcel of a correlative freedom *to* make the foundational choices that define our conception of the good life, how we will pursue it, and thereby the specific sort of *person* that we will seek to become (cf. Johnson 2001, ch. 3; Meeler 2008).

1. C. Media theory

This brief reminder of the sort of self essential to modern liberal democracy sharpens the political significance of the contemporary shift to secondary orality: what happens to such a self in an age of electronic media and the shift towards Ong's secondary orality – and will it remain the kind of self that requires and legitimates modern liberal democracy?

Again, Ong apparently believed that this new sort of communication technology would, as with the previous technologies of orality, literacy, and print, emerge as a supplementary layer (my term) – <u>not</u> as somehow as a displacement and replacement of the previous technologies. Indeed, as Klaus Bruhn Jensen perceptively notes: "Old media rarely die, and humans remain the reference point and prototype for technologically mediated communication" (2010, 44).

By contrast, however, a number of early enthusiasts and proponents of the then-nascent internet and world-wide-web emphasized rather that the secondary orality of cyberspace would issue in a radical overturning of all previous ways of communicating. So John Perry Barlow proclaimed: "With the development of the Internet, and with the increasing pervasiveness of communication between networked computers, ***we are in the middle of the most transforming technological event since the capture of fire***. (1995, 56, cited in Wellman 2010, 18; emphasis added, CE).

Given the correlations developed in the Innis-Ong schema, this transformation in our primary communication technologies predictably entails a radical change in our sense of self – i.e., the rise of the 'postmodern' self. While oceans of ink have been spilt on this notion, here, however, I solely highlight the specifically *Cartesian* character of several characterizations of such a postmodern self made by an extensive range of authors who constitute a kind of canon of literature surrounding emerging CMC technologies, beginning with Donna Haraway (1990) and extending through Howard Rheingold's foundational *Virtual Communities* (1993). This list would further include Sherry Turkle (1997), as well as John Perry Barlow's "Declaration of Independence of Cyberspace" (1996). But even earlier than Haraway, Hans Moravec's *Mind Children* (1988) predicted that human beings would eventually be able to upload their consciousness into ostensibly eternal computing networks and Artificial Intelligence systems, and thereby achieve a sort of eternal life in cyberspace. Moravec's vision makes clear the fundamentally *Cartesian* dualism underlying the more general sense that human beings might achieve some sort of liberation in cyberspace. That is, such liberation would be the liberation of a mind radically separate from a body – what Barlow, following William Gibson in his (equally canonical) novel *Neuromancer*, contemptuously referred to as "meat" (1984, 6; cf. Ess 2004)

1. D. The body strikes back ...

Positively, this contempt for the body *qua* meat serves as the occasion for Donna Haraway's highly influential Cyborg Manifesto (1990), in which she argued that women as bodiless in cyberspace would no longer be subject to the male gaze, much less physical violence. But these celebrations of bodiless liberation in cyberspace were soon challenged, beginning with Allucquere Roseanne Stone who pointed out that "… virtual community originates in, and must return to, the physical. . . . Forgetting about the body is an old Cartesian trick" (1991, 113). Stone's insight and critique were eventually reinforced by an emerging body of empirical research in CMC, beginning with Nancy Baym's work on fan communities (1995) that convincingly demonstrated that, *contra* the prevailing Cartesian assumptions, actual human behavior online was inextricably interwoven with our offline practices and identities. Susan Herring further showed through discourse analysis that online communication almost always betrayed gender-specific communication characteristics (1996, 1999). Similarly, emerging research likewise demonstrated that race does not disappear in cyberspace (Kolko, Nakamura, and Rodman 2000). Indeed, by the early part of this century, two of the most prominent and influential voices of the 1990s enthusiasm for a virtual world as radically disconnected from our embodied lives – namely, Jay David Bolter (2001) and Howard Rheingold (2000) – sought to correct their earlier, more dualistically based viewpoints.

