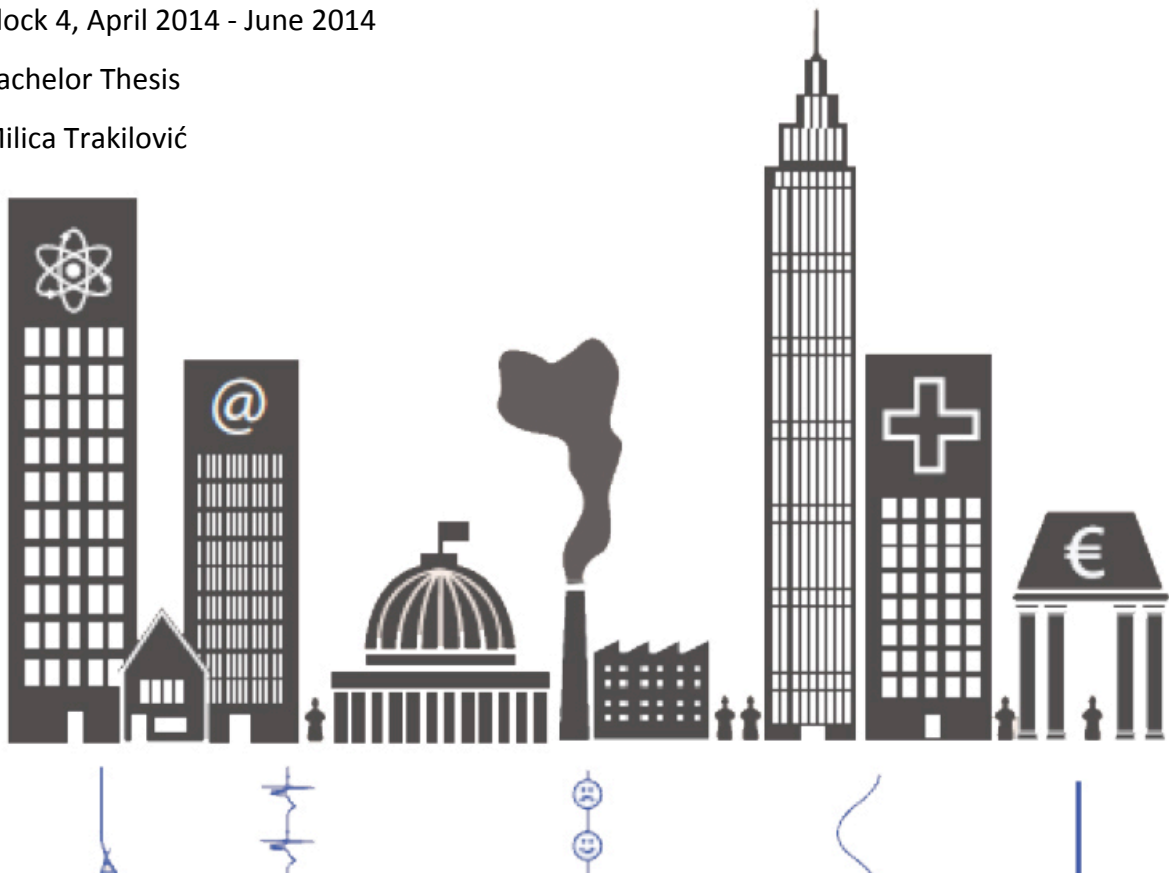


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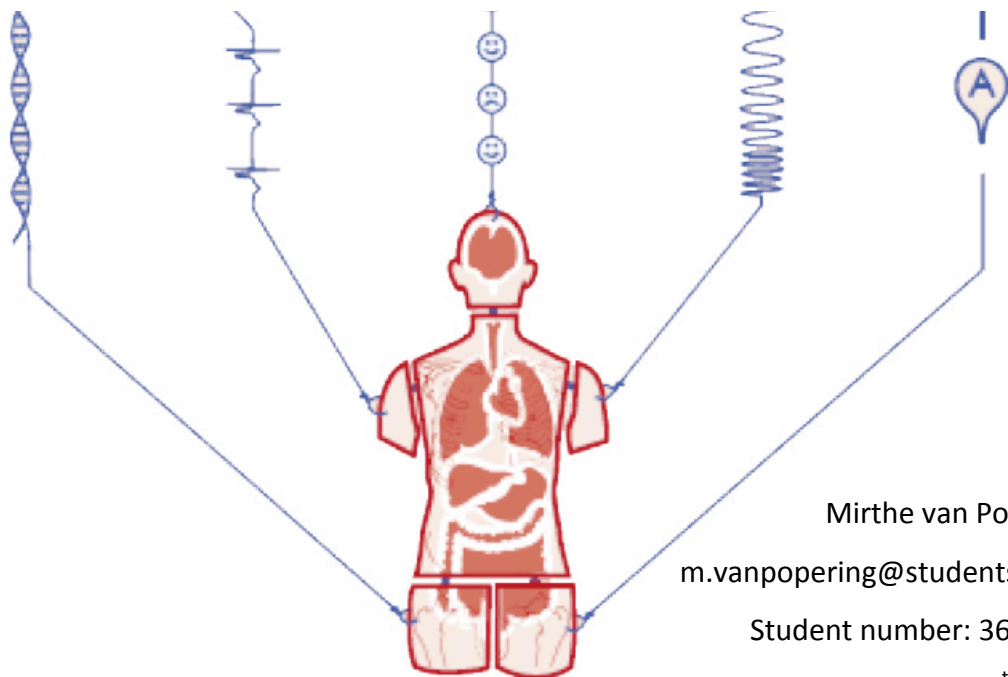
Bachelor Thesis

