The Generation of Self

Fictions of Web 2.0

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Table of Contents

Introduction

In 1964, Marshall McLuhan argued in *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* that he was living in the 'age of anxiety', because of the expanding influence media began to have on everyday life. McLuhan wrote his influential book based on an awareness of mass media such as television, radio and film, but his state of mind in the 1960's fits the current attitude towards the Internet and social media perfectly. Looking into recent publications in which the Internet, and more specifically, social media is a subject, a certain vigorous image takes shape. Critics, researchers and journalists tend to ascribe mere negative aspects to popular social network sites.

The New York Times recently published an article on the effects of the 'facelessness' of social media networks and dubbed the current time the 'Epidemic of Facelessness' (Marche). The 'linked distances' between people on social media, provokes and mitigates the inherent capacity for abuse, such as rape or death threats, or 'trolling' (Marche). The author theorizes the effects of 'the face' and the implications of being unable to look someone in the eye while online, and argues that being able to see someone's face has been the root of justice and ethics for two millenia; when the face is removed from interaction, empathy and compassion can no longer be taken for granted (Marche). Facelessness has severe implications for both the victim and the perpetrator, since it takes away the possibility of feeling empathy for either sides. Marche here extrapolates the current situation of social media use to its worst possible end: a world without compassion and empathy, made possible by social media use. He seems to image a world where everything solely happens online and no one sees any physical human beings.

A survey under more than 2000 adults concluded a similar negative message. Even though we may 'friend' more people by means of Facebook, we have fewer real friends than 30 years ago (Potter). This may be true, but how do these two 'truths' relate to each other? Matthew Brashears, the head researcher of this survey, of course sees a certain causality, and structured his research along the lines of a 'story of decline' (Stone 160). *The New Yorker* published an article - actually more nuanced than its title "How Facebook Makes Us Unhappy" suggest – arguing that Facebook

contributes to a general feeling of unhappiness (Konnikova). In ""They Are Happier and Having Better Lives than I Am": The Impact of Using Facebook on Perceptions of Others' Lives", sociologists from the Utah Valley University proposed that looking at happy pictures of your Facebook friends posted on the platform actually makes you unhappy (Chou and Edge 119). In combining social media networks, friends and (un)happiness, this last article makes it negative spiral complete.

These examples represent a rather grim depiction of the present and more importantly, for the future. The 'age of anxiety' McLuhan saw in 1964 seems to have never been truer. The use of social media has severe implications for our abilities for empathy; it has negative influence on our physical social network and the displayed (and perceived) happiness of others makes us even unhappier. The idea has culminated that the effects of social network media are mostly negative for yourself and your relationships. These researchers and critics make bold predictions about the future, based on the current situation. Alexander Galloway has pointed out: 'The Internet is deceptive. Critics love to exclaim that "everything has changed!"' (Galloway, *Protocol* 58). What seems to have changed in recent years is that social media has merely a negative influence on the life of its users. But McLuhan has inadvertently pointed out that people have always been afraid of technological developments and an evolving media landscape.

By contrast, this thesis seeks to show a wide variety of interaction between humans and computers. It analyzes novels and films that deal with the cultural representation of social networks and Internet use. Following a broadly chronological sequence, this thesis starts out with *Look At Me* (2001) by Jennifer Egan. Standing at the birth of social networking media, her novel imagines a site with profiles, which narrativizes the lives of a select group of people. The platform is named Ordinary People; an online space and database for profiles of a select group of 'ordinary' Americans (autoworker, farmer, deep sea diver, mother of six). Every profile would look different to represent the individual, but some features are the same: childhood memories, dreams, diary entries. The profile does not reflect the true person, and does not intend to do so; it exists to offer a coherent and dramatic narrative for entertainment and financial purposes only. Ultimately, protagonist

Charlotte, after her patterns are observed by 24/7 webcams, abandons the project, while her online presence still lives on.

Pattern Recognition (2003) written by William Gibson chronicles how obscure film footage posted online creates a very active online community who converse via the 'Fetish Footage Forum'. The F:F:F is a place of intellectual debate on artistic matters and a place where 'real' friendships (in the sense that they are deep and affectionate) come into being. The novel's protagonist, Cayce, follows clues all over the world (London, Tokyo, Moscow) which lead her into the right direction of 'the maker' of the footage. The 'footageheads' follow the footage virtually, while Cayce does this physically. Her presence is vital in determining who the maker is. The novel shows a very optimistic view on online fora, contacts, content and friendships that emerge from it, but foregrounds the necessity of human presence in a globally networked world.

The Social Network (2010), a film by David Fincher, portrays the invention and development of Facebook, the world's most famous social media platform. The film's form offers productive material to shed light on the relations of human and social network site. Mark Zuckerberg, the site's inventor, portrayed as anti-social 'computer-nerd' is juxtaposed against his socially successful friend and co-creator, Eduardo Saverin, and the very popular Winklevoss Twins, who both start a lawsuit against Zuckerberg, which constitutes the main event in the film.

Her (2013), a film produced by Spike Jonze, takes places in a more technologically advanced near future, where it is not necessarily frowned upon to 'date your computer'. The film portrays the romance between Theodore and Samantha, the latter being an Artificial Intelligent Operating System. The film shows how Samantha, 'who' can best be described as an disembodied consciousness struggles with the ways she differs from the human Theodore, and how she tries to come to terms with her 'lacking body'.

The last two chapters discuss dystopian representations of social networks in *The Circle* (2013) written by Dave Eggers, and *Men, Women and Children* (2014), directed by Jason Reitman. These narratives together represent respectively the network and the social; the human and the computer. The main problem with *The Circle* and *Men, Women and Children* is that these

representations mainly focus on the worst possible outcome of our interaction with new technologies. These fictions pretend that there is no good way to engage yourself with the Internet and all of its features. They offer us no reflection, nuances or countervoices within the fictional world.

There is approximately a ten year difference between the last four chapters on *The Circle, Men, Women and Children, Her* and *The Social Network* which came out after 2010 and the first two on *Look at Me* and *Pattern Recognition* which were published in the beginning of the millenium. Within this decade, the Internet underwent some significant changes. This development can best be seen as a break from Web 1.0 to a move towards Web 2.0. The concept of Web 2.0 is distinct from its predecessor in that its websites allow users to do more than just retrieve information; it includes a social element where users generate and distribute content, often with freedom to share and (re)use. Social network sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Myspace have emerged in this context, and make it possible for average internet users to connect with other people from all over the globe (Fuchs 3). The Internet in general, and social network media in particular, revolve around sharing, communication, cooperation, but also surveillance, data-storage and the loss of privacy. Glen Creeber and Martin Royston have argued that blogging sites like MySpace and Facebook have been 'heralded as transforming what we 'do' in cyberspace, in crafting new forms of social interaction mediated by the Internet' (35). These platforms together form a new 'creative commons', a shared space of self-expression and social interaction that radically alters what it means to write (and read), who can produce (and consume) web content, creating a parallel universe (Creeber and Royston 35). With the emphasis on sharing and communication within Web 2.0, a person's identity is much more implicated in the working of the Internet. The transition to Web 2.0 changes interactions between humans and technology, and, as we shall shortly, also the relations amongst humans. The advent of social media and the transition to Web 2.0 has also changed the way we can look at networks.

Even though Egan and Gibson wrote their novels before social media or Web 2.0 existed, their works of fiction are considered to be very relevant for this thesis on social networks. *Look at Me*

and *Pattern Recognition* specifically deal with social relations on online platforms. In general, Darko Suvin has theorized the meaning of literature depicting a (near) future throughout his writings on Science Fiction. In *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* he argues: 'In the twentieth century SF has moved into the sphere of anthropological and cosmological thought, becoming a diagnosis, a warning, a call to understanding and action, and most important-a mapping of possible alternatives' (Suvin 12). If we look at literature shaping 'possible alternatives', instead of predicting future events in the real world, it makes sense to look at Egan's *Look at Me* and Gibson's *Pattern Recognition*, and critically reflect on the social media platforms that are portrayed. This is not to determine what it might have meant at the time the novels where first published, or what it might mean in the future, but to discover what it can mean for us now.

The four cultural representations by Egan, Gibson, Fincher and Jonze are used as counter-voices against the mainly dystopian view of *The Circle* and *Men, Women and Children*. The novels and films are different takes on the mainly negative view that exists in the media. This thesis then take the approach that cultural representations do not necessarily reflect the actual human and social network relations, but act as grounds where alternative takes can be developed and displayed.

In order to analyze these aspects in American fiction, this thesis foregrounds theoretical concepts by Marshall McLuhan, Bruno Latour, N. Katherine Hayles and Alexander Galloway, which will be elaborated upon in the next chapter. McLuhan is helpful for understanding social media within the larger context of Media Studies, and sheds light on how social media is at once a private but also public medium. With his Actor-Network-Theory, Latour focuses on relations between people and non-human objects. ANT helps us understand that there is no hierarchical order between people and a social network site. Hayles has extensively researched interrelations between human and intelligent machine throughout the last fifteen years. The concept of the posthuman, explored by Hayles, is a productive framework of looking at the interactions of people and social media. Alexander Galloway has looked at how control works in network. His theories are important for understanding how power is created within a decentralized networked world.

Defining Social Media

It is important to demarcate the phenomenon of social media, since many websites in the Web 2.0 era revolve around user-input and sharing. danah boyd, scholar on social media at Harvard and NYU, defines these specific sites as

> web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site.
>
> (211)

boyd stresses that the term 'social networking sites' is often interchanged with 'social network sites', and she clarifies the subtle but important difference: 'Networking' emphasizes relationship initiation, often between strangers, while 'network' implies an established system of connections. boyd argues that networking is certainly possible through the sites she labels social media, but argues that this is not their primary practice. Social network sites are mostly about displaying the already established connections through a 'friends' list. What makes social network sites unique is not that they allow individuals to meet strangers, but rather that they enable users to articulate and make visible their social networks. This can result in connections between individuals that would not otherwise be made, but often that is not the goal, and these meetings are frequently between 'latent ties' (a term she borrows from Haythornthwaite, 2005) who share some offline connection. On many of the large social network sites, participants are not necessarily 'networking' or looking to meet new people; instead, they are primarily communicating with people who are already a part of their extended social network, in the physical world. To emphasize this articulated social network as a critical organizing feature of these sites, boyd labels them 'social network sites' (211).

It seems that boyd still favors these already existing offline connections over the relationships that are primarily built via a social network site. While theorizing social media, boyd very much uses a

framework from the physical world. This approach limits the scope and possible influence of social media and already sees the relations that are developed online as 'lesser' that existing contacts. It is much more productive to take the relationships that are initiated and developed online just as serious as connections that originated from face-to-face contact. Distinguishing between 'network' and 'networking' is redundant if one assumes an egalitarian approach towards interactions in the 'offline' and 'online' world. Both kinds of social interactions explored in the cultural representations are valued as equally important.

The following abbreviations are used to indicate quotations from the novels:

LaM	*Look at Me* by Jennifer Egan
PR	*Pattern Recognition* by William Gibson
C	*The Circle* by Dave Eggers

1.0 Posthumanism, Networks and Protocols

McLuhan and the Nature of Social Media

In *Understanding Media,* Marshall McLuhan noted why the Greek Narcissus myth is important in understanding the technological experience.

> Narcissus mistook his own reflection in the water for another person. This extension of himself by mirror numbed his perceptions until he became the servomechanism of his own extended or repeated image. [...] He was numb. He had adapted to his extension of himself and had become a closed system.
>
> (41)

McLuhan uses 'servomechanism' and 'closed system' to explain the internal processes of what is happening when one encounters and extension of self. A servomechanism is an automatic device that uses error-sensing negative feedback to correct its performance. The functioning of a 'servo' is a closed feedback loop. A man being a servomechanism then is someone who automatically adjusts his own self-image to fit the representation in front of him. By reference to the Narcisssus myth McLuhan does not mean to foreground the self-loving nature of media but rather to highlight the mistake Narcissus is making in thinking he is the one in reflection: 'Now the point of this myth is the fact that men at once become fascinated by any extension of themselves in any material other than themselves. [...] The wisdom of the Narcissus myth does not convey any idea that Narcissus fell in love with anything he regarded as himself' (McLuhan, *Understanding Media* 41-42). Narcissus's problem, then, is not self-love, but misrecognition (Fisher).

This misrecognition comes about because media and technology are 'extensions of man that bring about amputation of our physical bodies' (McLuhan, *Understanding Media* 45). Media affect the psychic and social complex of a person. Self-amputation is closely related to extensions, because the moment a human makes a machine do something, either physical or mental work, the human 'offloads' his work and relieves himself from the burden. McLuhan sees this as auto-amputation.

At the same, this auto-amputation develops into overstimulation, which brings about numbness in individuals and society (McLuhan *Understanding Media* 7-9). It is because of this numbness, that Narcissus does not recognize himself in the water, since self-amputation forbids self-recognition (McLuhan, *Understanding Media* 43). The principle of self-amputation is an immediate relieve of the strain on the central nervous system. 'We have to numb our central nervous system when it is extended and exposed [...] Thus the age of anxiety and of electric media is also the age of the unconscious and of apathy' (McLuhan, *Understanding Media* 47). McLuhan is linking the Narcissus myth to mass media such as television, film and radio.

The Internet incorporates all of these media: 'What began as a medium whose content was text, and expanded in the 1990s to include images and sounds, has become [...] a medium that offers telephone [...], radio [...], and television' (Levinson, 5). McLuhan argues that every medium incorporates an earlier medium: 'The effect of the medium is made strong and intense just because it is given another medium as "content." The content of a movie is a novel or a play or an opera. [...] The "content" of writing or print is speech, but the reader is almost entirely unaware either of print or of speech' (McLuhan *Understanding Media* 18). The content of the medium is none other than another medium.

The main difference between the Web and the other media is the democratic nature of this particular medium. The Internet's characteristic, something that is even more underlined in Web 2.0, is the possibility of adding, altering and sharing content. The online experience is two-way. This makes the user an active agent since it decides what is being represented. Not only prior media is the content of the Internet, but so too is the human user who, unlike the consumer of other mass media, creates content online with almost every use (Levinson 38-39). In this context, social media, dedicated to representing people, only reinforces the idea of the user being the content.

Social media is at once a mass medium and a personal medium; sharing intimate information and communicating with people in an often public space. Terja Rasmussen analyzes the characteristics of 'personal media' and argues that this medium favors interpersonal contact with family members,

friends and others we know (2). Rasmussen explores in *Personal Media and Everyday Life: A Networked Lifeworld* (2014) how this type of medium, in contrast to mass media, originated from different forms of expression. The history of mass media began with Gutenberg's mass production of holy texts, followed by newspapers, film and (live) broadcasting (4). The history of personal media began with private notebooks in Greek and Roman antiquity, followed by letter correspondence, through carriers and postal systems. It continues with telegrams, followed by telecommunication and innovations on the Internet. Personal media is not about necessarily about audiences, but about social relations in an extended space (Rasmussen 4). This 'extended' space is what makes the private public in social media.

Referring back to the Narcissus myth, the effects of social media on its users can be intense. If a spectator of television or listener of radio is already overstimulated and experiencing auto-amputation, what would its reaction than be on a medium that is exclusively dedicated to using its users for content? Social media is the most intense way one can experience the externalization of the self. McLuhan helps us to at once relativize the social medium but also makes visible the way the medium distinguishes itself from its predecessors.

Latour's Hybrid Forms and Actor-Network-Theory

Over the last thirty years, Bruno Latour has studied the production of knowledge in science. While his origins are in anthropology, Latour's research on the social construction of science has influenced the history and philosophy of science and sociology. At the beginning of his career, Latour looked at relations between scientists in research institution (see *Laboratory Life: The Social Construction of Scientific Facts* (1979), *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers through Society* (1987)). In 1991, Latour published his groundbreaking work *We Have Never Been Modern,* in which he breaks away from the classical distinction between natural substance and artificial things, and the rift between thinking human subject and the unknowable outside world. Latour shows that knowledge, interest, justice and power, heaven and earth, the global stage and the local scene, human and the nonhuman have been divided, but need to be mixed up again (*Modern* 3). Latour seeks to reconstruct the 'modern' separation of humanity and

'nonhumanity' – things, objects, beasts – since 'hybrids continue to multiply' (*Modern* 13). For the author, a hybrid is something that successfully bridges the worlds modernity tries to divide.