1. E. Empiricism and phenomenology: the (re)turn to embodiment

In parallel with these transformations in the domain of CMC literature and research, a number of philosophers – all working within the field of phenomenology – developed an extensive series of accounts of human experience and knowledge as inextricably interwoven with our existence as *embodied* beings. The first of these is Albert Borgmann, who emphasizes how our existence as embodied beings ineluctably ties us to the "gravity" of the body, a gravity that is defined by our experiences of *eros* and *thanatos* (death) – *contra,* in particular, the "extropian" hopes of Moravec (2000; see Ess, 2002).

Barbara Becker further develops this turn to embodiment, beginning with an extended phenomenological critique of several postmodernist theories. While acknowledging their importance and insights, Becker argues that these theories overlook the *materiality* of bodies, subjects, and nature (2001, 69). To denote this sense of a material body active in shaping its social existence, Becker uses the neologism *LeibSubject*, "BodySubject," in explicit contrast with a radical split between *Geist* and *Leib*, mind and body. (For further discussion, see Ess 2004.)

Also grounded in the phenomenological tradition, Hubert Dreyfus draws on Nietzsche's critique of dualism in the Western tradition – a critique that explicitly rejects precisely the hope of such dualisms to escape the human realities of finitude and death (2001, 6). Moreover, drawing on Kierkegaard, Dreyfus describes how human beings *learn* as embodied beings in a rich sense, i.e., the mastery at work in the experienced physician, skilled musician, etc. Such learning is inextricably interwoven with our extensive experience *qua* embodied beings – e.g., as apprentices learn from those with greater experience and judgment, precisely in order to acquire *judgment* (in the Aristotelian sense of *phronesis*), one of the most central elements of expertise and ethical/political interaction.

While further examples could be included here, I hope this sketch makes clear that, in parallel with the very strong trend of empirical research within the field of CMC, philosophers in the phenomenological tradition have developed a rich account of our lives as embodied human beings that turns away from 1990s dualisms and correlative hopes for a bodiless liberation and immortality in cyberspace.

2. A Global 'Web 2.0' and the (Re)turn to Nondualism and Embodiment

2. A. Media theory and research

Indeed, it appears that these twin turns from 1990s' dualisms are only accelerated by the advent of the so-called "Web 2.0." While there is dispute as to how novel "Web 2.0" may be – it is clear that the ever-expanding range of possibilities for communication via ICTs continue to interweave with our offline lives. The result is that the strong polarities undergirding 1990s' dualisms between the "real" and the "virtual," the "offline" vs. the "offline," etc., simply don't hold up. In particular, the forthcoming *Blackwell Handbook of Internet Studies* collects an extensive range of research overviews across much of the spectrum of CMC research. Taken together, these demonstrate "the complex interrelations between online and offline life" – with the result that "…to talk of such distinctions seems almost quaint, and hardly helps us to understand how, for example, individuals relate to others, and how they continually shape and transform … the tools and messages with which they work" (M. Consalvo & C. Ess 2010, 4).

2. B. the (re)turn to the embodied – and relational self: self, privacy, and community

These developments return us to our key question: what do these imply for our conception of our self/selves, especially as these conceptions appear to correlate with the modalities of communication, i.e., from orality through secondary orality?

From the networked to the smeared-out self. Within CMC research, Barry Wellman and Caroline Haythornthwaite's "networked individual" denotes the self facilitated by increasing interweaving with communication networks (2002). The network as not only a primary technology but primary metaphor is striking here – in part because it immediately resonates with parallel uses of this conception that are increasingly central in philosophy and information ethics. So Carol Gilligan (1982) introduced the importance of "webs of relationships" in understanding how women tend to make ethical decisions, in contrast with a more individualistic/autonomous approach characteristic of many males. The web of relationships became a guiding motif in subsequent feminist theory – one conjoined in an ecofeminism by Karen Warren with parallel notions from ecology of networked and interwoven ecosystems (1990).