Milica Trakilović



THE INTIMATE PANOPTICON

The techno-body at the dawn of the third millennium



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ABSTRACT

Technological innovations bring the machine ever closer to everyday life, as our bodies, minds and social environment – things we regard as vital elements of what constitutes being human – become increasingly interwoven with technology and cyberspace. Whereas our merging with technology offers new possibilities for self-fashioning, it simultaneously makes us more controllable and steerable than ever before, causing notions such as autonomy, freedom and subjectivity to shift. How does the intimate-technological revolution, in pushing the human body into a ‘malleable’ entity comprising both natural and technological elements, affect and reshape the contemporary subject? A dialectical analysis of a selection of Foucault’s and Braidotti’s main work will allow for a refreshing synthesis, that has the shape of a highly contemporaneous account of the (post)human subject.

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Introduction

*"For all previous millennia, our technologies have been aimed outward, to control our environment. [...] Now, however, we have started a wholesale process of aiming our technologies inward. Now our technologies have started to merge with our minds, our memories, our metabolisms, our personalities, our progeny and perhaps our souls."*¹

Technological innovations bring the machine ever closer to everyday life, as our bodies, minds and social environment – things we regard as vital elements of what constitutes being human – become increasingly interwoven with technology and cyberspace. The constantly renewed and improved iPhone and other smartphones by now have become a fixed part of our digitally extended identities and complex devices such as Google Glass will soon be just as ubiquitous. Thousands of bodies have been technologically enhanced by prosthetic limbs or even tiny pace makers, assuring the rhythmic pounding of the heart when it fails to do so autonomously, and printed organs have already been announced as the next big thing.² The omnipresence of cameras and the increasing use of facial recognition systems in public areas – as security and prevention have become the credo of western governments since the September 11 attacks – complete the all-round implementation of technology into life.

In the public sphere this proliferation of innovative technologies has engendered a twofold stream of reactions: euphoric accounts of techno-optimism are contrasted by feelings of (nostalgic) anxiety. Newspapers, for instance, report as much on groundbreaking new techniques as on issues of surveillance and privacy, the recent NSA scandals being the foremost example.³ Underlying these contradictory feelings and expressions, is the fact that the changes brought about in the advent of a techno-

¹ Joel Garreau, *Radical Evolution: The Promise and Peril of Enhancing Our Minds, Our Bodies – and What It Means to Be Human*. (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 6.

² See for instance: Brandon Griggs, "The Next Frontier in 3-D Printing: Human Organs," CNN, <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/04/03/tech/innovation/3-d-printing-human-organs/> (accessed July 7, 2014).

³ In popular culture and the arts, representations of technology have been equally divided. Exemplary for present-day techno-optimism is Venezuelan filmmaker, philosopher and futurist Jason Silva, who manages an online channel called "Shots of Awe", on which he uploads short, inspirational videos exploring the advancement of technology. See for instance: Jason Silva, "To be Human is to be Transhuman," YouTube video, 2:22, posted by *Shots of Awe*, March 25, 2014, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FN57u7-x75w>. Conversely, the pitch-black prospects characteristic for the nostalgic or anxious attitude versus technology can be illustrated by the recently published dystopian novel *The Circle* by Dave Eggers: Dave Eggers, *The Circle* (London: Penguin Books, 2013). A similarly alerting perspective is imbedded within the work of visual artist Nancy Nisbet, as her artistic explorations reflect the urge to resist some of the powerful aspects of (surveillance) technology: Nancy Nisbet, "Resisting Surveillance: Identity and Implantable Microchips," *Leonardo* 37, no. 3 (2004): 210-14.

world aren't solely material; their extent goes beyond metal and wire alone. Indeed, our merging with technology touches our very 'being' as it both offers far-reaching new possibilities for self-fashioning and simultaneously makes us more controllable and steerable than ever before. Pivotal concepts such as autonomy, freedom and subjectivity are shifting, now that fast, vast waves of change incessantly stir our once quiet shores.

In engaging with these substantial transformations and the sticky web of power-relations inextricably bound to them, I inevitably and consciously enter the arena of feminist thought and text; third-wave feminist theorists have occupied themselves with questions of subject-forming and the merging of technology with flesh for quite a long stretch of time now.⁴ Transdisciplinary, transmedial, international and radically non-essentialist, third-wave or poststructuralist feminist thought defies borders and seeks to deconstruct binary oppositions including that of humanity versus technology and seamlessly fits the complexity, paradoxes and capriciousness of present times.⁵ The feminist framework, with its Foucauldian percipience for structures of power and knowledge, hence forms an especially useful and critical tool in the dynamic discussion I intend to present.