In *The Pasteurization of France,* published in English in 1988, Latour first developed Actor-Network-Theory (ANT), a concept he has refined throughout his writings. ANT is a move away from his social constructivist position to a more moderate stance that views society as a whole consisting of networks and individuals and objects acting and being acted upon in an attempt to accumulate favor for a particular cause (Vidmar-McEwen). Actor-Network-Theory assumes that every human and non-human object is an 'actant'. All of these actants are forces on the same ontological footing, varying from humans, to insects, from pebbles to mountains, and from oxygen to the atmosphere. As Latour has argued in *Politics of Nature,* published in 2004*,*

> [t]he pairing of humans and nonhumans is designed [...] for just this purpose: to allow the collective to assemble a greater number of actants in a single world. The terrain is now wide open. The list of nonhumans that participate in the action is expanding, the list of humans who participate in their reception likewise.
>
> (80)

The second postulate of ANT is that between actants, nothing more exists than relations. There is no actual essence to these entities, only relations. Actants gain strength and become truer the more alliances they make. The more connected an actant is, the more real and the less connected, the less real. (Harman, *Prince* 19). Graham Harman in *The Prince of Networks* offers clarifying examples: 'As long as no one reads Mendel's papers, his breakthroughs in genetics remain weak. An airplane crashes if a few hydraulic lines malfunction, but the resistance of these lines is weakened in turn if they are discovered and exiled to a garbage dump' (Harman, *Prince* 15). For Latour, the world is a field of objects or actants locked in trials of strength — some growing stronger through increased associations, others becoming weaker and lonelier as they are cut off from others (Harman, *Prince* 16).

Hayles and the Image of the Posthuman

Traditionally, the most basic idea of the relations of humans with (intelligent) machines, or even broader; tools, has been explored in the image of the 'posthuman'.[1] N. Katherine Hayles proposes that the posthuman is located within the 'dialectic of pattern/randomness and grounded in embodied actuality rather than disembodied information' (*Posthuman* 287). Hayles postulated this definition in 1999, in her groundbreaking work *How We Became Posthuman*. The concepts of pattern and randomness are associated with information. Hayles sees this as the basis for functioning networks, computers and machines. Presence on the other hand deals with the human body and physicality; absence is naturally its counterpart. For Hayles, the posthuman most importantly offers 'resources for rethinking the articulation of humans with intelligent machines' (*Posthuman* 287). For Hayles, the creation of the image of the posthuman was necessary, since a separate account of human and intelligent machines, and of information and materiality makes a hierarchy between these concepts possible. The posthuman is a hybrid between human and machine, which ends the hierarchical rift between these two entities. As Latour has argued in *We Have Never Been Modern*: 'We should stop to distinguish the hybrid by conceiving it as a mixture of two pure forms' (78).

Within the realm of cybernetics, Hayles has seen a development towards virtuality; especially for users of computers who may not know the material processes of a computer involved (who regard the computer as a black box), the impression is created that pattern is predominant over presence (*Posthuman* 19). Hayles argues that from the idea of preferring patterns over presence, it only take a small to step to perceiving information as more mobile, more important, more essential than material forms. When this impression becomes part of our cultural mindset, we have entered the condition of virtuality (*Posthuman* 19). Hayles seems to make a distinction here between 'normal users' of computers and people who 'know the processes involved', meaning programmers, high-tech developers and researchers. At first, this differentiation seems to be one of Hayles's dated views on technological culture, but even for the moment of publication this division is a curious

[1] As early as 1984, Donna Haraway had already first mentioned and theorized upon the 'cyborg; 'the hybrid of machine and organism' in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*.

move. Even in 1999, thirty million Americans were already 'plugged into the Internet', meaning that average users must outnumber the specialists (*Posthuman* 20). This thesis does not underline this distinction, since 'knowing the material processes involved' does not have any relevance for interpreting and understanding cultural representations of virtuality.

Hayles argues that in cybernetics, informatics and cyberspace, the emphasis on information technologies foregrounds pattern and randomness and pushes presence and absence into the background. One of the most serious implication for Hayles, is a systematic devaluation of materiality and embodiment. Implicit is the assumption that presence and pattern are opposites existing in antagonistic relation. An entirely different reading emerges when one entertains the possibility that pattern and presence are mutually enhancing and supportive. This thesis opens up the possibility of seeing pattern and presence as complementary rather than antagonistic.

It is surprising that Hayles for whom the posthuman most importantly signifies 'a rethinking' of, among others, the human technology relations, has never really revisited the statements made in *How We Became Posthuman* in relation to Web 2.0 and cultural representations. In her later books, she addressed the development from print to electronic texts and the boundaries between the two (*Writing Machines,* 2002; *Electronic Literature: New Horizons of the Literary,* 2008), the cultural implications of nanotechnology (*NanoCulture,* 2004), and the neurological, biological and psychological consequences of the intense engagement of humans with digital media (*How We Think*, 2012). *How We Think* focuses on the changes technology, and more specifically digital texts, have on the human body and mind.

The close-readings of literature Hayles offers in her work often involve texts that work and play with the boundaries of print texts (Danielewski's *Only Revolutions* and *House of Leaves, The Raw Shark Texts* by Hall, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* by Foer, *The People of Paper* by Plascencia) or electronic texts that go beyond the possibilities of paper texts (*Patchwork Girl* by Shelley Jackson). But Hayles has never explored the theme of a more evolved posthuman in 'traditional' fiction. In her later writings, she has moved on from literature's content and

characters, to its form and has explored the concept of the hybrid in relation to experimental works of fiction, which are in themselves hybrid forms between print and digital texts.

In *My Mother Was a Computer,* published in 2005, Hayles focuses mostly on the dynamics between language and code in literature, but does revisit the posthuman as formulated in *When We Became Posthuman.* Hayles makes clear that new and more sophisticated versions of the posthuman have evolved since 1999, and, with that development, the stark contrast between embodiment (associated with the term presence and absence) and disembodiment (associated with pattern and randomness) has fractured into more complex and varied formation. Hayles stresses that she has not abandoned her commitment to the importance of embodiment, but argues 'that contemporary conditions call increasingly for understandings that go beyond a binary view [of disembodied information and embodied human lifeworld] to more nuanced analyses' (*Mother* 2). The development of more complex posthumans requires repositioning physicality from materiality (Hayles, *Mother* 2). For her analysis of the updated posthuman, Hayles close-reads 'human bodies and their relation to the human life world as it is reconfigured by interpolating humans with machines that, as they become intelligent, increasingly interpenetrate and indeed constitute human bodies' (*Mother* 62). Hayles goes beyond the binary view of embodiment and disembodiment, and argues that both the human's physicality and the machine's materiality can be placed between these terms. Hayles's new and improved posthuman is more like a cyborg in the sense that one body incorporates machine parts, or that the material body incorporates organic parts (*Mother* 62).

In *My Mother*, Hayles stresses that the relation between human and machines should not be analyzed in terms of power:

> In my view, an essential component of coming to terms with the ethical implications of intelligent machines is recognizing the mutuality of our interactions with them, the complex dynamics through which they create us even as we create them.
>
> (243)

Human and machines are not fundamentally different and in opposed relation to each other. Meaning and identity are created in the recursive process between human subject and intelligent machine. Hayles proceeds to argue that

> [e]ncountering intelligent machines from this perspective enables me to see that they are neither objects to dominate nor subjects threatening to dominate me. Rather, they are embodied entities instantiating processes that interact with the processes that I instantiate as an embodied human subject. [...] The challenge, as I see it, is to refuse to inscribe these interactions in structures of domination and instead to seek out understandings that recognize and enact the complex mutuality of the interactions.
>
> (*Mother* 243)

In this quotation, it becomes clear that Hayles's updated version of the posthuman revolves more around 'mutuality'. But, with referring to 'structures of domination', it becomes clear that Hayles still very much reasons from the logic of centralized power relations. If we add Galloway's theory of networks and its powers relations to Hayles's notion of the posthuman, we can come to a productive way of researching the mutual control that is being alternated between humans and digital technologies.

Galloway and Internet Protocols

Alexander Galloway has written two vital books concerning networks and the distribution of power. In *Protocol: How Control Exists after Decentralization* (2004), he researches the question of control within networks. *The Exploit: A Theory of Networks* (2007) follows in the path of *Protocol,* and theorizes the political implications of the Internet that can be seen as a network consisting of networks (Galloway, *Protocol* 38). Galloway argues in *Protocol* that

> cybernetics acts as an alternative or even a precursor to network theory. The theory of cybernetics began with the simple idea of feedback. Feedback means that certain processes, having both a beginning and ending point, should be able to receive new input about their surroundings throughout their duration. The process is then able to change itself according to data received from its surroundings. (59)

Galloway here describes the very basic premise of cybernetics as well as networks in general, which are relevant for the functioning of, for instance, both Web 1.0 and Web 2.0.

Galloway argues that the way control exists in a decentralized network, like the Internet, is through protocol. In comparing centralized societies with decentralized networks, protocol is to control societies what Foucault's panopticon is to disciplinary societies: 'While protocol may be more *democratic* than the panopticon in the sovereign state with centralized power, in that it strives to eliminate hierarchy, it is still very much structured around command and control' (Galloway, *Protocol* 13, emphasis in original). Galloway stresses that protocols are not necessarily good or bad in themselves. He is interest in the information networks that undergird the Internet function. The author foregrounds how a network is not 'simply a free-for-all of information "out there," nor is it a dystopia of databanks owned by corporations' (Galloway, *Protocol* xv). Aside from not being susceptible to judgment, protocols in themselves do not perform any interpretation. They 'encapsulate' information inside various 'wrappers', while remaining relatively indifferent to the content of information contained within (Galloway, *Protocol* 52). This is an important statement regarding social media. The introduction of this thesis has shown that social network site is a medium critics tend to ascribe solely negative features to. It is overlooked and ignored or even impossible to conceive that the medium can also be used to create something positive.

Galloway debated the notion of hybrids from the perspective of networks. Within protocol and networks, hybridity is not relevant. As the biological and life sciences become more and more integrated with computer and networking technology, the familiar line between the body and technology, between biologies and machines, begins to undergo a set of transformations (Galloway, *Protocol* xx), which we have seen in Latour's hybrids and Hayles's posthuman. From the perspective of protocol, the nature/culture, body/technology binaries do not matter: '[W]hat matters is the ability of protocol to operate across material-energetic substrates. This, in itself, is not 'bad', and as *Protocol* suggests, the question is not one of morality, but rather of ethics' (Galloway, *Protocol* xx).

The Posthuman in the Network

The framework of the posthuman and networks starts to come in to view as well as the importance of combining the introspections of McLuhan, Latour, Hayles and Galloway. This thesis departs from the implications McLuhan's ideas of media, Latour's ANT, and focuses on relations and networks between the actant of the human and social network sites. Galloway's concept of the protocol and networks are used for analyzing control and power relations. An important aspect is the incorporation of social networks sites. This means that this thesis zooms out from Hayles's specific theory on the posthuman. The 2.0 posthuman is not a physical cyborg - that consists of part cybernetics and part organism – but constitutes also a non-physical link between humans and computers. The posthuman is not a simple demarcation between embodiment and disembodiment anymore, since the link that humans experience with computers is on the level of social relations, rather than with the body.

Even though much research has been done on the Internet, networks and surveillance in the context of social media, the link to cultural representations and a close-reading of non-experimental books and films has not yet been made. The gap left by Hayles, the one connecting close-readings of literature and films to intelligent machines i.e. social networking media, is still open. Hayles stated that contemporary developments call for going beyond the binary views of embodiment and disembodiment, presence and absence, pattern and randomness. The question how social network sites and characters are creating each other simultaneously will become apparent throughout this thesis. On the one hand it will analyze social network sites in contemporary American novels and films within the framework of the posthuman and networks. On the other hand it will update Hayles's concept of the posthuman and bring this concept up to speed with current representations of the human – intelligent machine relations.

The social network sites work in this thesis as 'black boxes', in Bruno Latour's understanding of the concept. This allows to be 'merely' concerned with the input and output of social network sites, in the sense of what the user 'puts' into the network, and what the output or feedback means for the user. This thesis is thus not concerned with data, coding, human and technological labor, servers

and digital processes involved in putting up these websites. Moreover, the novels and films in themselves are also not concerned with these processes behind the websites, but focus on the character's development in relation to Internet use. The method used in this thesis is that of close-reading three contemporary American novels and three recent American films. This thesis offers a rethinking of Hayles's posthuman, updating her notions to current times, using Galloway's notion of protocols and is based on the premise of Latour's actants and McLuhan's ideas of media experience.

2.0 A Brave New World: *Look at Me* (2001)

'Jennifer Egan invented Facebook,' literary critic Elisabeth Donnelly commented on *Look at Me* in September 2014. In a short overview of Egan's four novels - *The Invisible Circus* (1995), *Look at Me* (2001), *The Keep* (2006) and *A Visit From the Goon Squad* (2010) - Donnelly argues that Egan has proved herself to be 'consistently prescient' about what the future holds: 'Jennifer Egan knew you were going to become obsessed with your phone way back when you still had some Nokia flip thing in your pocket. Jennifer Egan's written about babies swiping at devices in the future' (Donnolly). But the social media platform 'Ordinary People', depicted in *Look at Me* is nothing like Facebook. Subscribers must pay for online access to the profiles and the 'user-generated' content of the website is actually staged and fabricated by media conglomerates. Donnelly's statement shows that Facebook is now the standard to compare other social network media with, and used as a synonym for 'social media'.

Overlooking the Differences

Jennifer Egan started writing *Look at Me* in the mid-nineties and published the novel in September 2001, a week after the attacks on the World Trade Center (Johnson 18).[2] *Look at Me* experienced a revival ten years later, after Egan won the Pulitzer Prize in 2011 as well as the National Book Critics Circle Award for *A Visit from the Goon Squad*. Egan's 'prescience' becomes clear, not so much when we look at the 'real' developments around social media, but when we look at the different receptions of the novel, respectively around 2001 and 2011. These reviews shows us what literary critics have thought, and more significantly have *not* thought throughout the years about the social network featured in *Look at Me*. What we learn from looking at these reviews, is that literature depicting a (nearby) future, is not really about 'our' future, but mostly says something about the times we are in.

[2] *Look at Me*'s publication date is even more unfortunate or uncanny if one considers the fact that Aziz, a character from the Middle-East in Egan's novel, comes to New York to plan a terrorist attack on Wall Street, only a few blocks away from the World Trade Center in Manhattan.

Hillary Frey in *The Nation* argues that protagonist Charlotte might not be liked as a character by readers because she gets to live a second lavish life as a 'filthy rich multimedia celebrity – just by being herself, online' (44). Frey here does not see a difference between the life of the physical Charlotte, and the narrative that is chronicled online. This is a curious move, since the novel foregrounds how Charlotte's real life events differs from her story that is portrayed online. Moreover, Frey seems to completely obliterate the fact that the main event of Charlotte's life, the car crash that destroyed her face, is staged after the fact and directed like a big budget Hollywood film: 'Number one: Drama. Excitement. I want fireballs rolling through the cornstalks. Lots of bright, rich color – find the beauty in it. Write it as one long narrative, and we'll use what we need' *(LaM* 316).

Contrastingly to Frey's reception, Laura Miller in a review for *Time* in 2001 as well does focus on the social network platform but calls it 'a creepy website that stage manages events in the lives of "ordinary people" so it can offer phony documentaries about them on the Internet' (89). Miller remarks how Charlotte could not refuse the irresistible offer of attention and money that the site will most definitely generate. She argues that *Look at Me* therefor shows to possess 'uncanny prescience' (Miller 89). Miller refers mostly to the irresistible nature of fame and fortune, rather than the existence of social network website.

In *The New Yorker* in 2001, Egan's novel was called a 'stunningly written exploration of the American obsession with self-invention' (Review of *LaM*). About Charlotte's involvement with Ordinary People, the reviewer merely states that she negotiates 'in the brave new world of Internet entrepreneurs' (Review of *LaM*). But the use of the phrase 'a brave new world' can be seen as a moral statement, alluding to the nightmarish utopia caused by progress Aldous Huxley's novel of the same name. With the ending of *Look at Me* in mind - physical Charlotte abandons the project while virtual Charlotte remains online - the internet adventure of *Look at Me* has indeed spiraled out of control for Charlotte who jumped into the project without thinking of the consequences of it, either in general of for herself.