In these ways, these two diverse fields thus converge on a contemporary sense of self as the *relational* self – i.e., a self that defines itself primarily in terms of the relationships it holds both within human communities (of family, friends, and larger groups, including polities) and the larger natural (and for some, supernatural) communities surrounding us. Within Western traditions of philosophy, this emerging understanding of the embodied/relational self is articulated and supported with especial force by Susan Stuart (2008). Stuart's account, in drawing on contemporary work in neuroscience, demonstrates recent shifts from the cognitivist accounts of mind and knowledge characteristic of "hard" AI in

the last century – including the cognitivism and Cartesian dualism we have seen underlying 1990s' conceptions of a disembodied liberation in cyberspace. By contrast, what Stuart calls enactivism highlights multiple pre-reflective, non-cognitive ways in which the body is constantly interrogating and attuning itself to its immediate environment. The upshot is again a strong refutation of Cartesian dualism: this account demonstrates instead that "there is an inseparability of mind and world, and it is *embodied practice* rather than *cognitive deliberation* that marks the agent's *engagement* with its world" (2008, 256).

The "post-postmodern" relational self: resonances with ancient Western / Eastern views

I have argued elsewhere that these turns towards a more relational sense of self (re)turn us to both pre-modern Western conceptions of the self vis-à-vis the larger community (perhaps most famously, Aristotle's dictum that human beings are naturally social – *Politics*, I.2, 1253a2), as well as towards Eastern conceptions of the self as a relational self, beginning with Confucian thought (Ess 2005, 2006, 2007). Specifically, Plato's *cybernetes* – the ship's pilot – exemplifies such a relational, embodied self whose knowledge, *feeling*, and *judgments* about how to navigate in difficult seas as a primary metaphor for *phronesis* and its central role in our ethical lives (*Republic,* 360e-361a*;* cf. 332e–c, 489c). Similarly, for Confucius, the human being *is* his or her relationships. Henry Rosemont, Jr., offers the useful analogy between such a self and an onion: each of our relationships – as parent, child, friend, lover, sibling, etc. – constitutes a layer of such an "onion self." If any given relationship is lost or changed, so the self changes. This represents a fundamental contrast with a modern Western self, especially as conceived of as a Cartesian mind radically divorced from its own body (2006).

A more feminist/environmental/global relational self – but what of modern liberal democracy?

A last way of thinking about this networked individual is as the "smeared-out" self. This expression denotes a weak analogy between contemporary senses of self and quantum mechanical descriptions of sub-atomic particles. Somewhat like a quantum particle that, prior to its realization in one specific configuration upon observation or measurement, exists only as a set of potential locations "smeared out" in space – so we are increasingly aware of ourselves as distributed across CMC networks via multiple means of communication (SMS, social networking sites, micro-blogging, email, etc.) that thereby represent hundreds, if not thousands, of simultaneous but potential relationships/engagements that we realize one at time.

This analogy highlights the stark contrasts between a relational sense of self and the modern (Western) sense of the self as an "atomic" individual – e.g., a Cartesian rationality radically separate from its own body. Again, this atomic sense of self, especially as an essential freedom or autonomy, thereby becomes foundational for the modern liberal and democratic state. And as we have seen, this atomic self is thought to require a distinctive kind of individual *privacy*. By contrast, relational selves focus more on communication and other practices intended to foster a sense of community – what Anders Albrechtslund has helpfully identified as "lateral surveillance" (2008). They thereby de-emphasize the self as an atomic isolate, and thereby individual privacy, in favor of greater interaction and interconnectivity with both Others and others.

2. C. Some immediate (positive) consequences: community, convergence, hybridization

Albrechtslund highlights a positive consequence of such lateral surveillance – namely, the recovery of a sense of community characteristic of earlier times (2008). As well, this shift in contemporary Western conceptions of the self would explain, for example, why younger people *qua* relational selves seem far less worried about losing their privacy by way of online self-revelation, as compared with their elders whose sense of *individual* privacy presumes an atomic conception of the self.