Other scholars too have drawn attention to the debate on technology. In January of this year, the Dutch Rathenau Institute published a report on what it coins the intimate-technological revolution, urging its readers to contemplate on the transformations induced by technology.⁶ Titled *Intimate Technology - the battle for our body and behaviour*, the report powerfully illustrates the merging of man and machine and the intimate nature of our information technology or "the trend that technology is rapidly nesting itself in between us, very close to us and even within us, increasingly coming to know us and even receiving human traits."⁷ Intimate technology sparks many social and ethical questions and it is an exploration of these very questions,

⁴ This particular emphasis within feminist research can be traced all the way back to Donna Haraway's (in)famous *Cyborg Manifesto*: Donna J. Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

⁵ For an extensive introduction to third-wave feminism, see: Rosemarie Buikema, van der Tuin, Iris, "Doing Gender in Media, Art and Culture," (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), a wide-ranging collection of essays introducing third-wave feminism and contemporary gender studies.

⁶ The Rathenau Institute explores developments in science and technology, points at their effects on society and policy and stimulates dialogue and debate in order to support decision-making concerning science and technology.

⁷ Rinie van Est, "Intimate Technology: The Battle for Our Body and Behaviour," (Den Haag: Rathenau Instituut, 2014), 6.

conducted by experts in different fields (“politicians, administrators, lawyers, scientists, futurists, philosophers and ethicists”) as well as citizens, which the Rathenau Institute strives to instigate.⁸ Then, even though the report “seeks to address fundamental questions such as: How does intimate technology affect our humanity?” its merit lies in raising consciousness with regard to the (undesired) influence intimate technology can exert on our bodies and behavior and most of all in *setting* a debate.⁹ It does not, however, present us with any actual theorizing on the sketched developments.

Therefore, I would like to retake the just quoted question as well as the well-chosen concept of ‘intimate technology’, discuss it within a socio-philosophical and analytical perspective and examine whether the slightly worried voice accompanying the report is appropriate or not, throughout using poststructuralist feminist thought as a navigational tool. Hence, my leading question: *how does the intimate-technological revolution, in pushing the human body into a malleable entity comprising both ‘natural’ and ‘technological’ elements, affect and reshape the contemporary subject?* Since the scope of this thesis is necessarily small, I am obliged to present no more than a partial answer.¹⁰ Accordingly, I have decided to address two authors, whose work covers essential and enlightening arguments on both technology and subjectivity: Michel Foucault and feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti.

In order to locate myself within the scholarly debate I am about to enter, I will engage with two young disciplinary fields closely connected to their work, presenting an outline of recent views stemming from surveillance studies and commenting on these from a gender perspective (§i). Thereupon I will link the position thus arrived at to a dialectical approach in a brief methodological section (§ii). The body of my text, then, stages a dynamic play revolving around power relations, technology and the subject. Starting from Foucault’s social philosophy in a theoretical paragraph that underpins the analytical part of my thesis, I will revive several key concepts formulated in *Discipline and Punish* – a canonical work on disciplinary power that, when read from a contemporary perspective, offers a nearly perfect blueprint for an analysis of the

⁸ Idem, 7.

⁹ Idem, 8.

¹⁰ I have opted for specific emphases and have done so from a specific perspective, addressing specific authors – a framework that will be more extensively considered in my academic positioning and methodological section.

intimate-technological era.¹¹ By fusing Foucault's notions of discipline, docility and panopticism with present techno-culture, hence imbedding intimate technology within poststructuralist thought, light will be shed on an initial sub question: to what extent can the intimate-technological revolution be seen as productive of a society penetrated by panoptic mechanisms, hence turning the techno-body into a docile one (§1)? In the main analyzing part of my thesis, I will let the Foucauldian discourse enter into a refreshing dialogue with a posthuman perspective on subjectivity as offered by Rosi Braidotti.¹² More specifically, I will set the Foucauldian notion of the docile body against that of the nomadic subject as proposed by Braidotti, addressing a second sub question that seeks to analyze intimate technology within a clearly positive context, emphasizing its potential for self-fashioning: in what ways could the intimate-technological revolution or our 'becoming-machine' be understood as empowering and a means for enhancing the subject (§2)? Drawing on the synthesis hence arrived at, the third and final paragraph steers towards a posthumanist deconstruction of the classical human subject and defends a view on the contemporary subject as having shifted from a static 'being' into a hybrid and dynamic 'becoming', simultaneously pleading for the need of a perpetual critique and an informed 'techno-citizenship' (§3).

i. Academic positioning

When analyzing the impact of 21st century technology on the human subject with reference to Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, one cannot leave unmentioned the disciplinary field of surveillance studies. Then, the direction and emphasis of the field have long been decided by the architectural figure of the panopticon, as appropriated by Foucault.¹³ Originally stemming from a design for prison architecture conceived in 1791 by Jeremy Bentham, Foucault introduces the panopticon as an exemplar of modern mechanisms of control. The fact that the figure has gained interest among

¹¹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977).

¹² Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 2002).

¹³ See: Gilbert Caluya, "The Post-Panoptic Society? Reassessing Foucault in Surveillance Studies," *Social Identities* 16, no. 5 (2010): 621-33; Torin Monahan, "Surveillance as Cultural Practice," *The Sociological Quarterly* 52, no. 4 (2011): 495-508; David Murakami Wood, "Beyond the Panopticon? Foucault and Surveillance Studies," in *Space, Knowledge and Power: Foucault and Geography* ed. Jeremy W. Crampton, Elden, Stuart (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 344-59.

surveillance scholars is not surprising; Foucauldian panopticism easily lends itself for a comparison with contemporary (surveillance) society, as citizens are increasingly exposed to the permanent possibility of being watched and self-regulation becomes an internalized feature as an effect.