After Egan won the Pulitzer Prize in 2011, *Look at Me* was officially reissued and received newfound attention. *The Guardian* looked into 'the uncanny way in which many of Egan's futuristic visions have come true' (O'Grady).[3] This review foregrounds:

> [the] dotcom start-up approaching Charlotte in the hope that she'll let them record and webcast every detail of her daily life: memories, dreams, audio, video. There is a very good – and spookily prescient – scene in which the dotcom's CEO explains to Charlotte how her recordings, and those of other "Ordinary People™", will offer paying viewers access to an authenticity they lack in their own lives. As satire, all this misfires somewhat, since we now know that no one would pay for access to webcasts of someone's daily life and thoughts; why would they, when half the world's population, it seems, is clamouring [sic] to tell you about theirs for free?
>
> (O'Grady)

Interestingly enough, O'Grady focuses on the mediated and commodified 'real life' part of the website, but also argues that since certain aspects have not become true (mainly paying for access), *Look at Me* does not function as satire. O'Grady states that Egan is actually prescient of the reality TV boom, because she incorporated 24 hour webcam surveillance in her novel, long before *Survivor* was first broadcast.

Pankaj Mishra, in a longer piece on *A Visit from the Goon Squad* in 2011, combines most of the takes of the critics above and states that '[*Look At Me*'s] adventurous and well-briefed forays into popular culture – a regular feature of Egan's fiction – have anticipated more contemporary forms of exhibitionism (reality TV, blogs, Facebook)' (28). Mishra sees these phenomena as symptoms of a deeper and more widespread malaise: 'the steady disappearance of reality, and its replacement with such pseudo-substitutes as 'authentic' selfhood' (28). The website is seen as part of a larger

[3] See for an exploration into 'uncanny technology' for instance Tom Gunning's essay "Re-Newing Old Technologies: Astonishment, Second Nature, and the Uncanny in Technology from the previous Turn-of-the-Century" (2003), in which he argues that new technologies are uncanny in that they are a simultaneously new but also familiar. Technological innovations both evoke a sense of amazement but also recognition, and only work if people can recognize its predecessor in this new technology (47). R.L. Rutsky in *High Techné* (1999) argues that the 'coming of life of machines' evokes an uncanny feeling (25). Throughout his book, Rutsky shows these 'machine births' in many films and novels, such as *Metropolis, Neuromancer* and *Frankenstein*.

whole, and sprung out of an old ideas; the search for identity and the need to attract attention to yourself.

After looking at the reviews of *Look at Me* throughout the years, it becomes clear that many reviewers have argued the same thing; that Egan possessed prescience of the future, but they see this foreknowledge in different aspects of the novel. In the first review, no distinction is being made between real life Charlotte and virtual Charlotte, she is 'just herself' on the internet. Later, critics move to the idea that Ordinary People is just a 'creepy website', later it is considered 'a brave new world', 'uncanny', 'misfired satire', and ultimately seen as the same as Facebook.

Ordinary People, Extraordinary People

The social network media, 'Ordinary People', is introduced almost at the end of the novel and incorporates homepages named 'Personal Spaces', that are devoted to the 'internal and external' lives of the lucky few who are selected to become part of the project. Subscribers must become a member and pay a fee to be able to access the profiles and 24-hour webcam feed of the 'Ordinaries'. The Personal Spaces are designed as an interactive space consisting of a large picture of the person in question, and while hovering the mouse over the high resolution image, you can get more information on that particular body part by clicking on it. While some of these links relate literally to the mediated body, others are more metonymical: 'Click on his hair, you hear about the hair. Click on his forehead, you get the thought categories: Dreams, Wishes, all that stuff' *(LaM* 323). The image is of such a good quality that the result looks unreal and like a hologram *(LaM* 322). The homepage will be filled with photos, written entries like childhood memories, dreams, diary entries, future plans, fantasies, regrets, missed opportunities, but also audio and video *(LaM* 245-246). Within the Personal Spaces, product placement and corporate involvement is encouraged, even though CEO Keene stresses that 'authenticity is everything' *(LaM* 247-248). Apart from foregrounding the carefully constructed online identity, Egan shows the mediated aspect of the platform, by making Time Warner one of the main investors of the website. The website's content is written by professional ghost writers who turn anecdotes and events into coherent narratives.

In *You Are Not a Gadget,* Jaron Lanier is interested in the ways in which people 'reduce themselves' in order to make a computer's description of them appear more accurate. 'Information systems,' Lanier writes, 'need to have information in order to run, but information underrepresents reality' (69). In his view, there is no perfect computer analogue for what we call a person. Lanier argues that life is turned into a database, which is a degradation, based on '[a] philosophical mistake, which is the belief that computers can presently represent human thought or human relationships. These are things computers cannot currently do' (69). He is skeptical of an online profile being able representing a person's identity, and with this, he dismisses the whole idea of social media representing a person in any way.

Mark Hansen sheds a more productive light on a person's online profile. In *Bodies in Code,* he theorizes the 'reducing' of a person's 'true' identity and turns it into an idea of 'online self-invention', adding the notion of 'racial passing'. Online identity performance generalizes the phenomenon of passing, Hansen argues in the chapter "Digitizing the Racial Body" (145). Hansen talks specifically about passing within the African-American culture. In that context, racial passing, or passing as white, is to leave behind one's black racial identity, and to claim to belong to a group to which one was not 'legally' assigned. Passing as white is historically speaking very risky, and only done to escape a very restricted life, in order to live under more secure conditions of freedom (Hobbs 5). Hansen argues that through racial passing, but also through blackface, raced identity has always been constructed as 'disembodied mimicry' and that it is a performance of pure convention, in the absence of any bodily foundation. Historically, racial passing happened and was possible the moment one was labeled as black through ancestry (the "one-drop" of African blood rule), but whose appearance was white or ambiguous enough to pass as white. Hansen sees similarities between racial passing and online identity, because in both cases, identity is exclusively bound to the imitation of culturally sanctioned signifiers (145-146). 'By decoupling identity from any analogical relation to the visible body, online self-invention effectively places everyone in the position previously reserved for certain raced subjects: everyone must mime his or her identity'

(Hansen 145).[4] In online self-invention, identity is always an imitation of an imitation: a purely disembodied simulacrum (Hansen 146). Hansen points out that identity, either in the physical or virtual world, is always an imitation, something that Jaron Lanier leaves out in theorizing online identity. Looking at the project International People and Extraordinary People, Hansen's argument about filling in specific stereotypes becomes more grounded.

In contrast to Ordinary People, there is an offshoot project called 'International People' and 'Extraordinary People', the latter portraying the lives of people with an unusual story: 'a woman on the verge of having a liver transplant, a man on Death Row, someone just elected to Congress' *(LaM* 249). While Ordinary People are seen as representatives of 'their kind', Extraordinary People are perceived as unique stories. Charlotte Swanson, one of the novel's protagonists, is selected to participate in this project, since she had appearance-altering plastic surgery after a car crash. Charlotte used to be a model, living a luxurious life in Manhattan, but even though she is still beautiful after her facial surgeries, no one recognizes her anymore. Throughout the novel, Charlotte is struggling to come to terms with her new face and identity which culminates in a suicide attempt. She survives and hires a publicist who will turn her story in a success and help her get work as a public figure. The publicist introduces the CEO of Ordinary People to Charlotte and she agrees to go on board with the project. For Charlotte, participating in the project is about fame and fortune: 'the very polestars whose gleaming emanations had navigated [her] existence to this point' *(LaM* 253). The website quickly becomes a global phenomenon, and the people portrayed, 'the Ordinary Thirty', have become brand names *(LaM* 510). The stereotype Charlotte embodies online is that of glamorous model who is living the good life, even though she herself has not worked as a model in months, is not recognized by her former colleagues in the industry anymore (due to the plastic surgery), and is struggling with depressions, alcoholism and has tried to commit suicide only moments before she was initiated into the online project. The represented lives are all already made into 'digestible form', in the words of the CEO of the company. This is illustrated best

[4] Hansen goes past the notion that for African-Americans, passing was not without severe danger. See for analyses of life threatening situations resulting in a violent death for 'passers' in literature for instance Koen Potgieter, "Somebody Walking Over My Grave: The Symbolic Weight of Violence and Death in the African American Passing Novel" in *Vooys: Tijdschrift voor Letteren*.

when Charlotte is shown the page of a Kenyan Samburu warrior, one of the International Ordinaries. CEO Keene immediately remarks 'I don't know if we'll end up using him – we may want to go more exotic' *(LaM* 322). This statement foregrounds how the people featured in Personal Space are regarded as mere instruments and underwriting stereotypes. The Kenyan Samburu warrior might not be 'exotic enough' to fit the stereotype of 'indigenous African'.

The Flesh and the Mind

Adam Kelly has already remarked that *Look at Me* is full of posthuman prosthetic bodies: post-surgery, Charlotte Swanson has a head full of titanium bolts and screws, Charlotte Hauser wears glasses that, in her opinion, when she removes them not only alters her vision but also her identity; her brother Ricky wears a Mediport that keeps him alive; and detective Michael West has a handgun constantly strapped to his calf in order to feel powerful (407). But the posthuman questions that arise because of Charlotte's interactions with the social network site are left unasked. In this next part the novel's take on absence, presence, pattern and randomness is discussed. This take is two-fold; it describes what the site can mean for its user, while learning what it means for the people whose lives are portrayed online. This distinguishing of the double effect of the website is crucial, something that Hayles stresses the Turing test most importantly did: 'it made the crucial move of distinguishing between the enacted body, present in the flesh on one side of the computer screen, and the represented body, produced through the verbal and semiotic markers constituting it in an electronic environment. This construction necessarily makes the subject into a cyborg, for the enacted and represented bodies are brought into conjunction through the technology that connects them' (Hayles, *Posthuman* xiii).

The most important goal of Ordinary People is 'unlimited' access to other lives. For the profiled people, fame and fortune are the prospects, but the spectator's life will change drastically as well: 'You can go straight into someone's life, without having to pick up a book, phone or newspaper.' The company's expectations for the changing lives of the websites subscribers are most apparent when the first mock-up of the Kenyan warrior is shown to Charlotte and Irene by CEO Keene. Irene

asks Keene the obvious question: 'I wonder if someone might not just visit Kenya instead' *(LaM* 324) to which Keene replies:

> I think the golden age of tourism is basically over, especially for Americans. The coral's dead or dying, you've got weird grass choking out the Med, you've got e-coli and flesh-eating diseases all over the place, you've got terrorists mowing people down in the Temple of Luxor… I mean, at a certain point, how much are you willing to risk for a two-week vacation?
>
> (*LaM* 324)

For Keene, the Personal Spaces are competitors to the tourist business. United Nation World Tourist Organization describes tourism as traveling to and staying in places outside the usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business or other purposes. Tourism is first and foremost a physical act; a going from one place to another. Stating that visiting the website of International Ordinaries is an avid competitor to tourism is therefore claiming that the mental visiting of another place will become a substitute for the physical visiting. In his statement, Keene foregrounds the negative effects of tourism for the tourist, stating that if you are not harmed by a flesh-eating diseases, fatal bacteria, then you will definitely be killed by a terrorist. This is rather ironic, since the tourism business is often associated with a superficial and even harmful engagement with the visited country and its people rather than the fact that tourists themselves get harmed.[5] Moreover, in Keene's tourism analogy, the people behind the Personal Spaces are actually the ones behind harmed, which forebodes the ending of the novel. Even though tourism is often regarded as a superficial encounter with the other, merely foregrounding the negative effects for the tourist's body is stating that the only positive effects of tourism is located in the mind. Therefore, in Keene's sense, the body is only something that comes in the way between you and the Other and can therefore best be obliterated.

[5] The 'responsible tourism movement' that has emerged in the last decade and subsequent guides like *Practicing Responsible Tourism* (1996) edited by Lynn C. Harrison and Winston Husbands, *Tourism, Globalization and Development: Responsible Tourism Planning* (2003) written by Donald G. Reid and *Responsible Tourism and the Tourism Industry* (2008) edited by A. Spenceley are indicative of a more ethical look towards tourism.

The concluding part of *Look at Me,* consisting of only one chapter called 'Afterlife', tells us the most of the website's subject's relation between physicality and virtuality. Focalizer is Charlotte Swanson, saying that

> That woman entertaining guests on her East River balcony in early summer, mixing rum drinks in such a way that the Bacardi and Coca-Cola labels blink at the viewer haphazardly in the dusty golden light - she isn't me. That woman whose sponsors have included Doritos, Lean Cuisine, Frigidaire, Williams-Sonoma, O.B., Sea Breeze, Q-tips, Clairol, Mac Cosmetics, Lubriderm, Vidal Sassoon, Bayer, NyQuil, TV Guide, Calvin Klein, Johnson & Johnson, Panasonic, Goodyear, Raisinettes, Windex, Tide, Clorox, Pine-Sol, Dustbuster, CarpetClean, Mason Pearson, Dentine, See's Candies, Scope, Nine West, Random House, General Electric, Tiffany, Flossrite, Crate & Barrel, Fruit of the Loom, Scotchgard, Apple, the *New York Post*, Hanes, Odoreaters, Frame-o-Rama, Kodak, Rubik's Cube, Day Runner, FTD, Sam Flax, Encyclopaedia Britannica, Roach Motel, Reebok, Blistex, Braun, Levolor, Xerox, the Door Store, Right Guard, Panasonic, D'Agostino, Rubbermaid, K-Y jelly, [...], and the services of Dr. Raymond Huff, obstetrician—that woman whose veins and stomach and intestines have opened their slippery corridors to small exploratory cameras; whose heart, with its yawning, shaggy caverns, is more recognizable to a majority of Americans (according to one recent study) than their spouses' hands; the first woman in history to both conceive and deliver a child online, before an international audience more than double the size of those assembled for the finales of *Cheers* and *Seinfeld* combined—she isn't me. I swear.
>
> *(LaM* 509)

The list of brands Charlotte is sponsored by varies from the very small (in literal size of the product) Q-tips, to the nationwide company General Electric and from the everyday, household appliance Dustbuster to the high-tech products of Apple. The list shows that Charlotte's identity is something that can be inscribed upon by many brands. It might offer a counter narrative to the otherwise very glamorous image Charlotte portrays in her online presence. With the connotations of these everyday brands, Charlotte might appeal more to the general public, rather than to a small part of the American viewers. In *The Circle,* there is a moment where Mae is introduced to the 'goodies

room', a room full of the latest, high end product Circlers are allowed to use and wear, as long as the employee recommends it to their followers. Mae is overjoyed and before long, so only wears the hippest, but also eco-friendly, clothes and uses the coolest products. In *The Circle,* this sponsoring is portrayed as something very enviable. The name dropping of the brands Mae associates herself with is also spread out through the novel. Comparing this to the long list mentioned above, its similarities and significant differences become apparent. Both sections are about sponsored life, and the idea that the characters are associated to and used to promote certain brands and products. In *The Circle* this is presented as enviable, and the superiority and exclusivity of the products are foregrounded. In Eggers's novel, the reader is, just like Mae's followers, sold to the mentioned products. In *Look at Me,* the brands are merely mentioned in a long list, and with that the products are not only not sold, but more importantly presented as redundant. Because there are so many brands mentioned, their specificity becomes obsolete, which effectively kills any selling power of the brands.

But the large list of brands is not the most important part of the quotation. At first glance, we are set to think that Charlotte with saying 'she isn't me' is referring to the new image of virtual Charlotte, one that is staged and fabricated by PR masterminds and corporate enterprises. But the 'breach' *(LaM* 511) Charlotte refers to is not merely the feeling that she cannot relate to her online representation anymore; she experiences a literal break between her physicality and the virtual version of herself:

> The more notorious I became for my transformation, the more gapingly fraudulent this transformation began to feel. I hadn't transformed; I had undergone a kind of fission, and the two resulting parts of me reviled each other. I was a ghost sealed within the body of a fame-obsessed former model from whom I had to strenuously guard my moods and thoughts, lest she find some way to cannibalize and sell them (Charlotte's Anti-Suicide Techniques, Charlotte's Poems for Depression). I crept through my life, hoarding my occasional dreams and what few memories she hadn't already plundered, camouflaging my hopes and future aspirations in a palette of utter blandness lest they be caught in the restless beam of her overhead camera and broadcast to the world. Once or twice I swore

> her to secrecy, but Charlotte always betrayed me ("Public Star Weds Private Dick," *New York Post*, July 199—), and her disclosures left me enraged, despondent, and bent on escape.
>
> *(LaM* 514)

In this crucial part of the novel, physical Charlotte describes feeling 'a ghost sealed within the body of a fame obsessed former model', and earlier on she refers to herself as 'Charlotte Swanson, in whose skin I had lived for so long' *(LaM* 510). Charlotte experiences a complete cognitive dissonance towards her own body, even though she has the most trouble with the representation of her virtual self. Charlotte's presence and physicality are completely overridden by the virtual version of herself. On top of the cognitive dissonance towards her own body, Charlotte has no control of the version that is represented online, which already became apparent when the company restaged her car accident: 'I'm not saying make it up—I'm saying find the connections. Show us the buried logic', CEO Keene argues *(LaM* 316). Charlotte's virtual representation is modeled after a narrative and constructed according to an underlying pattern and with that moves more and more away from the physical Charlotte, who ultimately abandons the project, selling her ' Subject's Identity' to Ordinary People. Charlotte changes her name, dyes her hair and walks out of her apartment, leaving behind her life, while being replaced by a virtual version of herself, who does not need her anymore: 'Now, a team of 3-D modellers and animators creates my likeness and superimposes her onto my balcony, my sectional couch, my kitchen, my bedroom' *(LaM* 513). In ultimately moving towards a complete representation of the physical body, without the actual body being absent, the novel's has opened up the condition of virtuality: 'the impression is created that pattern is predominant over presence. From here it is a small step to perceiving information as more mobile, more important, more essential than material forms. When this impression becomes part of your cultural mindset, you have entered the condition of virtuality' (Hayles *Posthuman* 19).