   Equally positively, this shift thus brings Western societies closer to our Eastern counterparts. As I have argued elsewhere, these shifts are necessary for the emergence of a global information ethics that will provide us with shared norms while simultaneously protecting and fostering cultural differences in important ways (Ess 2005, 2006, 2009). Indeed, as contemporary Western conceptions of the self apparently shift towards Eastern conceptions pointing eastward – in such Eastern societies as Japan, China, and Thailand, conceptions of the self and affiliated notions of privacy are dramatically shifting in Western directions. To begin with, young people in these societies – in part, under the influence of Western cultural models – are increasingly demanding *individual* privacy for themselves, confounding their elders as wedded to more traditional understandings of the relational self which sees individual 'privacy' as threatening the harmony of the community (Ess 2005). More recently, Soraj Hongladarom has articulated a Buddhist conception of the 'empirical self', in contrast with the enlightened self that understands individual 'self' as a pernicious illusion. In the context of Thailand's traditionally hierarchical political traditions, Hongladarom's empirical self – like its modern Western counterpart – justifies individual privacy and other basic rights of citizens in a democratic society (2007). In these two ways, then, we see what were once Eastern conceptions (i.e., conceptions clearly distinct from Western conceptions) mirroring changes in the West – i.e., as they point westward in adopting and adapting what were once exclusively Western conceptions of the self and privacy.

3. Electronic Media as Weapons of Mass Distraction vs. the (Re)turn to Body as Anchor of Identity and Focus of Virtue Ethics

This overview may close with a happy ending. Presuming that the body and embodiment are indeed crucial to knowing ourselves and engaging the world around us – then more contemporary research and philosophical reflection redeem the body and embodiment from their threatened extinction by a 1990s' endorsement of the virtual as radically disconnected from and opposed to the material and the real.

   These developments suggest an optimistic picture of a global society, one that pluralistically preserves conceptions and practices of self *qua* embodied, community, and ontology defining local traditions, conjoined with shared understandings of self, community, and ethics appropriate to the communication networks that increasingly tie us together. In particular, the sense of self and community that emerges in the work of Stuart and Hongladarom is further accompanied by a shared focus on *virtue ethics* as an ethical framework essential to the shaping and development of such networked selves. We have seen this turn to virtue ethics in Foucault's focus on the virtue of the care of the self made possible by literacy. More recently, Shannon Vallor's analyses of mobile

technologies foregrounds how these technologies may foster or hinder important virtues (2009). Indeed, one of the most influential information philosophers, Luciano Floridi, has developed an information ontology that entails a "networked morality" directly parallel with contemporary environmental and feminist ethics. Most broadly, Floridi's ontology resonates with ontologies generally characterized in terms of philosophical naturalism in both Western and Eastern traditions – e.g., in Spinoza, Plato, Buddhism, and Confucian thought (Ess 2009). These traditions and figures again (re)turn us to virtue ethics as necessary for realizing the relational self's best possibilities.

3. A. Reinscription of gender stereotypes, return of the male gaze, violence

All is not sweetness and light, however. To begin with, the collapse of the 1990s' Cartesian dualism clearly undermines early feminist hopes (Haraway) of escaping the male gaze and violence against women in a bodiless cyberspace. On the contrary, not only does gender fail to disappear in cyberspace; not only is the internet and the web – and, increasingly, our mobile phones – exquisitely well suited for the production and distribution of pornographies that, with some important exceptions, appear to largely reinforce traditional gender stereotypes and thereby the subordination of women. Finally, even within the more mundane domains of virtual worlds and social networking sites, the blurring of any putative boundary between the offline and the online means that traditional gender stereotypes are easily reinscribed, if not amplified in online domains. A great deal of evidence along these lines can be adduced here, but perhaps most strikingly, Suely Fragoso and Martinsdo Rosário have documented how participants in *Second Life* literally enhanced their avatars in ways that reiterated and amplified such stereotypes (2008). The (re)turn to embodiment, it seems, inevitably brings the abuses of patriarchy in its wake.