Recently the theoretical framing of practices of surveillance has however undergone a paradigm-shift towards a post-Foucauldian approach – a development that is met with both enthusiasm and reluctance. Whereas Torin Monahan in a recent retrospective on surveillance studies welcomes new perspectives in the by now transdisciplinary field as “a healthy and productive development”, others are more reserved.¹⁴ One of them is David Murakami Wood, a leading scholar in the field. Wood deems several of his fellow-scholars too eager to go beyond Foucault and emphasizes the “need [for] a creative relationship with Foucault, challenging and disrupting existing forms of thought.”¹⁵ Moreover, he concludes his paper with an appeal to follow Foucault in his method and “find a new language to discuss the relationship of life and technology [...] that is capable of producing a genealogy of the present (and perhaps the future).”¹⁶ Yet another scholar, Gilbert Caluya, takes up a truly radical standpoint as he fiercely rejects the recent yearning to go beyond Foucault. He argues that “surveillance scholars have misinterpreted both [Foucault’s] analysis of the gaze and power” and advocates the need to “[resituate] Foucault’s work on the panopticon in the broader context of his theory of power.”¹⁷

Now, as these differing standpoints reveal, the discussion on how recent technological developments should be tackled within the field of surveillance studies is vivid to say the least and – so far – has not led to consensus. Whereas I think it is true the field would benefit from a new approach, it is questionable whether abandoning Foucault altogether is the right answer. I agree with Caluya, when he states that many scholars within surveillance studies have failed to embed panopticism within its much-needed socio-philosophical context. The vast majority of work done within the field has clung frenetically to an interpretation of panoptic power enclosed within the walls of disciplinary institutions, but even when the panopticon originally is an architectural

¹⁴ Monahan, "Surveillance as Cultural Practice," 502.

¹⁵ Murakami Wood, "Beyond the Panopticon? Foucault and Surveillance Studies," 258.

¹⁶ Idem.

¹⁷ Caluya, "The Post-panoptic Society? Reassessing Foucault in Surveillance Studies," 622.

figure, Foucault is clear in his assumption that panoptic power itself is coextensive with *all of society*. Moreover, surveillance scholars have altogether failed to engage with what I deem a vital merit the Foucauldian legacy, namely his meticulous genealogical investigations, which allowed him to fiercely deconstruct the structures that create meaning and order – shaped as knowledge and power – in human experience and which opened the way for the contingency and radical historicism he famously promoted.¹⁸ One of the reasons for me to involve a poststructuralist feminist perspective in the debate is that it is imbued with Foucault's critical deconstructionist legacy and hence can be instrumentalized as a tool to break through the walls and structures within which surveillance scholars have found themselves captured.

One of the rather scarce surveillance scholars who actually has attempted to apply the logic of the panopticon to a less limited scale is culture-geographer Matt Hannah. In "Imperfect Panopticism", he attempts to show "how the basic logic of the panopticon operates to maintain normality amongst the already normal."¹⁹ Hannah emphasizes the importance of visibility within the panoptic logic, rightly stating the more visible the human object of control becomes, the more complete the coercion of normal behavior will be. Since citizens have the possibility to be anonymous in certain situations and moreover have a right of privacy, they have the possibility to resist some of the normalizing mechanisms at work; that is why Hannah deems societal panopticism imperfect. Whereas he exposes the normalizing tendencies present in contemporary surveillance societies and thus takes some important steps in the direction of a less restricted interpretation of panopticism, Hannah's effort stays somewhat shallow in that it does not prevent itself from falling in another nostalgic account of advanced technology.

I think one could add to this critique that surveillance scholars have overlooked those aspects of Foucault's work that may counterbalance the conception of surveillance technology as an insuperable determinant and even depraving force.²⁰ To expose these aspects, we need to zoom in to societies bearer: the subject. Initially

¹⁸ See: Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1971).

¹⁹ Matt Hannah, "Imperfect Panopticism: Envisioning the Construction of Normal Lives," in *Space and Social Theory: Interpreting Modernity and Postmodernity*, ed. Georges Benko, Strohmayr, Ulf (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 344.

²⁰ A key text in which Foucault addresses the possibility of freedom: Michel Foucault, "What Is Enlightenment?," in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984).

exposing the subject as a mere product of power, in his later work Foucault sets out to nuance this view, arguing we are not just subjected to and constituted by the conditions posed upon us by the machine of power as constructed time, but also have the ability to emancipate from them as an autonomous source of progress, free in our ability to interrogate the limits imposed on us and hence to actively produce ourselves.²¹ Nonetheless, surveillance scholars – Hannah included – maintain the general discomfort versus the advent of intimate-technology as they focus exclusively on issues of social control that spread and intensify together with technological advancement – as such profiling themselves as the academic equals of whistle-blowers like Edward Snowden. In order to prevent lapsing into a one-sided discussion, let me introduce some of the work that has pursued a more positive account of technology.