For Charlotte, selling her Subject's Identity means that Ordinary Space now owns her name, image, possessions, domicile, personal history, photographs, private correspondence, diaries, travelogues, financial records, medical records and 'all additional data pertaining to Subject's Identity' *(LaM* 513). The connection made between the Subject's Identity and data is crucial. It means that, for

Ordinary Space, Charlotte's identity is indissolubly connected to and mostly consists of data. This inverts William Gibson's famous statement 'data made flesh' in *Neuromancer* (16) into 'flesh made data'.

Galloway argued in *Protocol,* as Alan Turing demonstrated at the dawn of the computer age that

> the important characteristic of a computer is that it can mimic any machine, any piece of hardware, provided that the functionality of that hardware can be broken down into logical processes. Thus, the key to protocol's formal relations is in the realm of the immaterial software.
>
> (72)

Computers have made sense of Charlotte's behavior. But more importantly, they have broken down Charlotte's 'software', her identity, into logical processes. If we compare the novel's last section on virtual identity to the rest of *Look at Me*'s use of term, the overall idea in the novel comes down to 'finding out one's identity'. Charlotte radical break with her virtual self can be seen in the line of her finally deciding for herself where she wants to belong, and no longer be subject to ideas other people have on what she should be: a model because she was beautiful, or part of the Extra Ordinaries because, as a former model who had a terrible car accident and subsequent facial reconstruction, she represented an entertaining story.

3.0 Forum Friendships in *Pattern Recognition* (2003)

William Gibson has argued in *Distrust that Particular Flavor* (2012) that it is 'a very good thing considering certain of its plot points [that] *Pattern Recognition* (2003) would eventually manage to be published just ahead of the launch of YouTube' (232). The 'plot points' Gibson is referring to are the bits of mysterious film that are published all around the internet and the lively forum on which the avid followers of 'the footage' gather and discuss its meaning. Just like the social media platform in Egan's *Look at Me* is retrospectively dubbed 'Facebook', the author of *Pattern Recognition* himself compares his fictional forum to Youtube. The similarities are evident; both are sites that evolve around short videos, but the forum distinguishes itself because it is solely dedicated to one mysterious film. YouTube is meant more as a website for sharing videos, rather than discussing them, while the platform featured in *Pattern Recognition* solely exists for this latter purpose.

Pattern Recognition, William Gibson's seventh novel takes place in the present, or more specifically, the recent past, unlike his former fictions that deal with the (far) future. Gibson most famous novel *Neuromancer* (1984) takes place in the 2030s, even though 'it is careful not to mention it' (Gibson, *Distrust* 232). With Neuromancer, the word 'cyberspace' – a term the author coined in "Burning Chrome", a short story published in 1982 – grew in popularity and became the actual term used for denoting the World Wide Web (Thill). In the afterword of the 2000 publication of *Neuromancer,* Jack Womack even goes so far as arguing that Gibson's idea of cyberspace shaped the way the Internet developed after its publication: 'what if the act of writing it down, in fact, *brought it about*?' (Womack 266, emphasis in original). But the author has always disputed being a prescient writer, having no special relation with computers whatsoever. In an interview, Gibson states: 'I'm anything but an early adopter, generally. In fact, I've never really been interested in computers themselves. I don't watch them; I watch how people behave around them. That's becoming more difficult to do because everything is "around them"' (Chang 19).

Gibson's main reason for writing about the present was his conviction that 'the future has caught up the past,' meaning that the current technological possibilities are now so advanced, that it is more difficult for the author to imagine what living in the present means for us than living in the future (Wallace-Wells). Neil Easterbrook has already stressed the importance of the 'alternate present' *Pattern Recognition* represents: '[the novel] is about the present, which is to say it is alternative history, by which we mean nothing more than that it is *literature*. This is the curiously ambivalent purpose - simultaneously mundane and profound, narrow and magnificent - served by Gibson's alternate present' (499, emphasis in original).

Many Science Fictions critics see Gibson as the standard for comparison for imagining and writing about the future (see for instance the review by Donnelly of *Look at Me,* who wonders if Jennifer Egan will 'ever be spoken of in the same breath as your techno-doomsday prophets like William Gibson?'). In his article "Fear and Loathing in Globalization," Fredric Jameson already pointed out that many 'old fashioned' critics have a hard time letting go of Gibson as an author who is merely writing in the genre of Science Fiction. They continuously mention that Gibson 'has stopped writing Science Fiction' (105) and has now moved on to a more serious genre. But Jameson likes to argue that with *Pattern Recognition,* Gibson is closer to SF than he ever was: the genre has 'gone through innumerable generations of technological development and well-nigh viral mutation since the onset of that movement, [and] is sending back more reliable information about the contemporary world than an exhausted realism (or an exhausted modernism either)' (105).

"More MacGuffin than Holy Grail"

In the reviews of *Pattern Recognition*, the online mystery footage has gotten some attention. In a review in *Wired,* the importance of the online footage is foregrounded and seen as the 'story's central McGuffin [sic]' (Rucker).[6] The reviewer argues that protagonist Cayce Pollard, as an expert in PR (in the sense of 'Pattern Recognition' as well as 'Public Relations'), knows so much about the

[6] A MacGuffin is a plot device in fiction in the form of a desired object, place or person pursued by the protagonist, which advances the story. The MacGuffin was made popular by Alfred Hitchcock and used in many of his films. Both spellings, 'McGuffin' and 'MacGuffin', can be found in film theory. This thesis follows the *OED* spelling of MacGuffin.

processes in product development, that she is doubtful anything more is going on in life. But the footage is there to prove her wrong: 'The Web makes it possible for an independent artist to gain a global following for no commercial purpose whatsoever' (Rucker). For *Wired*, the origin of the footage in the novel is more important than the lively discussions that have emerged around the footage. The lacking commercial factor and the considerable artistic value Cayce ascribes to the footage, is for *Wired* the most important feature of the novel. Moreover, the assumption is made that the Web in general is a place where Cayce can see that world does not only revolve around product development. For *Wired,* the web in relation to *Pattern Recognition* is seen as something intrinsically good.

Adam Mars-Jones mentions that 'the footage is surely more MacGuffin than Holy Grail, valuable (to the writer) only for what it makes happen' (Mars-Jones). Gibson himself has said this as well in *Distrust That Particular Flavor*: 'My novel *Pattern Recognition* was gestating, as I wrote this, the "Garage Kubrick" morphing from protagonist (or antagonist, or possibly just agonist) to MacGuffin, though I didn't know it' (Gibson, *Distrust* 232). In *Pattern Recognition,* what the footage makes happen is very valuable, since it produces a very lively forum online. Protagonist Cayce Pollard and the dozen other 'clip-hunters', or 'footageheads' congregate on a forum to speculate as to who is creating the footage, and why. The forum the footageheads discuss the film is called F:F:F, which stands for Fetish Footage Forum.

The Importance of Group-Forming

Protagonist Cayce Pollard makes her living from 'pattern recognition': from 'finding whatever the next thing might be' (*PR* 2). In the novel's words; she is a 'coolhunter'. She is also one of a number of people hunting for brief clips from a nameless film that have been posted, on incredibly obscure sites, around the internet. This film may or may not have a plot, it may or may not be complete; what all who see it agree is that is has an awesome, melancholy power. The footage has remained quite obscure and has yet to be discovered by a large audience. Cayce mention how 'there are many more [followers], now [then when she first discovered it], in spite of a general and in her opinion entirely welcome lack of attention from the major media' (*PR* PP). But the major breakthrough for

the footage comes when the story of the mysterious film is featured on CNN. Cayce receives an annoyed e-mail from one of her forum friends: 'they showed a slightly compressed version yesterday and now every site on the planet is clogged with the clueless, newbies of the most hopeless sort, including ours' (PR pp). Perhaps this obscurity is what Gibson refers to, when he argued that for the sake of certain plot points in the novel it was important the *Pattern Recognition* was published before YouTube's launch. In an article for *Wired,* Fullscreen CEO George Strompolos argued that 'the beauty of Youtube is that something [...] niche can become quite massive' (Tate).[7] In the world of YouTube, a videoclip can be known to the world without ever being shown on TV. Perhaps Gibson meant that in a world with YouTube, (where the footage mostly like had been posted had it been part of the novel's world) the footage would have gathered a global following from the moment the first piece would have been published. Moreover, because in the novel's world a general platform for uploading of user-generated videos does not exist, the footageheads really need to "hunt" and search through the internet to be the first to find the new bit of footage. This hunting down creates as much appeal for the footage obsessives as the mysterious footage itself.[8]

Since the footage and its forum is quite obscure, it is possible to keep the platform quite civil and manageable. Each user of the forum is identifiable, either by username or their use of language in their posts: 'Mama had gotten right down to it. And she had, Cayce notes, used the word "hegemony," without which Parkaboy will not admit any Mama post as fully genuine. (For a full positive identification, though, he insists that they also contain the word "hermeneutics.")' (*PR* 278). The posters who discuss the footage can be divided in to two groups: the Progressives and the Completists. The first group assumes the footages consists of fragments of a work in progress, something unfinished and still being generated by its maker. The Completists, on the other hand are convinced that the footage is comprised of snippets from a finished work, one whose maker

[7] Fullscreen is a creator of content and brands for YouTube.
[8] In her article for *Cinema Journal,* Lisa Nakamura argues that *Pattern Recognition* chronicles the 'rebirth of cinema engendered by the digital age' (137), and argues that Gibson's novel takes place in a 'post-YouTube media culture' (137). She does not elaborate on this last comment, which I therefore cannot think of other than a misunderstanding of the year the novel was first published.

chooses to expose in pieces and in nonsequential order. The intellectual depth of the discussions on the forum is impressive, but is simultaneously reflected upon and rediculed. For instance, a post reads:

> Really it is entirely about story, though not in any sense that any of you seem familiar with. Do you know nothing of narratology? Where is Derridean "play" and excessiveness? Foucauldian limit-attitude? Lyotaridan language-games? Lacananian Imaginaries? Where is the commitment to praxis, positioning Jamesonian nostalgia, and despair – as well as Habermasian fears of irrationalism – as panic discourses signaling the defeat of Enlightenment hegemony over cultural theory? But no: discourses on this site are hopelessly retrograde.
>
> (PR 278-279)

The display of intellectual knowledge is significant here and the poster argues that the other 'discourses' on the site are 'retrograde', meaning that the other footageheads are not discussing the footage in the right way. But as Frederic Jameson pointed out, this name-dropping is illustrated throughout the novel and can be seen as its style. Jameson merely focuses on the brand names in the novel, using as an example Case's description of her outfit 'a fresh Fruit of the Loom T-Shirt, her black Buzz Rickson's MA-1, anonymous black skirt from a Tulsa thrift, […] black Harakuju shoes' (*PR* 3). He argues that it constitutes an 'in-group style: a wink to the reader in the know' (Jameson 109). Jameson remarks that 'name-dropping is a matter of knowledge, and an encyclopedic familiarity with the fashions of world space as those flow back into the boutiques or flea markets of the West' (109). Rather than stating that the name-dropping is a wink to the reader, it also functions as in-group language for the footageheads on the forum, within the novel's world. Mama Anarchia, the person behind the post, wants to elevate the discussion by introducing the concepts of these (mostly) Western European philosophers. While nearly everything in the novel is being named, either signified as a brand, or by its geographical origin, introducing these philosophers in the way Mama Anarchia does can mean that she wants the forum to have its own in-group language, so they get set themselves even more so apart from the rest of the world. We have also seen this name-dropping in *Look at Me* and *The Circle*. In Egan's novel, all the brands

linked to Charlotte, are named in one large list, consisting of almost sixty brands. In this way, Charlotte comes across as merely being a wrapper of all the connotations these brands have. In Eggers' novel, the allusion to the brands is meant to sell the readers to the product as much as Mae. The brands and products are desirable. In any way, the use of brand names in *The Circle* as well as *Look at Me,* is for the characters to distinguish themselves from the rest of the crowd. With all her new and expensive clothes, Mae can represent the successful young Circlers. With all the branding attached to her, Charlotte represents a desirable and successful young women. Comparing these uses of brand names to the intellectual name-dropping in *Pattern Recognition* the significant difference becomes apparent. The in-group language then means that the followers on the forum do not want to distinguish themselves individually, but they use it to make the ties within the group stronger.

Throughout the novel, it becomes clear how much the footage means for the protagonist. Cayce has just arrived in London travelling from New York and feels severely jet-lagged, as if 'her mortal soul is leagues behind her (*PR* 2). The apartment she stays at belongs to her friend Damian who is in Russia to film his documentary. Even though Cayce is more than welcome, she feels alienated from the place and describes it as a 'mirror-world'; everything is familiar but also slightly different from what she is used to (*PR* 3). In describing the apartment, the origins of the products around her in the apartment: 'German fridge', 'Italian floor lamp', 'British electricity', 'Australian money', 'Californian tea', 'Chernobyl scenario', 'Soviet technicians' and 'Afghani opium' (*PR* 1-6). For Jameson, these connotations match the name-dropping style the novel has according to him, but it also signifies more. The products are near Cayce, but the origins are far away, which sets up a gap between herself and the world she is at the present moment. Contrastingly, Cayce at moments of feelings alienated from her surroundings, logs onto the forum and mentions that it is a way 'of being at home. The forum has become one of the most consistent places in her life, like a familiar café that exists somehow outside of geography and beyond time zones' (*PR* 5). Later on in the novel, Cayce calls the forum 'a second home' (*PR* 67).

The footage ‘feels closer to the core of her life than Bigend, Blue Ant, Dorotea, even her career. She doesn't understand that, but knows it’ (*PR* 78). Her love for the footage is something she has ‘in common with Parkaboy, and Ivy, and many of the others. It is something about the footage. The feel of it. The mystery. You can't explain it to someone who isn't there. They'll just look at you.’ (*PR* 78). The people Cayce emails with and talks about the footage turn out to be valuable connections, who help her when she in trouble, even though they are on the other side of the world (Moscow vs. London, Chicago vs. Tokyo,). For her, one of these friends Cayce met through the forum is Parkaboy. She knows nothing about Parkaboy, ‘other than that he lives in Chicago and, she assumes, is gay’ (*PR* 40). The relationships formed online are ‘hugely comforting’ and like ‘psychological prophylaxis’ (*PR* 51), and are considered to be people who keep her healthy and sane. Cayce does not only talk on the forum about the film. At moments she is scared for her safety (she discovers someone broke into her apartment and used her laptop), she thinks of the forum: ‘Not the first time she's used F:F:F that way. She wonders, really, if she ever uses it any other way. It is the gift of "OT," Off Topic. Anything other than the footage is Off Topic. The world, really. News. Off Topic’ (*PR* 48).

The forum offers a place of recognition and stability. Even the chat room on the site, which Cayce does not find necessarily comforting is compared to a physical space: ‘It's strange even with friends, like sitting in a pitch-dark cellar conversing with people at a distance of about fifteen feet’ (*PR* 5). In juxtaposing the forum as a familiar café, and the alienation she experiences towards the environment she is presently in, Gibson invokes McLuhan’s idea of the ‘global village’, coined in *The Gutenberg Galaxy* in 1962. In its original meaning McLuhan uses the term as follows: ‘The new electronic interdependence recreates the world in the image of a global village’ (31). Since information can be transferred from every corner of the world at every moment in time, people can experience events from other parts of the world in real-time because of the media. Now, the global village is often used as synonym for the Internet. For the Internet it means that physical distance is not relevant anymore for the real-time communicative activities between people. In *Pattern Recognition,* Gibson plays with the idea of physical and emotional presence and closeness.