3. B. Secondary orality, the loss of the modern atomic self – the loss of modern liberal democracy?

The shift away from the "classic" modern self, moreover, forces the question: will such a networked, "smeared-out" self – while highly relational, more fully interwoven with a larger, indeed global community, and shaped by an emerging global virtue ethics – be able to acquire and sustain the basic skills and capacities of free rationality, deliberation, and judgment (*phronesis*) required to justify and sustain viable democratic societies?

Some positive responses to this question are possible. Briefly, if we follow Ong's own view, now as reinforced by contemporary research and reflection that emphasizes the *continuity* between previous forms of communication and the ever-expanding secondary orality of electronic media, then we can perhaps be optimistic that the sort of modern self associated with the technologies of literacy and print will be sustained as part of a more complex sense of self, i.e., one that includes the more relational sense of self described above. Naomi Baron describes this direction in terms of a "*print culture sans print*" which conjoins the "fast text" and ephemeral texts that we produce *en masse*, e.g., via texting and micro-blogging, with the self fostered by literacy and print culture, including careful reflection, logical clarity, etc. (2008). We can extend her suggestion with Lüders' point from Foucault: as supplemented rather than replaced by secondary orality, the skills and abilities of literacy and print will continue to make possible the

sort of "care of self" apparently needed to foster the emergence and sustained presence of a modern self as moral agent.

This optimism would be reinforced, finally, by the (re)turn to the body we have witnessed. If we do not fall prey to "the old Cartesian trick" of "forgetting the body" (Stone), we thereby always come home, so to speak, to the unitary body, the *LeibSubjekt* that is our own and no one else's. As our *embodied* experience and interactions with embodied Others constantly remind us of and anchor us in our singular body, such experiences and interactions may reinforce our sense of identity in modern terms, i.e., as a singular individual and moral agent with some coherency and continuity in our identity and experience, not simply a networked self smeared out across a nearly infinite range of relationships made possible by networked communication technologies.

Darker futures, however, also seem possible, if not likely. So Baron describes an alternative future of "Print sans print culture," referring thereby to early 1990s' celebrations of secondary orality as a complete replacement of the technologies of literacy and print. On this trajectory, a few people might still cultivate the production and collection of books, dedicating themselves to writing journals, diaries, and letters the old-fashioned way – and thereby, continue to cultivate the self like Foucault's 1st century Romans and, for Baron, the Renaissance humanists such as Erasmus and the moderns such as Jefferson. But such people will resemble much more a Roman elite or the Confucian literati than a modern democratic citizen as envisioned by Locke, Jefferson, and Berlin.

Indeed, a very unhappy ending to our story is starkly suggested by Neil Postman, who famously worried that Western societies, as increasingly saturated by diverse media, were already on the edge of "amusing ourselves to death" (1984). Postman made his case by contrasting two dystopias, Orwell's (better known) *1984*, and Huxley's (lesser known) *Brave New World* (originally published in 1931). Most briefly, Postman characterizes Huxley's dystopia as one in which "…people will come to love their oppression, to adore the technologies that undo their capacities to think" (1984, vii).

This observation takes on particular salience in light of the contrasts between the technologies of literacy and print, as these are affiliated with a particular sort of (modern) self that is rational, critical, and reflective in ways crucial for modern liberal democracies, and the sorts of relational selves we may become via secondary orality, especially as these incline us away from the sort of critical rationality affiliated with literacy and print. Crudely put, pre-literate societies are both authoritarian (including the predominance of the community and tradition over the individual and innovation) and more or less patriarchal. Especially in light of increasing evidence that our immersion in the internet, along with affiliated contemporary communication technologies, thereby inclines us in the direction of a secondary orality – and with it, a smeared-out self characterized by shorter attention spans and less capacity to engage with critical argument – it may not be needless handwringing to worry, following Postman, that the communication media of secondary orality indeed threaten to undo our capacity to think in the ways required for the autonomous self and liberal democracies.