A growing body of optimistic analyses of technological change has developed within the field of gender studies ever since Donna Haraway published her (in)famous *Cyborg Manifesto*, in which she explores the ways the body or the subject can be revisioned and enhanced by means of a posthumanist and transformative approach.²² Following the footsteps of both Foucault and Haraway, Rosi Braidotti positions herself in the midst of the changes evading the third millennium while focusing on how the changing face of society can be translated into new representations of the subject, and has already produced an impressive body of work on the matter. Distancing herself from nostalgic and pejorative perspectives and static, long-established habits, she engages with notions of transition, hybridization and nomadization, thus theorizing on the structural transformations of subjectivity in the social, cultural and political spheres that match the changes set into motion by intimate-technology. As Braidotti's work is highly contemporary and is able to counterbalance the paranoid surveillance society as sketched by surveillance scholars, I think weaving her voice into the debate will prove enlightening.

In summary: I aim to contribute to a much-needed new perspective on the relationship of humanity and technology by resituating Foucault's work on the panopticon in the broader context of his theory of power and merging it with Braidotti's posthuman perspective on the human subject, thus arriving at a well-

²¹ Ibid.

²² Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century."

rounded and highly contemporaneous account of the subject in the age of intimate technology. By adapting a broad and inclusive poststructuralist perspective and attempting to develop a look that does not focus on a singular or dominant ideology, I think I might answer to Wood's call for a creative relationship with the Foucauldian legacy, for a new language to discuss the relationship of life and technology, for a genealogy of the present and the near future that disrupts and goes beyond disciplinary borders and the partial perspective that incarcerated surveillance scholars.

Before continuing, let me add a few final words to my positioning. I am aware of the fact that the technologies I speak of are not available to every single individual nor to every group of people in the world. The 'we' I have been and will be addressing lives in a post-industrial, economically and technologically developed world. Is it fair then, to speculate on 'our' changing subjectivity? I think it is, when it is taken into account at all time, that the thesis I defend does not equal a universal essence or truth. Once again: my enterprise is partial, as is any scholarly or scientific enterprise, but exact and located in the midst of a complex society and complicated disciplinary relations.²³ Exactly the partiality of my perspective – and here I refer to Donna Haraway and her excellent discussion on *Situated Knowledges* – promises objective vision.²⁴ My vision is embodied and engages with a specific web of texts and thoughts, using a specific toolbox and is meant to join forces with other attempts that are or will be made to develop viable representations of the intimate-technological era.

ii. Method

As already apparent in my introduction and academic positioning, I will address the presented debate through a perspective that can be embedded within feminist postmodernism, a movement that is part of third-wave feminism and focuses on a

²³ My scholarly development is rooted in many soils. I have acquainted many methods, approaches and disciplinary borders, developing an interdisciplinary view and obtaining an academic open-mindedness that complies with my personal attitude. Rigid disciplinary borders have been there only to be critically exposed, transgressed and maybe even erased, sometimes leaving me insecurely floating in an academic no-man's-land. Mostly, however, driving me towards original perspectives and the capacity to arrive to original, highly reflexive and critical conclusions.

²⁴ Donna J. Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

poststructuralist interpretation of gender.²⁵ As poststructuralist feminists engage with supposed or internalized normative truths, knowledge, and binary oppositions, it serves as an enlightening background for any kind of critical analysis directed at social or cultural phenomena and is an especially fruitful perspective for the issue at stake. Locating myself within this transdisciplinary, inclusive and radically non-essentialist web of thought, I allow myself to overcome borders that have previously led scholars – of whom surveillance scholars are a clear example – to unsatisfactory, one-sided conclusions on intimate technology; to engage with a method just as complex and dynamic as the world it seeks to interpret; and hence to work towards an indefinite and transformative account of the subject. I do not believe my work to be necessarily feminist itself; rather, as an interdisciplinary researcher, I instrumentalize poststructuralist feminist thought as a critical tool for cultural analysis.²⁶

To be more specific, I will address the presented debate dialectically. I will enter a imaginative and creative process which engages oppressive social structures and – hand in hand with feminist practice – rejects truth or finality as a destructive illusion. “The essence of this method lies in a process of constantly moving between concepts and data as well as between society and concrete phenomena, past and present issues, appearance and essence” and hence is based a constant motion of deconstruction followed by reconstruction.²⁷ As I previously pointed out, the social and academic debate on intimate technology is currently reigned by two distinct axes – anxiety on the one hand and techno-optimism on the other hand: the panoptic powers inherent in surveillance technology seemingly lends itself for anxiousness versus intimate technology, whereas the (self-)creative potential implicit in the innovations conversely engenders a positive conception. Through engaging both perspectives in a dialogue, I think a well-rounded, inclusive and refreshingly contemporaneous account of subjectivity can be presented.

²⁵ This section is based on two standard works considering the feminist research practice: Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber, *Feminist Research Practice: A Primer* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2014); Sotirios Sarantakos, "Feminist Research," in *Social Research* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

²⁶ Rosi Braidotti endorses a certain approach, stating “The location in disciplines is different for gender scholars who emerge from [...] an interdisciplinary background. In these cases, doing gender is likely to provide a sharper navigational tool and may act as a zoom lens that focuses the researcher more precisely onto her/his research project. In this respect, interdisciplinary gender research provides its own foundation and mutates into a trans-disciplinary practice that relies on feminist epistemologies for its own justification.” Rosi Braidotti, "Dympna and the Figuration of the Woman Warrior," in *Doing Gender in Media, Art and Culture*, ed. Rosemarie Buikema, van der Tuin, Iris (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), 241-59.

²⁷ Sarantakos, "Feminist Research," 63.