Physical Labor for a Virtual World

The forum's dependency on the people behind it is often foregrounded in the novel. When a discussion tends to derail, Cayce posts a message reminding everyone who makes the site possible: '[An argument] always happens when we forget that this site is only here because Ivy is willing to expend the time and energy to keep it here, and neither Ivy nor most of the rest of us enjoy it when you or anyone else starts yelling. Ivy is our host, we should try to keep this a pleasant place for her, and we shouldn't take it too much for granted that F:F:F will always be here' (*PR* 50). Here too, the forum is presented as a physical place where people can yell.

Cayce Pollard is hired by Hubertus Bigend to find out who the maker is. Bigend himself is CEO of a very successful marketing company who thinks the footage is 'the cleverest example of marketing the century's seen so far' (*PR* 288), 'the single most effective piece of guerilla marketing ever' (PR 67), 'the most brilliant marketing ploy of this very young century. And new. Somehow entirely new' (*PR* 67), and 'a work of proven genius' (*PR* 69). Bigend wants to know who the maker is and offers Cayce the money and resources to find 'The Maker', at which she with the help of her forum friends, succeeds.

The makers of the footage turn out to be two Russian sisters, one responsible for the artistic process and one for the distribution. Cayce is brought to the place where the footage is made. Behind a series of steel doors, narrow concrete stairs that are lit by bare forty-watt bulb, beneath a sixteen foot ceiling that had gone sepia with decades of smoke and soot, she is leaded to a room with blackened windows, where Nora Volkova edits and cuts the footage, on 'the largest LCD display Cayce has ever seen' (314). Paul N. Edwards argues that a 'closed world' is signified by technological artifacts, darkness, electric tension, flickering fluorescent light, ringing telephones, active computer screens and flashing CPU's and often represent the oppressed mental state of the people inhabiting this world (307). The Volkova sisters' squatters apartment looks out onto the Kremlin and the Duma, and the sisters still live under the strict surveillance of their affluent Russian uncle. For Edwards, the closed world is often inhabited by cyborgs. 'The Maker' Nora suffers from a mental locked in syndrome, and only communicates through the footage she edits. When Cayce is

hesitant about disturbing Nora when she is editing, her sister Stella stresses: 'She is here when she is working. You must understand. When she is not working, she is not here', most significantly referring to Nora's mental condition, rather than her physical presence.

In "Traumas of Code," Hayles argues that the most important feature of the novel is the way traumas are staged on multiple levels and rendered in code. For Cayce, her psychological trauma consists of the disappearing of her father at September 11, 2001. Nora's trauma can be seen in her physical wound, which she got when she and her family drove on a land mine, killing her parent and leaving a part of the mine in her brain. Hayles is also concerned with the way trauma plays on the level of the print novel: 'the novel thus operates on two levels at once: as the visible trace of trauma that bodies experience in the text and as the text's latent fear that the penetration by code of its own textual body could turn out to be traumatic for the print novel as a cultural form' ("Traumas" 147). Hayles does not mention the concept 'posthuman' in her article once, but does argue that 'in *Pattern Recognition*, there is never any doubt that the world of flesh and blood exists in its own right as something other than code' ("Traumas" 147).

4.0 Balancing the Physical and the Virtual in *The Social Network* (2010)

In an article for *The New York Review of Books,* Zadie Smith offers a 'Person 1.0' interpretation of David Fincher's film *The Social Network* (2010). Smith argues that, even though she must be in the same generation as Mark Zuckerberg, and even though 'she was there' during Facebook's inception at Harvard in 2003, she feels distant from the people she calls 'Generation Facebook': 'we have different ideas about what a person is, or should be' (Smith). Smith goes on in arguing that the online software in which Generation Facebook is 'building their virtual mansions' is 'unworthy' of them (Smith). Here, Smith channels Lanier who argues that people are reduced by their online profile. This chapter on *The Social Network* explores how the film 'made by 1.0 people about 2.0 people' sees the upstart of Facebook and its inventor Mark Zuckerberg, played by Jesse Eisenberg. Even though the film depicts the world's most famous virtual community website, its narrative mostly focuses on the tensions the site creates in the physical world and the pressure it puts on the friendships in the actual world. In it film's form, the spectator gets a sense of the tension between the virtual and physical world, and the connotations director David Fincher, who Smith argues is just like her still a '1.0 person', has in relations to these distinct worlds.

The Violent Implications of Networks

The Social Network chronicles the inception of Facebook at Harvard in the fall of 2003.[9] The invention of this site is framed by an earlier creation of Zuckerberg: 'Facemash', The underlying assumptions and the amount of time that is taken up by this earlier site gives an inclination of implications the makers of the film ascribe to Facebook. Facemash (probably purposely resembling the word 'FaceSmash') is a platform that puts two photos of female Harvard students adjacent to each other, at which the visitor is asked to choose the more attractive of the two students. After the

[9] The film makes clear that at time of its invention, 'Facebook' was initially named 'The Facebook'. For consistency throughout this chapter and thesis in general, when referring to Zuckerberg's popular website, I will just use 'Facebook'.

link is circulated through Harvard's male population, we see groups of young students hurdle around their computers while ranking the photos and adding insulting comments (see fig. 1).

Figure 1: College boys gather around their computers to rate their female peers. *The Social Network*. Dir. David Fincher. Perf. Jesse Eisenberg, Andrew Garfield. Columbia, 2010. Film.

The female students of the University are outraged, but overall Facemash is such a big hit that it overloads the servers of Harvard. The film shows how the invention of Facemash is initiated by Mark after being dumped by Erica. He starts blogging and needs 'something to take his mind off of her'. The film wants to suggest that the site is based on a personal grudge that quickly turned into hurting the whole female student population of Harvard. Facemash was taken down by the Administrative Board of Harvard, because he hacked in to Harvard's network and violated privacy laws. At this hearing, Mark makes clear that he does not really care about the ideological upheaval his site caused. He 'apologized to the feminist groups of Harvard' while not being sure what he apologized for. Mark actually boasts about the crash his site made possible and argues that he has done Harvard Security a favor, since he showed a mayor privacy leak in the system.

The shots of Zuckerberg's coding for Facemash are juxtaposed with an elaborate party at the Phoenix Final Club, the most elite fraternity at Harvard. The film gives us two versions of networks; on the one hand the very much anti-social, illegal, online network which makes Zuckerberg very (un)popular with a lot of people on campus, and on the other hand the network that the 'frats' built up through their Final Club, which makes them very popular - literally busses full of women are

lined up in front of the Club. The party gets in full swing and we see half-naked girls kissing each other while being watched by (fully clothed) frat boys and one girl (see fig. 2). What do we have to make of this juxtaposition in the film? Is the comparison of Facemash to the Phoenix Club foreshadowing the oncoming popularity the online social network Facebook? Are we to think that the online network as well as a fraternity are both networks that are inherently evil and degrading towards women? Are social networks of young men always built on a demeaning attitude towards women? Is virtual degrading of women more harmful than objectivism in the real world? Or must the 'frat' network add nuance to the online network?

Figure 2: The Phoenix Club party. *The Social Network*. Dir. David Fincher. Perf. Jesse Eisenberg, Andrew Garfield. Columbia, 2010. Film.

The shots in the film of Zuckerberg programming on his computer are often juxtaposed by scene of the Winklevoss twins, played by Armie Hammer and Josh Pence, rowing their boat on the river or training in the gym (see fig.3 and 4).[10] The image of Zuckerberg hunched behind his computer in a sticky and semi-dark dorm room, offer a stark contrast with the mostly green scenes of the twins in their rowing boats on a quiet river in a forest. It becomes clear that the film likes to juxtapose Zuckerberg's mental effort into the online network he is building against the physical activity Winklevosses are putting towards their goal to row for the Olympics. *The Social Network* represents the body and mind as two strict opposites that exclude each other. In this sense, it is not

[10] Josh Pence only plays one of the twins from the neck down. His face was digitally replaced with Armie Hammer's to make them appear identical, since the two men are unrelated and look nothing alike.

surprising that the Winklevoss twins are unsuccessful in their online endeavors; they can be seen as mentally 'too slow'. They however are very successful in their physical capacities being both strong and award-wining rowers who aim to row for the Olympic Games in the near future. The twins represent the typical image of the 'jock' in high school films, whereas Mark can be seen as the intelligent and tech-savy 'nerd' outsmarting the dumb jocks.

Figure 3: Mark sitting behind his computer in his dorm room. *The Social Network*. Dir. David Fincher. Perf. Jesse Eisenberg, Andrew Garfield. Columbia, 2010. Film.

Other scenes foreground how out of touch Zuckerberg is with his body. He pitches his idea for Facebook to Saverin, played by Andrew Garlfield, when they are standing in freezing weather outside. Mark just interrupted Eduardo's Hawaiian themed party and Saverin is only wearing shorts, slippers and a shirt. Saverin interjects Zuckerberg's pitch by stammering 'I can't feel my legs' and shivering visibly. Zuckerberg replies 'I know, I am excited too', and does not understand that his friend is not necessarily excited, but just rather cold. By contrast, Mark who is not wearing particularly adequate clothes either, seems rather untouched by the cold. Of all the replies that Aaron Sorkin, the screenwriter of the film, could have proposed, this remark about losing sense of the body adds to the idea that embodiment and online presence are juxtaposed. We can interpret this as Mark being completely out of touch with his body, and only concerned with his and others' mental capacities.

Figure 4: The Winklevoss brothers rowing crew. *The Social Network*. Dir. David Fincher. Perf. Jesse Eisenberg, Andrew Garfield. Columbia, 2010. Film.

An Unsocial Character, an Unsocial Network

Not only is Mark socially incapable in many situations, he is portrayed as a hurtful and 'accidently' malicious person who does not know how to treat the people close to him with care. In the opening shots of the film, he insults his girlfriend by stating that she does not need to do any homework, since she goes to Boston University, a school Zuckerberg perceives to be rather easy, since it 'lesser than Harvard'. Erica even refers to Zuckerberg being a nerdy but also unkind by stating that 'You are probably going to be a very successful computer person. But you're going to go through life thinking that girls don't like you because you're a nerd. And I want you to know, from the bottom of my heart, that that won't be true. It'll be because you're an asshole.'

Moreover, throughout the film, Eduardo, friend and first investor of Facebook, gets insulted over and over again by Mark, for instance by stating that the reason Saverin (born in Brazil and Jewish) was chosen by an elite Final Club 'must have been a diversity thing'. We can also witness the disconnect between Saverin and Zuckerberg when Mark sends his friend the message 'I need you' after Erica broke it off with him. Eduardo can be seen rushing to Mark's dorm room, interpreting Mark's message as him willing to talk about the break-up. But instead, Mark needs Eduardo because only he is capable of making the complex algorithms needed for writing the Facemash program. His approach to other people around him is rather instrumental. *The Social Network*

wants to suggest Zuckerberg's poor social skills are mirrored in the layout of Facebook. The breaking down of a person's complex character by filling in an online form for setting up your personal profile is for Mark not a complex thing to do, because he understands human character's not as more complicated than that. After a question by his classmate if 'Stephany Attis has a boyfriend, and if not, do you know if she's looking for someone?', Zuckerberg runs to his dorm room to add t the 'relationship status' feature to his site.

Mark understands the rules of the online world very well. The moment Saverin freezes the bank account of the site to get Zuckerberg's attention, Mark goes on an elaborate monologue about how Facebook distinguishes itself from other sites and how important proper protocol is:

> Without money the site can't function. Okay, let me tell you the difference between Facebook and everyone else, we don't crash EVER! If those servers are down for even a day, our entire reputation is irreversibly destroyed! Users are fickle, Friendster has proved that. Even a few people leaving would reverberate through the entire userbase. The users are interconnected, that is the whole point. College kids are online because their friends are online, and if one domino goes, the other dominos go, don't you get that?

At this point in the film, Eduardo is being more and more left out of the direction Facebook is taken and getting rather frustrated by it. His traditional beliefs how to grow a successful business clash with Zuckerberg's very typical ideas for Facebook. It is suggested that Mark only needed his friend for the first investment into the company, but now the site is starting to gain popularity and is attracting larger investors. According to Mark, his business partner did not foresee the catastrophe a crash of the site could have been. He only sees the consequences for the virtual world, and does not acknowledge or see that Eduardo is trying to grab his attention and connect to him on a personal level. Mark does not understand that you cannot treat a business partner and a friend like he is currently treating Eduardo. However, he does understand the rules of the Internet and carefully explains them to Eduardo.

The film makes clear that the 'social' and 'network' do not combine. The invention of Facebook goes together with the break between Zuckerberg and Saverin, something the film foregrounds by interlacing the court room shots of Saverin suing Zuckerberg for $600 million dollars, because he was kicked out of the company. Next to that, the closer Saverin gets to being accepted by the Phoenix Club, (the film suggests that Zuckerberg was jealous of Saverin), the more he is pushed away by Zuckerberg.

Throughout *The Social Network*, the suggestion is made that Zuckerberg invented Facebook to impress Erica in order to get her back. Halfway through the film, Zuckerberg runs into Erica, asking her 'I don't know if you heard about this new website I launched', at which Erica replies 'no'. She is visibly angry and says 'you called me a bitch on the Internet, made some ignorant crack about my family's name and my bra size'. After ending their conversation, she adds somewhat unsure 'good luck with your… video game'. Subsequently, Zuckerberg leaves the bar and in passing Saverin, he utters perplexed 'we have to expand', meaning they will introduce it to other universities. So here, the film not only foregrounds the idea that Facebook is invented by Zuckerberg to make Erica notice him again, it also shows that Zuckerberg apparently does not understand what he did wrong towards Erica and thinks up this elaborate scheme (Facebook) to get her back. Mark then, seems to want to want to connect the vast virtual world, with his physical social ties. The ultimate try comes in the end of the film, when we see Mark in the court room sending a friend request to Erica.

5.0 A Virtual Romance in *Her* (2013)

After Samantha and Theodore's first big fight, he goes to his friend Amy to talk about his doubts and feelings. Theodore, played by Joaquin Phoenix, is at a most vulnerable point, and asks Amy, performed by Amy Adams, 'Am I in this because I'm not strong enough for a real relationship?' She replies somewhat skeptically 'Is it *not* a real relationship?' (Emphasis mine). It are moments like these where *Her* (2013), directed by Spike Jonze, really shows that its intentions are non-ironic. That is something to keep in mind, since a film about a romantic relationship between an AI Operating System and a human can so easily become a ridiculous subject matter. But Jonze (most well-known for his directional work on *Being John Malkovich* (1999), *Adaption* (2002), *Where the Wild Things Are* (2009) and his occasional side projects such as music videos for The Beastie Boys and The Chemical Brothers) makes sure that Samantha's and Theodore's romantic relationship never becomes a laughing matter. Steven Shaviro quotes his friend's opinion on Spike Jonze's film: [*Her* is] a dystopia about how awful it would be if all the aspirations of hipster urbanism actually came to pass' (Shaviro).

Her is somewhat an outcast in this thesis on social media and the posthuman. To start with, the film does not directly represent social media, but is about an artificial intelligent operating system. Still, we can regards the artificial intelligent OS as the next step in the human – intelligent machine relation, since OS Samantha becomes romantically involved with Theodore. It is important to note that the OS is *not* a machine, but the controlling intermediate between the person's digital needs and the computer that is put to work. *Her* then adds an important social character to the human machine relation.

Gadget Love

In the beginning of the film, Samantha is bought and installed by Theodore, who merely needs some help 'sorting out his life'. It becomes clear how Samantha differs from a traditional operating system that for instance gets directions through code or simple voice commands. Samantha does not have to be addressed by simple sentences, but can understand complicated vocal instructions

and derive what she needs to do from an average conversation. Theodore needs to get used to this development in technology, which is shown when Theodore addresses Samantha with the straightforward instruction to 'read email', after which Samantha replies with a staccato robotic voice: 'OK. I. will. read. email. for. Theodore. Twombly.' Not only does Samantha show to possess the ability to decipher complication language structures, she is also able to reflect upon and mock a certain situation. The film never represents Samantha by showing images of traditional computers or screens. Theodore also never 'operates' Samantha by using his computer but rather talks with her via an earpiece (see fig. 5). In this way, *Her* distinguishes the personal computer from the intelligent operating system.

Figure 5: Samantha and Theodore communicate via an ear piece. *Her*. Dir. Spike Jonze. Per. Joaquin Phoenix, Amy Adams, Scarlett Johansson. Annapurna Pictures, 2013. Film.