Perhaps most seriously, Huxley's uncanny anticipation of the darker possibilities of contemporary society includes a focus on "…man's [*sic*] almost infinite appetite for distractions" (*ibid*). If anything, even more perfectly and completely than Huxley's "feelies" and Postman's movies and TV, the internet appears to serve as a medium for

controlling us by oversaturation, reduction to passivity – all done by way of largely innocent satiation of our near-infinite appetite for pleasure and distraction. Of course, we are in love with this medium – but thereby, as Postman and Huxley suggest, we risk falling in love with the technologies of our enslavement.

This may sound too dire, too alarmist, too curmudgeonly and too Luddite. But against all the wonderful possibilities and new developments facilitated by contemporary communication technologies – these contemporary shifts and developments argue for me that as we continue to develop and use these technologies, we must pay ever greater attention to how they may influence and reshape our sense of self – along with the correlative social and political possibilities and implications of such selves.

3. C. Happier endings?

If we do so, then I think a happier ending to the emergence of secondary orality and the networked self may well be possible.

To begin with, if I have been successful here in holding together the frameworks of CMC research and philosophy and information ethics – then I hope this suggests the value of continuing along this interdisciplinary path so as to further take advantage of CMC research, philosophy, and information ethics in the service of working toward this happier ending. First of all, these continued efforts will help us better understand and thereby foster greater (self-) awareness of how our various communication technologies interact with our sense of self – thus making possible the *informed* choices necessary (especially within a framework of virtue ethics) regarding which technologies to use under what circumstances.

Second, this would mean further developing within philosophy and information ethics our understanding of this emerging conjunction between *virtue ethics, the body, and the art of crafting a self*. As we have seen, this conscious cultivation of the self through careful and reflective choices of our communication options is highlighted by literacy and then print. At the same time, the ethical transformations in the West over the past few decades have included a (re)turn to virtue ethics. As a reminder: virtue ethics is a central component of not only ancient (e.g., Socratic and Aristotelian) but also modern Western ethics, including feminist and environmental ethics. At the same time, it is central to such non-Western traditions as Confucian thought, Buddhism, and multiple indigenous traditions – traditions we are increasingly linked to and hybridizing with via our networked communication technologies. Virtue ethics is thus a strong candidate for a *global* information ethics.

Finally, virtue ethics depends centrally on the body. Both Socrates and Aristotle argued that just as we know that we must cultivate and care for the body through appropriate diet, exercise, and related habits oriented towards excellence (e.g., as athletes, musicians, etc.) if we are to enjoy a sense of well-being and contentment – so we must cultivate the capacities and habits of the self in order to achieve the harmony and balance that likewise constitute a sense of "psychic" (from *psyche*, self or soul) well-being and contentment.

Hence, as our (re)turn to the body restores a central focus on the importance of body as core to and anchor of our sense of identity (so Borgmann, among others) – so this (re)turn may further remind us of the central importance of cultivating the virtues or excellences necessary for both physical and psychic health and well-being. This sort

of (re)turn to the body and virtue ethics might then keep in the foreground the sort of self-cultivation fostered by literacy and print – and thereby preserve, if not foster, the sort of self required for modern democracies and liberal states.

Following Ong's original sense that secondary orality will work to supplement rather than exterminate literacy and print, we might anticipate the emergence of a hybrid self, one that conjoins

a. a modern-style individual self – one we can now call a "virtuous self," cultivated primarily by the technologies of literacy and print, immersed in the life project of practicing, within some "core space" of privacy, *autonomy*, *phronesis*, the virtues of patience, perseverance, as *communicative* virtues necessary for

b. the relational self – one widely distributed via network technologies that further entail the pleasures, conveniences, (and: infinite distractions) of secondary orality, as at least frequently open to the (lateral, if not hierarchical) surveillance of others?

I believe that this focus will become an increasingly important project in information ethics, as part of a larger focus on what "the good life" might mean for networked selves inextricably interwoven with others in larger, increasingly more complex and technologically-mediated communities. Such a focus, complemented with parallel work in media studies on how our sense of self is changing vis-à-vis new communication technologies, seems a promising counter to the worst-case scenario – allowing ourselves to be blithely drawn into a web of infinite distractions and falling in love with the technologies of our enslavement.

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