1. Theoretical framework: panopticism and the docile body

When analyzing intimate-technological developments and their impact on our very conception of what constitutes humanity or the contemporary subject, one thinker naturally comes to mind: Michel Foucault. The Foucauldian body of thought has not only proven greatly influential as a cleaving blade capable of dissecting the great narratives of history; Foucault in fact sets the debate when he reveals a paranoid and voyeuristic society arising from the institutions of modernity in *Discipline and Punish*.²⁸ In the current section, an analysis of several notions stemming from this canonical work allows us to shape an initial perspective on the intimate-technological revolution. Especially part three of the book, titled *Discipline*, will benefit my enterprise, for it discusses (the origin of) the modern subject as a malleable and improvable person in correlation to the notion of progress and covers key concepts such as docility, panopticism and the inspecting or normalizing gaze.

1.1 *Discipline and docility*

Disciplinary power is an invention of the classical age; it became a general formula for domination in the 17th and 18th century, thus argues Foucault as he meticulously works through the history of punishment and prison systems. It originated from and together with the birth of an art of the human body, a creative aesthetics in which the body became analyzable and manipulable, hence an object of knowledge and use. This 'docile' body, as Foucault terms it, is a body "that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved" as it is the product of a machinery of power that examines, deconstructs and rearranges it.²⁹ The practiced and subjected docile body is carefully ordered within an efficient societal system, as discipline "increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience)."³⁰ Whereas these mechanics can most easily be pictured within the institutional walls of schools, hospitals, the military or the like, Foucault in this stage of

²⁸ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*.

²⁹ Ibid., 136.

³⁰ Ibid., 138.

his analysis already hints to a tendency of disciplinary power to expand and cover the entire social body. Discipline implies a dream society resembling a well-oiled machine, constructed by means of automated and meticulously subordinated cogs.

One of the foremost tools that can assure the functioning of this machine is vision. More specifically, Foucault describes a disciplinary or normalizing *gaze* that enables hierarchical surveillance as well as normalizing judgment, fitting and enhancing the analyzability and manipulability of the docile body as it supervises these bodies and presses them to conform to the same correct model.³¹ Bodies become differentiated, hierarchized, homogenized, excluded as power makes them into objects, giving them identities to which a set of 'natural' categories are attached – woman/passive/lack; criminal/illicit/dangerous; sane/reason/normal – which become the standards of the existing social practices.³² Moreover, the constantly being seen, or the mere possibility of always being seen, assures the hold of power that is exercised over them and thus maintains their status of subjection. Just as important as imposing compulsory visibility upon those subjected to the normalizing gaze, is the invisibility of disciplinary power itself. To illustrate this, let us turn the architectural figure that was appropriated by Foucault as an exemplar of modern mechanisms of control – a perfect incarnation of disciplinary power within the walls of an institution.

1.2 The figure of the panopticon: a political technology

Combining the ancient Greek words *pan*, which translates as 'all' and *optikon*, stemming from *optikos*, which signifies 'of or for sight', panopticism literally means a complete visibility, the panopticon hence being a device resembling an all-seeing eye.

³¹ Gazing implies an act of looking in which both subjects – the onlooker and the one looked at – relate to each other in a field that is marked by power relations and inequity, for those looking are generally more powerful than those gazed upon. Feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey famously illustrates the authoritarian potential of the gaze in her analysis of early classical Hollywood film, in which she exposes film as an instrument of the male gaze that produces limited representations of women from an exclusively male point of view. Mulvey also notes that looking signals activity, whereas being looked at connotes passivity – in the case of early commercial film revealing itself through the objectification of the female body and the female character being sadistically controlled and fetishized. Even though Mulvey's essay covers only one of the guises the gaze incorporates, namely the male gaze that rests on a traditional male-female binary, I think it does so in a remarkably convincing manner and can be seen as exemplifying the potential of the gaze in constituting gendered identities such as desiring-desired, sexually dominating-sexually, but also more generally that of subject-object. Marita Sturken, "Visual Culture," in *Grove Art Online* (2007); Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16, no. 3 (1975).

³² See also: Neve Gordon, "Foucault's Subject: An Ontological Reading," *Palgrave Macmillan Journals* 31, no. 3 (1999).

The concept became the name of a type of prison designed by Jeremy Bentham in 1791, consisting of a concentric building composed of rings of cells in which inmates are arrayed around a central tower (see figure 1). From this tower, their every movement is visible, whereas the guards themselves are hidden from view. The possibility of perpetual inspection, of a panoptic gaze that is lasting, together with the being unable to return or counter this gaze, is what ensures the obedience of the inmates and guarantees order – even when an actual onlooker is absent. The panopticon imprints the mind of the inmate with a sense of constant visibility that in Foucault's words make him "the principle of his own subjection" as the panoptic gaze becomes an integral part of the inmate's mind and hence shapes his conduct.³³

The question standing before us now, is whether panopticism is a viable concept outside of the prison walls too. Foucault argues it is, insisting that the panopticon is a model of power in general; "an infinitely generizable mechanism" coextensive with all of society.³⁴ Panoptic power is "like a faceless gaze that transformed the whole social body into a field of perception: thousands of eyes posted everywhere."³⁵ And he might be right, then panopticism easily lends