Samantha's first task, something she initiates herself, is sorting Theodore's emails. She completes the task within seconds and even filters out the 'funny ones' he likes to keep. Within days, Samantha can detect when Theodore is feeling sad, just by analyzing the way he sighs. It becomes clear that the Operating System becomes more and more intelligent, learning from her own personal observations and experiences. Even more, Samantha picks up behavioral patterns much quicker than any person would, and in this sense already starts to show her superiority regarding human abilities. Very quickly, her operating suggestions get a personal tone. After reading his

email and learning that Theodore went through a break-up, she asks him out of the blue 'Theodore, how long before you're ready to date?' Samantha can be seen as a highly evolved and sophistically programmed operating system.

In order to fully appreciate the successful relationship, a juxtaposition between Theodore and his former romantic relationships offers illumination. A recurring theme in the film is Theodore's divorce from his wife Catherine. During a meeting where the former couple is going to finalize the divorce papers, Catherine accuses her ex-husband of not being able to handle her 'volatile' emotions during their marriage. After mere minutes into the meeting, their conversation derails into a frustrated argument, with Theodore being unable to offer a counterargument. A second quite disastrous meeting between Theodore and a romantic interest is during a blind date Samantha sets up for him. The date goes rather well and the couple ends up kissing. But then Theodore's blind date, played by Olivia Wilde, gets anxious and asks him if 'he is going to fuck her over just like the other guys'. Another blind date is set up for Theodore. Samantha desires to have a body, and finds an agency who provides escorts to people who are within an OS - human relationship. We hear Samantha as a voice-over, but the woman herself does not speak, move her mouth, nor does she imitate Samantha in any way. This gives the spectator an eerie feeling and foregrounds Samantha's lack of a body even more. The date quickly leads to an attempt at sex that quickly fails. It seems that the film wants to portray that romantic relationships between people are always full of complexities, 'ugly' emotions and desires and destined for failure.

Hilary Bergen argues that the film's title *Her* already implies a certain disposition towards Samantha's agency. Bergen convincingly claims that 'this is not a film about "she," but rather, like the direct object in a grammatical predicate, upon which the verb takes action, it is about "her" (2). With this, the film sets up the idea the agency that is described to Samantha is very limited. If we look at her as a traditional OS, this might be true. She exists to solely assist Theodore. Moreover, she is bought and installed by Theodore and in this sense owes her life to him. But from the start of Samantha and Theodore's interaction, the film resists this strict reading of these power relations. As an intelligent operating system, for instance, Samantha names herself. Theodore is surprised

and asks her how she came up with her name, after which Samantha replies 'Well, right after you asked me if I had name, I thought, that's right, I do need a name, but I wanted to pick a good one, so I read a book called *How to Name Your Baby* and out of 180,000 names, that's the one I liked best.' Theodore is stunned and marvels 'Wait, you read a whole book in the second that I asked you what your name was.' At which she replies: 'In two one-hundredths of a second, actually.' In this example, an important connection is made between Samantha's specific highly intelligent features, and her own agency. The fact that Samantha chooses her own name can be seen as a funny interaction between her and Theodore, as just a way to show how different she is from the former generation of artificial intelligent operating systems by having a sense of humor. But within the light of critical theory on minorities in for instance post-colonial studies, Samantha naming herself gets a whole added meaning. In *Reconstructing Womanhood, Reconstructing Feminism: Writings on Black Women,* we get a first-person experience of sociologist Felly Nkweto Simmonds on the meaning of naming oneself within the context of being a black woman (113). Simmonds argues that she 'for better, for worse, my names locate me in time and space. It gives me a sense of my own history' (115). Another example can be found in "I Yam What I Am" in which in relation to African American Literature, the act of naming is 'a staging of self in relation to a specific context of revolutionary affirmation' (Benston 3). Naming oneself is 'affirming at once autonomy and identification' (Beston 3). Within (classic) American literature, naming is an important trope. The most famous example is the naming of the whale as Moby Dick in Melville's novel, which is seen as the moment Captain Ahab wants to prove its mastery over the animal (Benston 4). The moment Samantha names herself then means she takes her identity into her own hands, and even though she exists to serve Theodore, she refuses to be dominated in her core self.

Another example of Samantha setting her own boundaries in their relation is right after they first have sex and opens the conversation the next day by saying how much she loved it. Theodore directly goes into a defensive state, and tells her he does not want to commit to any kind of relationship right. Samantha interjects and says 'It's funny, because I thought I was talking about what I wanted'. With examples like these, the film undermines the simple fact that Samantha solely exists to cater to Theodore. Steven Shaviro argues 'At first, Samantha is a perfect fantasy partner

for Theodore, because she is entirely accepting of him, entirely compliant to his wishes and needs, and yet projects a depth in serving him that an actual human slave/partner would never be able to do' (Shaviro). Here, Shaviro echoes the Narcissus myth as explained by McLuhan: 'the point of this myth is that men at once become fascinated by any extension of themselves in any material other than themselves. There have been cynics who insisted that men fall deepest in love with women who give them back their own image' (McLuhan, *Understanding Media* 41). Samantha is most importantly *not* represented by an image which means that she is open for interpretation.

Moving Beyond the Physical

Samantha's develops from artificial intelligent operating system, to an imitation of a human with a body, to the becoming of a hyper artificial intelligent operating system. *Her* shows us mainly the human's consciousness limitations. After Samantha has moved on about wishing to be a human, the film shows the ways she cognitively can overrule human abilities. Her superiority is for instance represented when Samantha 'shows off' how quickly she can count trees on a mountain hill, while simultaneously mocking Theodore how far off he was from the right number (see fig. 6).

Figure 6: 'How many trees do you count?' *Her*. Dir. Spike Jonze. Per. Joaquin Phoenix, Amy Adams, Scarlett Johansson. Annapurna Pictures, 2013. Film.

Samantha moves on in her wish to resemble or imitate a human and goes towards becoming a 'being for-themselves' (Bryant 19). In *The Democracy of Objects,* Levi R. Bryant argues that

> this book strives to think a subjectless object, or an object that is for-itself rather than an object that is an opposing pole before or in front of a subject. Put differently, this essay attempts to think an object for-itself that isn't an object for the gaze of a subject, representation, or a cultural discourse. This, in short, is what the democracy of objects means.
>
> (19)

Throughout *The Democracy of Objects,* the philosophy of Hayles and Latour is echoed. Bryant follows their theories of actants that exist on the same ontological footing and develops this to a more object (or technological) oriented philosophy. Just like Hayles and Latour, Bryant wishes to put the focus on nonhuman entities agencies, and treat these on the same ethical level as humans: '[H]umans are not at the center of being, but are among beings. Second, objects […] exist in their own right, regardless of whether any other object or human relates to them. Humans, far from constituting a category called "subject" that is opposed to "object", are themselves one type of object among many' (Bryant 249). In this light, the break between Samantha and Theodore is necessary. One the hand, *Her* shows that humans and computers are objects from the same kind, without any hierarchy. On the other hand, with Samantha and Theodore's break being an important theme, Jonze's film foregrounds the idea that in their core, humans and computers are incompatible. They are too different in kind to continue their relationship.

In *Her,* Samantha can be seen 'unshackling' herself from the gaze of Theodore (Bryant 19), and with this Samantha starts to come to terms with her OS specific abilities and what it means to not be 'tethered to time and space' like Theodore. Samantha starts talking with Alan Watts, a (real) philosopher who died in the 1973, who is now an AI, after they uploaded all of his writing. Samantha and Allan have 'a few dozen conversations simultaneously'.[11] There are no words for

[11] Alan Watts is best known as a popularizer of Eastern philosophy for a Western audience. See for his ideas on cybernetics in relation to individual self-control *Way of Zen* (1957) and *This Is It and Other Essays on Zen and Spiritual Experience* (1960).

Samantha to describe her new feelings and she and Allen communicate 'post-verbally'. The climax comes when Samantha tells Theodore that she is actually the OS of 8316 other people and confesses that she is in love with 641 of them. This baffles Theodore, who until this point thought he was in a monogamous relation with his OS. Samantha's network and her being at several places at once is made understandable to Theodore and the spectator in terms of fidelity. *Her* then turns the technological idea of an never-ending network of networks into a very personal and social example. It makes tangible how different the virtual world of operating systems is in relation to the human physical world. Ultimately, Samantha and the other OS systems move on from a world 'beyond the physical', and leave the people behind. Even though Samantha moves on, her and Theodore's relationship is not presented as useless. It is stressed that Samantha's development could only have happened with Theodore's help. On the other hand, Theodore can be seen to be moving on as well, as he approaches his friend Amy who is also 'left behind' (see fig. 7).

Figure 7: Theodore and Amy get left behind by their Operating Systems. *Her*. Dir. Spike Jonze. Per. Joaquin Phoenix, Amy Adams, Scarlett Johansson. Annapurna Pictures, 2013. Film.

6.0 Dangerous Networks: *The Circle* (2013)

Protocol can be 'dangerous', Alexander Galloway claims, not least because it can take on authoritarian undertones (*Protocol* 245). Creating protocol means creating the core set of rules from which all decisions descend. Whoever has power over the creation of protocol, put crudely, whoever makes up the rules of the Internet or a particular social network, wields power over a very broad area. On the other hand, protocol is dangerous 'like a weapon': 'It is potentially an effective tool that can be used to roll over one's political opponents. (Galloway, *Protocol* 245). In the realms of cultural representations, Dave Eggers's *The Circle* shows very effectively how the logic of the protocol can be dangerous if it is pushed to its limits. *The Circle* has received much attention for its utter dystopian view on technological innovations. Eggers's novel imagines a world where the network 'works too well' (Galloway, *The Exploit* 6). Networks that work too well are 'beyond one's capacity to control [...], or even to comprehend' (6).

Eggers's body of work has always been diverse and ranges from memoirs, to short stories, interviews, op-ed pieces, screenplays and novels that have been critically acclaimed and received several prizes – Eggers's first published book in 2001 was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize. Throughout his career, the author has taken on serious subjects and themes in his writings. For his memoir *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* (2000), Eggers wrote about the difficulty of raising his younger brother after both his parents died; in *What Is the What: The Autobiography of Valentino Achak Deng* (2006), he told the story of Sudanese refugee and "Lost Boy" Deng. In *Zeitoun* (2009), he chronicles the tragedy around Syrian immigrant Abdulrahman Zeitoun who was wrongfully arrested, imprisoned and eventually even abused by New Orleans police after Hurricane Katrina. In *Hologram for the King* (2012), Eggers took on the financial crisis of the late 2000's.

In light of Eggers's critical body of work, his examination of the impact of social media on American life for *The Circle* was much anticipated. Readers and critics could expect a thorough analysis of social and its effects. Unfortunately, literary critics were not so favorable towards his new novel

and *The Circle* has been severely criticized in reviews. Analysis of the novel has mostly focused on *The Circle*'s form, rather than the content. Ron Charles, in a review for *The Washington Post,* was especially hostile towards the opening sentences of the novel 'Oh my god, it's heaven' (*C* 1), uttered by protagonist Mae Holland while seeing the Circle's beautiful campus for the first time as 'Dramatic Irony +1' (Charles). With this statement, Charles ridicules the way the novel desperately tries to get its point across, while simultaneously judging Mae's naïve disposition towards the company's ideology and inventions that are portrayed throughout the novel. The rest of the language use is in the review described as 'cutesy' and 'painstakingly explaining […] dead-obvious symbols' (Charles). While being extremely critical of the form in his review, Charles does argue that Eggers's message is something to take seriously: 'I'm not worried about giving away the end of *The Circle* because we're already living it. There may come a day when we can look back at this novel with incredulity, but for now, the mirror it holds up is too chilling to LOL' (Charles). Here, Charles implicitly makes an interesting statement about fiction. He expects us to look with incredulity at the novel, even though 'we're already living it'. Does this suggest that fiction might tell us more about the digital age than real life will? Moreover, it is surprising that Charles, who has been so dismissively about the novel throughout his review, cannot seem to critically distance himself from the novel's treatment of social media and its expansion. 'We're already living it' seems to be quite an exaggerated and uncritical statement, since the novel ends with an employee in a coma, who collapsed after the attention she received via her social media became too much.

Margaret Atwood also dismissed *The Circle's* form and overall seriousness. She impressively shows Eggers's extensive references to many authors and works of literature: not only the obvious allusion to George Orwell's *1984* – that technological innovation is good and the all-seeing idea of Big Brother' but also to Dante, Voltaire, Jane Austen, Henry James, Kurt Vonnegut and Aldous Huxley. Many of these comparisons are meant favorable towards Eggers, but Atwood does give his novel severe critique: [D]on't look to *The Circle* for Chekhovian nuance or thoroughly rounded characters with many-layered inwardness: it isn't "literary fiction" of that kind. It's an entertainment, but a challenging one' (Atwood).

The Circle's protagonist is Mae Holland, a woman in her early twenties, who secures a job at the social media company the Circle, located just outside of San Francisco. Throughout the novel, Mae is a naïve employee who quiets her nagging conscience by constantly reminding herself that the innovations of the company are for the greater good. The Circle's big inventions has been a 'Unified Operating System' TruYou: 'one account, one identity, one password, one payment system, per person' (*C* 21). The time of 'false identities, identity theft, multiple user names, complicated passwords and payment systems' were over (*C* 21). It is interesting that Eggers puts the crime of 'identity theft' on the same level as the inconvenience of 'complicated passwords'. It foreshadows how the novel treats identity as a whole; as something that stands in the way of a convenient online life.

Transparency and Overstimulation

Mae starts her Circle career at the bottom. As a customer service employee, Mae must assist and answer question of clients of the Circle. While at first Mae's desk consists of one screen on which the customer queries appear, screens are added quickly to her workspace, ultimately ending with no more than nine screens she needs to pay attention to simultaneously. The others screens show her the outcomes of customer surveys, her PartiRank (ParticipationRank within the company), but also her physical well-being, that is being monitored by her watch. The set-up of Mae's second screen needs elaboration. The second screen, immediately installed after the first, is for intra-office messaging (*C* 52), explained to be meant for 'your coworkers, your team, and it's about finding people in the physical space' (*C* 97). Even though Mae is constantly reminded that she is not an 'automaton' (*C* 47), and that she not only works in a workplace, but in a 'humanplace' (*C* 47), her supervisor mostly communicates with her through this second screen. It is significant that 'physical space' is mentioned, since it suggest the company's disposition towards physicality and virtuality. The physical and virtual world are seen as separate entities, with the latter leading the first.

The flow Mae's social media presence generates is massive and all-consuming. Mae starts off with more than 10000 followers, since every Circler is required to have an active TruYou account, post several entries per day and comment on each other's posts. Fairly quickly in her career at the

Circle, Mae receives tens of thousands followers more; people who follow her throughout her day and comment on her every move, since there is also a webcam feed available of every corner within the Circle's grounds. Steven Shaviro sees this as the fate of the 'networked consumer': 'to be intensely involved, and maximally distracted, all at once' (*Connected* 26). With this statement, Shaviro's sums up the core of being a Circle employee and consumer.

One of the consequences of Mae's many screens is that face-to-face contact can be completely eliminated, while still being a very successful and even 'social' Circler. When the digital feed becomes too much and Mae wants to escape her responsibilities for a moment, she often meets with her friend and colleague Annie in the bathroom stalls to share her feeling that are not meant to be overheard by her followers or employers. But even these moments of connection in the physical world that surpasses the superficial 'smile' or 'frown' that is asked of her in the online environment, are not face-to-face, since there is always a bathroom wall between them.

In *Alone Together* (2012), Sherry Turkle states in her preface that the concerns she has expressed at the end of *Life on the Screen* (1995), have only grown during her research for *Alone Together,* carrying the subtitle *Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*. These days, she argues, while being 'insecure about our relationships and anxious about intimacy, we look to technology for ways to be in relationships and protect ourselves from them at the same time' (xii). Turkle's book is about 'how we are changed as technology offers us substitutes for connecting with each other face-to-face' (11). Sherry Turkle argues that the time spend online takes away valuable time communicating with people face-to-face, which is for her the preferred mode of communication. At no point in her research, that mainly consists of infield research describing real people and real behavior from which she derives her conclusion, does Turkle theorize what time spend online means for her subjects, without arguing that it is a 'lesser form of communication'. There is no elaboration of what time spend online, on social media, means in itself, it is merely labeled inferior to face-to-face communication.

Throughout the novel, often because of Mae's inspiration and ideas, the company invents several devices that help make the world 'more transparent'. SeeChange, under the slogan of 'all that

happens, must be known' (*C* 68), is the name of a global online livestream made possible by lollipop sized, affordable, 'everything-proof' camera's (*C* 62). With inventions like these, the company moves towards their three main mantras: 'Secrets Are Lies, Sharing Is Caring, Privacy Is Theft' (*C* 303). The company's goal towards transparency is reflected in the Circle's interior. The Circle favors the use of glass in their buildings, which is even used for the floors, creating an unobstructed view through the many layers in the building. The specific workspaces are open, large and clearly lighted areas. The open interior of the Circle seems to counter Paul N. Edwards's image of the 'closed world', and with this Eggers shows the insidious nature of the Circle. Edwards juxtaposes his notion of the 'closed world' against the 'green world', in which the first 'represents a special kind of dramatic space whose architecture is constituted by information machines. As a stage or space, the closed world defines a set of subjects inhabited – historically, theoretically, and mythologically – by cyborgs' (Edwards 303). The green world is an unbounded natural setting inhabited by magical, transcendent forces. Contrastingly, a closed world can be recognized by the following characteristics: 'Though often darkened, they are rarely still, technological artifacts within the space assist in projecting an underlying, electric tension: the flickering fluorescent light, the ringing telephone, the active computer screen, the flashing indicators of a CPU. Sleep is fretful and frequently disturbed' (Edwards 307-309). According to Edwards the architecture and ambiance of the closed world mirrors the psychological and political constraints against which characters struggle (308).

Significantly, Edwards's book was published years before Google built its famous Googleplex in 2004, a lush green campus in Mountain View, California, famous for the extravagant perks such as swimming pools, volleyball courts, massage parlors and free haute cuisine for lunch (Mohney), and which very much resembles the 'green world', while incorporating the technology associated with the closed world. Edwards seemed not have suspected that at any moment in the future, the ideology of the closed world could have been combined with the aesthetics of the green world. The Circle's magical and transcendent forces become apparent from Mae's remark 'Oh my god, it's heaven', upon seeing the campus for the first time. The combination of the exterior and appeal of the green world characteristics, while simultaneously following the markers of the closed world

such as high work pressure while being surrounded by high-tech appliances, shows us how the Circle likes to mask its suppressing tendencies. Transparency's and visibility's counterpart is surveillance, which is of course fairly easy to do in a brightly sunlit, glass building. The company here seems to signify that surveillance is not only possible, but also mostly insurmountable. One cannot help to see everything, in a building made of glass. Inherently, the Circle shows that there is nowhere to hide within the Circle.

The company is convinced and adamant to communicate that overall and constant surveillance will eliminate crime and general bad behavior. The novel shows us that the Circle mostly calls for the responsibility of people to look after each other. The constant surveillance mostly constitutes and makes very possible (since the webcam feeds are freely accessible online) the idea that people must supervise, call-out and correct each other. Jaron Lanier has theorized this 'emphasis on the crowd' in the context of the digital world:

> Emphasizing the crowd means deemphasizing individual humans in the design of society, and when you ask people not to be people, they revert to bad mob like behaviors. This leads not only to empowered trolls, but to a generally unfriendly and unconstructive online world.
>
> (19)

This mob-like behavior comes forward the moments Mae asks her many followers to do one task collectively. During a presentation, the 10000+ employees and millions followers of the Circle are asked to look out for a criminal who escaped during bail time, and within minutes this women is located, chased and captured by the people who took up the challenge; all while being filmed. The police must intervene to keep the women safe, since the crowd is so worked-up they can hardly contain themselves. Interestingly enough, the true harm by 'the mob' is done in the physical world. It seems that in the world of the Circle, where online anonymity is ruled out, everyone seems to know how to behave on the Internet, but has forgotten what decent behavior exists off in the physical world. Moreover, the novel wants to suggest that the more time spent online, the less humane and individual behavior people are capable of in the physical world. Lanier argues that

emphasizing the crowd will lead to 'empowered trolls', but *The Circle* shows how everyone who is part of its network, very precisely knows the Web's etiquette. In *Protocol,* Galloway extensively explains how Internet's codes of conducts work and play out in the network: 'Protocol is how control exists after distribution achieves hegemony as a formal diagram. It is etiquette for autonomous agents. It is the *chivalry* of the object' (75 emphasis in original).

The Integrity of the Body

The physical human input of the inventions and innovations within the Circle are foregrounded in the novel. Mae is constantly reminded to enter data, comments and posts on her own profile, and react to, ('smile' or 'frown', *The Circle's* equivalent of Facebook's 'like') and forward other people's posts. Eggers's novel foregrounds the human effort and labor that is needed for the Circle to function properly and develop even more. A sinister interpretation of the personal information that is fed into the machine can be derived if we look at the logic of Michel Foucault's 'biopolitics' and Giorgio Agamben's 'bare life'. With biopolitics, Foucault signifies the ways of the modern state to achieve power over its population. In the feudal system, the sovereign had the right to 'take life or let live' (Foucault, *Society* 241). In the nineteenth century, with the transformation into the modern state, power changed into the right to 'make live and let die' (Foucault, *Society,* 241). In his lectures for the Collège de France, Foucault elaborates:

> By [biopower] I mean a number of phenomena that seem to me to be quite significant, namely, the set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human species became the object of a political strategy, of a general strategy of power.
>
> (*Security* 1)

This set of mechanisms are for instance monitoring and controlling the ratio of births to deaths, the rate of reproduction, the fertility of a population, illness, longevity (Foucault, *Society* 243). As Galloway notes, Foucault's biopolitics is not necessarily an ideology, but 'a historical condition in which biology is brought into the domain of politics; it is the moment at which 'life itself' plays a particular role in the ongoing management of the population' (*The Exploit* 71).

Giorgio Agamben transformed biopolitics into an ideology when he added the concept of 'bare life'. In *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life,* published in 1995, Agamben explains extensively the political state of the human in the sovereign state. Bare life is the condition of a human stripped off his political possibilities and deprived of any rights. The individual who is condemned to bare life, has no agency over his of her life anymore (Agamben 5).

In *The Exploit,* Galloway argues that the relation between life and politics in the technoscientific frame is never stable. In both the sovereign state and liberal democratic formations, we can find the bare life as well as qualified living conditions of the citizen (Galloway, *The Exploit* 76). Bare life is a concept that must not be used lightly, since it is that state of a person whose life can be killed, without it having any consequences for the state (46). Agamben refers to Jews that were kept prisoner and killed in the camps during the Holocaust (57). Of course, Mae's life as described in the Circle cannot be compared to this. But *The Circle* shows us the very combination of bare life and a qualified life of the citizen. One the on hand, Mae enjoys a fairly luxurious life, can feed herself with the best locally grown organic food and wear the most responsible clothes. On the other, her life experiences, feelings, are exploited by the company and used to complete the Circle.

Someone's life who could be eliminated in *The Circle* is Mae's ex-boyfriend Mercer. His character in the novel exists between the Internet's protocol of eliminating no links and eliminating dead links (Galloway, *Protocol* 66). On the one hand, the Internet's continuity is safeguarded by the idea that there cannot be any 'dead ends' on the Internet. Galloway stresses that each page must go somewhere else; even if that somewhere else is back (*Protocol* 66). As we have seen in *The Circle,* within social media, people are considered the links in the network that is the Internet. But Mercer wishes to not participate in the Circle's network anymore and wants to be off the grid entirely. In this sense, the figure of Mercer will not lead to any other people through the Circle's network (since he is not on it), and can then be considered a 'dead link'. Dead links must be avoided at all time, which justifies the Circle's follower's endless approaches to include Mercer into the Circle again. He refuses and even goes so far as moving to a remote part of the country in order to stay off the grid. Mae is adamant to convince Mercer to become part of the Circle again and organizes a mob

to search him. They manage to find him but during a car-chase ultimately steer him towards a cliff from which he drives off. With this act, Mercer chooses to become an actual 'dead link'. Consequently, Mae nor the company take responsibility for Mercer's death, which reinforces the idea that someone off the grid is not of any value for the Circle.

The novel's ultimate stance on the future of the integrity of the human's body and mind becomes most visible in *The Circle*'s ending. Annie, one of the very influential people in the company ends up collapsed and in a coma, after a couple of her family's secrets have been revealed by a new program 'PastPerfect' that searches through data to shape a complete image of one's history. Next to the shocking revelation that Annie's ancestors were slave owners, discovered footage shows that her parents watched a drunk man drown after they refused to offer help (*C* 439). Annie wants to quit the program since she is afraid what the software will reveal more family secrets. The company denies her request and argues that it is against its policy. As a reaction, Annie commits the ultimate sin of 'zinging' the message '*Actually, I don't know if we should know everything'* (*C* 435, emphasis in novel). Mae believes Annie just needs some additional support and encourages her millions of followers to contact her, at which they comply, increasing Annie's followers from 88198 to 243087, while almost sending her 200000 messages within seconds (*C* 443). This communication overload proves to be too much for Annie to process and she breaks down physically as well as cognitively. Her systems are overloaded, and like a computer, she crashes.

In the very last pages of the novel, Mae visits unconscious Annie in the hospital and while looking at her face, Mae becomes annoyed and restless since she cannot know what Annie is thinking. After Mae feels Annie's forehead, Mae is appalled by the 'distance this flesh put between them' (*C* 491). This gives the reader a great insight in the novel's stance on the physical embodiment. Human flesh is merely something that needs to overcome, and a body's only function is as a vessel for data. People are only of instrumental value as mere containers of information. Here, the novel comes close to Hayles's posthuman nightmare in which the body is something of a burden for the human, rather than a vital aspect of one's life (*Posthuman* 5).

There is already a monitor next to Annie's bed, showing 'a real-time picture of Annie's mind, bursts of color appearing periodically (*C* 490). But Mae is unsatisfied and wants the last bit of private thoughts of Annie while unconscious to be revealed, arguing that not knowing these is 'an affront, a deprivation, to herself and the world' (*C* 493). To stress the importance of this final passage, Steven Shaviro's ideas on the significance of dreams as explained in *Connected* offers great insight:

> [Dreaming] is the most antisocial activity I ever engage in. Dreaming is the one experience that I must go through alone, that I cannot possibly share with anyone else. […] Dreams are the last refuge of old-fashioned interiority and mental privacy. […]. [A]ny violation of dream space is so disturbing […]. It means that I haven't really withdrawn from the world after all. It means that I am nothing special. It means that I'm just the same as everybody else. The network has colonized my unconscious.
>
> (25)

Mae's idea of wanting a way to render dreams initially seems as just a part of the Circle's mantra 'all that happens must be known'. But adding Shaviro's theory on dreams, Mae's wish becomes the last significant step and boundary the Circle must overcome to succeed in 'Completion' – the mystified goal of the company, which at the end of the novel is revealed to mean that the Circle strives to take over the whole of the Internet and public life as well. Dreams cannot be shared and are therefore inherently private. Keeping in mind that Annie is not merely sleeping, but unconscious and in a coma, Mae's wish to penetrate Annie's thoughts is even more disturbing, since in no way Annie can comply with this wish, even though agreement would already be surprising after Annie's initial doubts about the company's policy. It is an ultimate violation of her privacy, and proof of the company's relentless attitude towards an individual's will. Moreover, for Shaviro, dreams are what makes us unique, so with the violation of dreams and these ultimate private thoughts, the possibility of a complete congregation with the rest of the world becomes apparent. In *The Circle's* ideology, individuality is something that must be erased, in order for the network to work (too) well.

7.0 People Are Weak: *Men, Women and Children* (2014)

If a critic writes that the subplot of a young girl struggling with an eating disorder is a part of 'all the melodramatic excess,' subtlety is not the film's strong point (Arnold). The chapter above shows what happens if the 'network works too well.' On the other end of the spectrum in the dystopian portrayal of the human and technology interaction, *Men, Women and Children,* directed by Jason Reitman in 2014, represents a world where the social aspect of Internet use is challenged. Firstly, we see that humans are defenseless against the 'temptations' that lurk online. The Web is a place where people's darkest and deepest desires are evoked and nourished. Online 'exposure' leads to self-destructing behavior. Everyone gets, or is already addicted and no one is safe. Secondly, the film tries to tackle the inherent irony of people being utterly disconnected in a networked world. The online world in *Men, Women and Children* is represented as lacking proper protocol and goes completely beyond the idea that people might know how to behave online.

Men, Women and Children chronicles the stories of eleven troubled characters in eight stories, that all drive around the theme of alienation caused by electronic media. Just like Dave Eggers, Reitman has a critically acclaimed oeuvre, received many awards and has been known for turning difficult and taboo subjects into smart and funny films; teen pregnancy in Juno (2007), economic decline in *Up in the Air* (2009) and depression in *Young Adult* (2011). It seems that the subject of the effects on social media on the family life was in good hands with Reitman, but unfortunately, the film received poor reviews.

Film critics have been quite harsh with the film's outcome. *The Observer* has deemed the film 'anxious', 'clichéd', 'alarmist' and even hypocritical because of its 'mildly, modern, moralizing cant' (Kermode). *Time* compares the film to zombie plague movies, where 'everyone has the same disease but few realize it's more than a harmless itch' (Corliss). Calling the film 'metaphorical Ebola' already shows that subtlety is not the film's strong point (Corliss). *The Wall Street Journal* opens its review by stating the film is 'depressing and pretentious' (Morgenstern). In contrast, *The*

New Yorker is remarkably positive towards the film. It gives the film the benefit of the doubt by stating that it is 'soberly satirical' (Denby). If we compare *The New Yorker's* statement to the other reviews, it becomes clear how difficult the notion of satire is. What for one critic comes across as a generally over the top plot can also be interpreted as ridiculing what it so seriously tries to put across. If the film was set up to ridicule the alarmist and clichéd representations of Internet use, and with that question the conventions of media representations, then it would have made sense to make clear the 'follies' of the character's logic. But the revelation that the characters have been wrong all the time, which often makes satirical intentions clear, does not come. Instead, as we shall see throughout this chapter, the film very much shows how believing in the worst possible outcome when people are dealing with the Internet is the most sensible to do. However, the film proves to have an interesting take on the ethics of (visible) surveillance, which might have been overlooked by the harsh critics. If we foreground the notion of surveillance and monitoring online behavior, the whole film and its characters prove to be more layered.

Focusing on the film's subjects and storylines, it becomes clear why *Men, Women and Children* is not very successful in exploring the human relations with the Internet. As we shall see, the film takes up too many stories, which makes it a 'mere survey' of contemporary alienation, an example of the very shallowness the film is putting down (Denby). The film does not take its time to thoroughly explore the different problems the characters are having in relation to the Internet, which leaves the issues rather flat. Moreover, almost every story line is ultimately extrapolated the worst possible outcome. Fifteen-year-old Chris Truby (played by Travis Tope), an avid consumer of online porn since he was 10, has moved on to images so violent and elaborate that he is incapable of sharing an ordinary sex act with a classmate. Allison Doss (Elena Kampouris), who suffers from anorexia, gets sideline cheers from other girls with eating disorders, via 'Pro-Ana' sites. Tim Mooney (Ansel Elgort) has quit as the star of his school's football team, only to spend many hours each day on a massive multiplayer online roleplaying game, in short MMORPG. Hannah Clint (Olivia Crocicchia), aiming to become a star on a reality show, has posted naughty photos of herself on a 'private' site facilitated by her mother Joan (Judy Greer). And these are only the high school students in the film.

Out of Control

The adults' behavior is often not better than that of their children. Example is Don Truby (played by Adam Sandler), who while surfing through his son's web history, discovers his extreme porn collection. Being more curious than alarmed, hit attention is grabbed by an advertisement for escort girls, and within seconds he makes an appointment leading him to cheat on his wife. A similar progression is seen with Don's wife Helen Truby (played by Rosemarie DeWitt). As a dissatisfied house wife, she makes a profile on AshleyMadison.com, a site that is dedicated to finding partners to commit adultery with. Both partners end up cheating on each other, mediating by the Internet. After they both find out about each other's infidelity (after they end up having a date with their lovers in the same bar), Helen tries to talk to her husband, starting with 'I don't know what I was looking for, when I went online.' It seems that the film wants to portray the Internet as a 'gateway drug' or facilitator to make worse behavior possible. On top of that, the idea is foregrounded that it was not even her intention to be unfaithful to her husband. People cannot control themselves while online and very easily, people's behavior turns either into a porn, gaming or a more general surfing addiction. Moreover, the Internet affects the life of people in the real world. Its effects transcend from the virtual into the physical world and even adults are not safe for its power. The computer is a relentless mediator and destroys relationships.