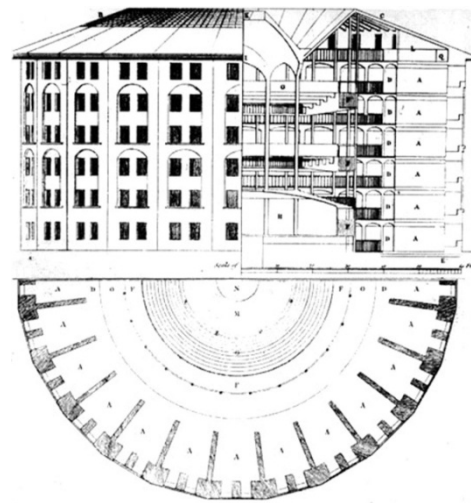


Fig. 1 | The Panopticon

itself for a comparison with contemporary (surveillance) society, in which citizens are exposed to the permanent possibility of being watched by the countless mechanical eyes that invaded the public sphere and invisibly zoom in on our bodies and behavior from everywhere – even from space. Whereas the eye was once necessarily organic, it now proliferates not only as the locus of a sensory trait, but as a mechanical device too, its range ever-extending.

³³ Ibid., 203.

³⁴ Ibid., 216.

³⁵ Ibid., 214.

1.3 Intimate panopticism

With the installment of disciplinary mechanisms of power, a techno-political anatomy of (wo)man-the-machine was born; a micro-physics of power that might drag us deep into the panoptic machine now that the advent of intimate technology has led to a whole new level of examination. Measurement capabilities that can be used to classify and normalize our behavior are virtually unlimited and surveillance has become automated now that omnipresent mechanical eyes and buzzing black boxes keep track of our movements, arguably making stepping or even thinking outside of the tailor-made box increasingly difficult. As intimate technology merges with our bodies, our behavior, our minds, it is not unthinkable that normalizing disciplinary mechanisms will press the 21st century docile citizen to conform to the morals and taste of the majority; that optimization processes are forced upon this same citizen; and that dissidents together with any form of civil disobedience get exterminated.

However, Foucault seems to deny these pitch-black prospects by stating “there is no risk [...] that the increase of power created by the panoptic machine may degenerate into tyranny”, for “the exercise of power may be supervised by society as a whole.”³⁶ With this brief sentence, Foucault takes an initial step towards his later work, in which he gives an impetus to our emancipation from the status of a mere subject to the status of an autonomous subject as the agent of freedom. In *What is Enlightenment?*, he reverses the passive role he ascribed to the subject in *Discipline and Power* by arguing we are able to lay bare the conditions that constitute what is real, to analyze and interrogate the borders imposed on us, to go beyond them, and to discover where and what specific transformations are possible.³⁷ Foucault in other words invites us to live a philosophical life and to become dissidents: to be, act and think different(ly). What if it is merely what Immanuel Kant once deemed our ‘private’ use of reason – the reason we use as a part of the system or societal machine – that gets increasingly invaded by intimate panopticism?³⁸ What if that particular part of our autonomy is indeed compromised, but our freedom to speak and to criticize this

³⁶ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 207.

³⁷ Foucault, “What Is Enlightenment?”

³⁸ For an elucidation on the private and public use of reason, see: Immanuel Kant, “Beantwortung Der Frage: Was Ist Aufklärung?,” *Berlinische Monatsschrift* (1784).

machine – Kant’s public use of reason – remains intact? With a call for critique, it is time to turn to the work of Rosi Braidotti.

2. Meta(l)morphoses: what do we want to be?

Undermining, discussing and aiming to change the *communis opinio*, the status quo, the powers that be, is what Braidotti does or at least intends to do in her book *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming*.³⁹ The chapter considered here, “Meta(l)morphoses: the Becoming-Machine,” critically but far from negatively addresses the relationship of body and technology and the ways technology relocates the subject within a posthuman framework.⁴⁰ Braidotti dynamically addresses the merging of (wo)man and machine, arguing for a hybrid, nomadic view on the subject; an approach in which categorical divides between ‘self’ and ‘other’ – human/machine – dissolve and humanist anthropocentrism gets replaced by a posthumanist heteroglossia of the species. Fluidly changing perspectives and enthusiastically engaging with the transformative changes, mutations and metamorphoses characteristic of the dawning third millenium, she works towards a dissipation of once strictly separated, pejorative binaries, underlining the symbiotic relationship binding flesh and steel and simultaneously arguing for a conception of the subject as a dynamic ‘becoming’ instead of a static ‘being’.

2.1 Hybridity or the (wo)man-machine

In line with Foucault, Braidotti locates the birth of the inclination to pathologize differences and ‘the other’ in the 19th century. This inclination has ever since persisted and even seems to gets reinforced now that ongoing transformations carry the promise of possible change and creativity, thus argues Braidotti. Fear and anxiety of the “Majority, embodied in the dominant subject-position of the male, white, heterosexual, urbanized, property-owning speaker of a standard language” have resulted in a reactionary clinging on to static traditional binaries and habits, hence in an intensification of existing power-relations.⁴¹ Moreover, a visible gap exists between lived reality and our imagination of it, as we have collectively failed to find

³⁹ Braidotti, *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming*.

⁴⁰ “Meta(L)Morphoses: The Becoming-Machine,” in *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 2002).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 213.

representations and concepts fitting the kind of subjects we have already become, Braidotti argues. Ask someone how they picture the future and they will sketch a world with highly advanced technology, but an unchanged society, moral and subjectivity.

Braidotti challenges this reactionary attitude versus technological changes and strives to overcome the inability to picture these changes socially and culturally, defending a view on the subject that has morphed into a hybrid, heterogeneous, posthuman entity and defies categorical distinctions and constitutive boundaries as its identity flows between nature and technology. Intimate technological developments have the potential to emancipate us from our anthropocentric, normative habit of rejecting anomalies and urge us to let go of the idea of the mutant, monstrous technological 'other' by becoming technological ourselves. Braidotti hence sees intimate technology as a welcome challenge, a chance to question subjectivity and to reinvent and enhance the self in the midst of a growing body of possibilities for creative self-fashioning. And with the self-fashioning she advocates, society's others dissolve. They do not dissolve due to their being observed, classified, normalized – that is: disciplined – but due to the transgression of ontological borders. Societies others, with Braidotti, do not become aligned in an order of the disordered, but conversely merge with their former opposites, together entering into a hybrid and unitary symbiosis.

2.2 A nomadic theory of becoming

Modern disciplinary power fixed the subject by imposing on it a relation of docility-utility, or as Foucault states: "one of the primary objects of discipline is to fix; it is an anti-nomadic technique".⁴² With the advent of the postmodern era the status of the essential 'human nature' as an incontestable, universal truth started to crumble. A crumbling that has changed into smashing now that intimate technological devices metamorphose the body, the behavior and eventually the mind. Accordingly, the posthuman subject as introduced by Braidotti has an emergent ontology rather than a stable one; it is not a singular, defined individual, but rather one who can 'become' or

⁴² Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 222.

embody different identities and understand the world from multiple, heterogeneous perspectives. With Braidotti, the docile body has become a hybrid, nomadic body.

3. The posthuman(ist) subject

Now that posthumanist science fiction is converging with science fact, a fundamental reconceptualization of what constitutes humanity, of what defines the subject, is needed. It is needed on an academic plane, as theorizing on the transformations of the present day has for the most part been inadequate, lags behind on lived reality in its inability to replace conceptual thinking for process-based thinking and as such remains utterly helpless. It is needed for the future of citizenry too, for our increasing malleability needs to go hand in hand with a critical, informed disposition enabling one to reflect on the self and his or her conditions. In analyzing intimate technology in a twofold way, addressing expressions of anxiety as well as excitement versus the influence it exerts on the body, the behavior, the mind, and fusing these expressions, I think I can take some initial steps in the direction of such a reconceptualization.

We are no longer the natural, essential, unitary being we once were. Both Foucault and Braidotti have deconstructed the humanist conception of the subject, exposing it as a product of its time; a multi-layered, dynamic and malleable entity. We are shaped by instances of power, but at the same time can take up an active stance in the creation of our conditions, shaping ourselves and our lives, and I deem it our greatest task to embrace our dynamic disposition in a way that goes beyond classical notions of self and other, of categories that have already started to shift but until today have remained prevalent in the social imaginary. Let us embrace the contextual rather than relative, situated rather than objective, the hybrid and nomadic 'becomings' that we already are, now that the art of living that originated with the disciplinary society has taken on a whole new dimension; with the unfolding of an intimate-technological world, our lives become an oeuvre that carries certain values and that may be altered in with regard to stylistic criteria we conceive. We have become complex and vulnerable creatures that are accountable, accessible, heterogeneous, hybrid and constantly on the move. Our faces are myriad and we can hence understand our world from multiple, heterogeneous ever-changing perspectives, manifesting ourselves through different identities.

Conclusion

In the course of my thesis, I have engaged with a conception of intimate technology that has been torn between anxiety and optimism. In bringing both voices in conversation through the work of respectively Michel Foucault and Rosi Braidotti, concentrating on the way intimate technology influences humanity or the subject, I have attempted to arrive at a synthesis that goes beyond the pitfalls of naïve euphoria and reactionary nostalgia. The question that functioned as the red thread in this enterprise was the following: *How does the intimate-technological revolution, in pushing the human body into a malleable entity, affect and reshape our understanding of what constitutes humanity or being human?*

Let me briefly recapitulate my findings. As I revived Foucault's concepts of discipline, docility and panopticism and connected them to intimate technology, I flirted with the idea of a society penetrated by panoptic mechanisms of power. A society in which our increased visibility extends existing power relations and turns the docile subject into a dream-citizen and a dream-consumer. Foucault himself however nuances this conception of the subject as a passive construct of power in his later work, where he argues the subject can emancipate from the mould of power through critiquing the conditions imposed on him or her. With Braidotti's theory of becoming, then, the docile subject morphed into a hybrid, nomadic entity, free-floating as a dynamic, heterogeneous 'becoming', as such defying essential notions of manhood as well as the rusty binary of self/other or technology/human.

In concordance with Braidotti, I have argued that we need to go beyond naïve techno-optimism just as we need to resist withdrawing into any kind of hostile anxiety and that intimate technology shifts our understanding of the human subject as an essential 'being' into a hybrid and nomadic 'becoming'. The body as the locus of an individual self has become a hybrid heterogeneous entity in need of a posthuman approach as well as constant critical (self)reflexivity for it to protect its autonomy. Let us shake of our dried out human(ist) skin and acknowledge our evolved posthuman selves, entering the thrilling open space, within which fusion and hybridity reign – a space we already inhabit.

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