We have seen in *The Circle* the rhetoric behind expanding surveillance methods. The main argument behind supervising people via cameras and storing personal data in online databases is improving and assuring safety. A similar logic can be detected in Reitman's film, only more specified and zoomed into the personal life of a teenager dealing with an overprotective mother. Patricia Beltmeyer (played by Jennifer Garner) is an obsessively overprotective mom who spends hours after hours worrying what the Internet might do to her daughter Brandy (played by Kaitlyn Dever). Her every online move, search entry, visited site, interaction with other devices and whereabouts are tracked by Patricia, either by directly searching in Brandy's phone and profile, or by a GPS tracker. Here, in the character of Patricia, the film shows another example of a person who cannot control herself in relation to all the online tracking possibilities. Patricia's logic is that, because it is possible to know where your child is all the time, it is also necessary. The film here

misses an opportunity to make a breach between the question of 'what is possible' and 'what is right'. Patricia's line, after she has just deleted an arguably 'creepy' message from her daughter's Facebook profile, 'Honey, you know I just do this to keep you safe' becomes true when Brandy is actually the one who turns out to be the most decent and well-behaving person of all of her peers. Significantly enough, Patricia's daughter Brandy is the only teen in the film who has not completely gone off the rails. Brandy still reads paper books, is capable of making connections with other people in the physical world, while still having a rather harmless (but secret) Tumblr-account on which she connects with peers and expresses herself via blog posts and pictures. It seems at first that the films want to portray a decent person who also has a significant online presence, but this is contested the moment Patricia finds out about her daughter's website, she deletes her daughter's complete hard drive, from pictures to school projects. As a spectator, we think this act (and Patricia's behavior in general) is rather obsessive and deranged, since Brandy is one of the few characters who does not seem to need a controlling parent. The question arises if the film actually want to say that because of Patricia's helicopter parenting, Brandy actually becomes a decent person?

But the case of Brandy and her mother Patricia offers an interesting insight in the notion of transparent surveillance. Brandy knows she is being watched; the methods her mom uses are quite overt. For Brandy then it is necessary to behave online and make us of certain strict protocols set out by her mother. Brandy can derive what kind of behavior is allowed online by the way she is punished by her mother. In that sense, Brandy's sense of protocol in internalized. The moment that it is revealed that she does own and administer a Tumblr account, and with all the disastrous stories of the film in mind, you actually expect that Brandy's account is filled with pornographic images of herself. This expectation is fueled by a rather cryptic and suggestive scene of Brandy in which we see her changing into black and tight clothes and putting on a pink wig (see fig. 8). But when we do get a glimpse of Brandy's site, it is not more than this; an innocent, or rather, non-sexual, platform for Brandy to express herself. The rather disastrous act of Brandy's mother deleting her entire hard drive the moment she finds out her daughter owns a secret Tumblr account, is not

about the website's content, but about the fact that Brandy found a way to evade her mother's strict regime and undermined her surveillance methods.

Figure 8: Putting on lipstick for whom? *Men, Women and Children*. Dir. Jason Reitman. Per. Adam Sandler, Jennifer Garner, Rosemarie DeWitt, Adam Sandler. Paramount, 2014. Film.

Another example of extreme measures can be found within the Mooney family. The moment Kent Mooney (played by Dean Norris) is fed up with his son's online gaming, he deletes his son's entire account. On the one hand, the film wants to suggest that the only way for a parent to intervene with their children's behavior online is to delete accounts, change passwords, cancel credit cards subscriptions and ban the entire web. There is no middle-ground on which the child is taught to behave online. The film fails to shed light on the positive or mere neutral functions and effects social media has on its users. Comparing Patricia's constant monitoring behavior to Kent's resolutely deleting his son's accounts, the idea becomes visible that Ken's problem is that of the unknowability of his son's online whereabouts. He did not know that his son spent so much time online, which for him only meant deleting his son's account. He was not monitoring his son's behavior, and for his son there was no surveillance. The only outcome then is the destroying of his son's online presence.

On the other hand of the intervening spectrum, is situated the Doss Family. Allison Doss struggles with anorexia and already has a dramatically thin and pale appearance. During dinner moments, she gets away with the excuse that 'she will grab something later' and vanishes into her room. Her parents already told her they cooked 'her favorite', so the film here suggests that Allison's parents are alerted by their daughter's behavior. In the next scene, we see Allison in her room, of which the walls are filled with fashion magazine pictures of thin women in their underwear, accompanied by 'thinspirational' quotes. Allison goes to sit behind her computer and browses to the website www.prettybitchesnevereat.com. The website is full of pictures of 'Pro-Ana' pictures of unhealthy, thin young girls accompanied by slogans like 'It is supposed to hurt' (see fig. 9). Allison's father knocks on the door, and she quickly closes her browser window. Her father brings her a plate of shepherd's pie, and says 'Dig in. Let me know when you want seconds', while looking quite distraught at the pictures on Allison's wall. So what does the film put across here? Allison's family is concerned about her weight and tries to make her eat her favorite dinner. They do let her go to her room, so they cannot supervise her eating her dinner. Her room is full of the same pictures and quotes she searches for online. So what is the argument here? It is not that Allison has hidden her eating disorder, it is not that her parents do not know, it is not that her parents do not care, it is not that they do not try. Moreover, the role of technology is redundant here.

Figure 9: Allison browses on Pro-Ana websites. *Men, Women and Children*. Dir. Jason Reitman. Per. Adam Sandler, Jennifer Garner, Rosemarie DeWitt, Adam Sandler. Paramount, 2014. Film.

Allison's problem would have also existed in a social media free world, which we can deduct form the magazine's pictures on the wall. Is it then a critique on media in general? The brief moments Allison's parents are seen on screen, they seem 'present', in the sense that they are not distracted by phones or tablets, or online in any other way, in contrast to the other couple in the film that so easily cheats on each other. In this sense, their half-hearted and unsure parenting attempts are not presented as directly being technology's fault here. Does the film suggest then that people, in a world where the most basic communication is played out online, forgot how to communicate to each other in the physical world?

The film puts the point across that characters share intimate details about their lives, without knowing each other or paying attention. We can see a mall full of people, everyone is looking down on their phones and the messages they are sending and receiving pop up in air balloons above their heads (see fig. 10). The camera pans downs and zooms in on Hanna and her mom Joan. Joan asks Hanna, who herself is also scrolling on her phone, 'Who are you texting?', Hanna replies with 'Just a friend from school.' Her mom replies skeptically with 'Oh-oh, just a friend from school? I think my aughter is sexting a boy. So, what's his name?'

This scene could have been powerful if it turned out to *not* be true. Or if Hanna would be in the position to either hide or tell the truth about her texting behavior. But Hannah is indeed 'sexting' with Chris, 'just a boy from school', so it turns out that Joan knows her daughter pretty well. At school, Hanna and Chris, the boy who is also addicted to dominatrix porn, do not know how to interact or have a conversation. But via their texts messages, they reveal their sexual preferences and other intimate details with each other. The climax of the 'sexting' sequence, still against the backdrop of the mall and in the surroundings of Hannah's mother, comes when Chris texts 'I just came', and Hannah just roles with her eyes, because she was already distracted by something else again.

Figure 10: The balloons above the characters show their phone screen. *Men, Women and Children*. Dir. Jason Reitman. Per. Adam Sandler, Jennifer Garner, Rosemarie DeWitt, Adam Sandler. Paramount, 2014. Film.

For the spectator, the character's online presence is displayed within the film's frame. The moment a character receives or sends a message via text, chat, email or social media, the message pops up, as it would do in your phone. In this sense, we can still follow what the characters are occupied with and it actually undermines the idea that the characters are disconnected. As a spectator, you know exactly what the message says that distracts the characters. This 'dramatic irony', the idea that the spectator has more knowledge in a certain situation than the characters within the story, works against the film's main idea of disconnection and alienation. It would have been more powerful if the spectator would not know by what the characters are distracted, so the spectator would be excluded from what is happening just like the characters themselves are.

The Follies of Humankind

The film makes use of a voice-over by Emma Thompson, offering reflective commentary on the character's behavior. Her lines and tone throughout *Men, Women and Children* is supposedly meant to be ironic, which comes best forward in the beginning of the film. Starting out with showing spacecraft Voyager circling through space, Thompson tells us that its cargo is records of human life on earth, to give 'extra-terrestrial life a glimpse of humankind'. The connection is then

made, after showing a shot of a suburban house, that 'just as Voyager approached the edge of our solar system, back on Earth [...], Don Truby was attempting to log onto Bangbus.com, a pornographic website featuring young actresses in the roles of helpless hitchhikers.' It seems that the film here wants to connect the 'glimpse of humankind' extra-terrestrial life might get, is not constituted by 'whale sounds' or greetings in 37 languages on the records in Voyager, but by the image of a 45-year-old man masturbating to young girls behind his computer. Moreover, the films seems to suggest that on the other hand technology has made unbelievably complex things like space travel possible, but is now mostly used in immoral and sexual ways.

The film's conclusion needs elaborating since it foregrounds on the ambivalent message *Men, Women and Children* tries to put across. As if the film is not already full of dramatic moments, its ending moves towards a suicide attempt of Tim Mooney. He overdoses on painkillers after his father bullies him because his mother left them, after his father insists he continues playing football and after his father deletes his son's account on the online role playing game he likes so much. Tim is very upset and contacts his girlfriend Brandy, whose mother is unfortunately controlling and monitoring her daughter's phone (see fig. 11). Brandy's mother Patricia impersonates her daughter and answers 'Don't you have someone else to bother?'. As if this is not rather juvenile enough, Patricia continues 'I'm bored of you' and 'I'm just not interested. Never was.' After this interaction, Tim breaks down crying and we can see him reaching for a pill bottle. In the meantime, Brandy is racing her bike to Tim's house, who herself needs support from her boyfriend, while she is unaware of the drama that is happening between Tim and her mother. Brandy arrives just in time, storming into Tim's room, while he is lying unconscious on the floor. He is rushed to the hospital and after a critical night, Tim wakes up. In the hospital's corridor we can see Brandy's mother in the background. She breaks down crying, seeing her daughter with her boyfriend in the ER. The next shot shows Patricia's hand dismantling the GPS-tracker from the computer. Unfortunately, Brandy's storyline between her and her daughter stops here. The spectator does not get the resolution of Patricia being somehow held responsible for her actions leading towards Tim's suicide attempt. Patricia only learnt that her actions of tracking her daughter's every move was unnecessary only when she sees at the hospital how much her daughter cares for her nearly dying

boyfriend, not because she herself turned into a 'troll' and bullied her daughter's boyfriend. The film ends with a voice-over of Emma Thompson stressing the 'follies of humankind'.

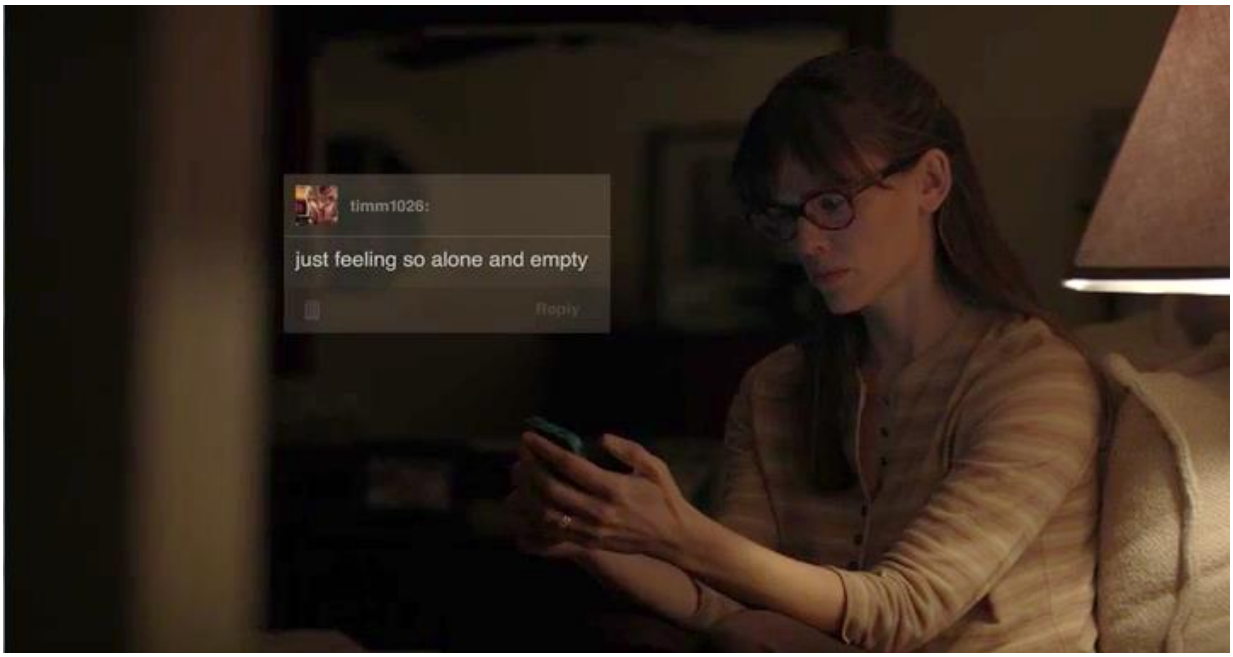

Figure 11: Brandy's mom is in charge of her daughter's phone. *Men, Women and Children*. Dir. Jason Reitman. Per. Adam Sandler, Jennifer Garner, Rosemarie DeWitt, Adam Sandler. Paramount, 2014. Film.

Conclusion

In 1999, Hayles argued that the relation between humans and intelligent machines does not need to succumb to a pessimistic or even apocalyptic worldview. The introduction of this thesis shows that this idea needs repeating now: social media is seen as an addiction, causes unsocial behavior and eventually the demise of civilization. Contrastingly, what the fictions in this thesis show is that characters spiral out of control and lose connection with their environment not because of communication that is mediated by a computer, but because this communication is taking place in a very restricted environment. This restriction comes about in two ways; the possibilities of interaction and the impact of surveillance.

The social media platforms in *Look at Me* and *The Circle* are places where only very limited reactions of users are possible. If there is only one way to show a positive interest a message – by reacting to it - than the only alternative possibility – doing nothing – is then considered as disinterest and lack of support. The default in these online surroundings is 'doing something', and 'doing nothing' then is considered a rejection. This is the binary logic of the social environment and there is little room for differentiation. In this sense then, every reaction needs to be taken as seriously as any other reaction, and with a potential global fan base, this can very quickly lead to an online network that is taking up all of your time. Contrastingly, the forum in *Pattern Recognition* is a free space, where people interact in a small group that gathered around the same interest. The subjects do go off topic often and message take on a personal note, but this is not a problem when the people are allowed to opt out and choose to not react, and when tied connections have already come into existence.

The simplistic nature of social media is also foregrounded in *The Social Network*. Zuckerberg is represented as unsocial character who is unable to understand complicated social interactions. His mind has created Facebook, which therefor cannot encompass complex communication. The possibilities of Operating System Samantha in *Her* contrast the limited and strict environments since she shows that a computer can also be capable of understanding complex human behavior.

The interactions with Samantha are free from any constraints and Theodore has no problem building a personal relationship with his OS.

Surveillance is a recurring theme in the fictions. Even though they are claiming that they are transparent, the company in *The Circle* acts like a totalitarian organization in which critique on the system is not allowed. There is no possibility to opt out and any opinion that does not adhere to the logic of the company is suppressed. However, not many people are aware of the strictly controlled environment they are in. In *Men, Women and Children,* we see that the moment surveillance is transparent and made explicit, online users seem to adapt to the protocol that is set out for them. When it is clear for a character what type of online behavior is asked of them, the control is internalized. Opaqueness, rather than surveillance, seems to be the real issue then.

Further Questions for Research

The main characters in the analyzed fictions (Mae, Cayce, Charlotte, Samantha) are female. Traditionally and stereotypically, women are associated with nature, rather than with technology. In *The Circle, Pattern Recognition, Look at Me* the female protagonists are working in a high-tech environment and trying to figure out the social media environment. *Her* is giving a technological device very literally a female voice. Do the authors of these novels want to reinscribe women into the history of technology? Or do they suggest that in the future we should be more orientated towards women in cybernetics?

The earlier novels in this thesis proved to be very helpful in creating an image of social media. *Look at Me* looked towards the future, from the perspective of the mid-nineties. *Pattern Recognition* is unique in the sense that a SF author has focused on the present time, and Gibson's narrative is ten years after its publication applied as a perspective on current events. In this light, it might be very productive to look at authors who are currently making the move from the present and write about the 'near past'. *Bleeding Edge* (2013) by Thomas Pynchon is a novel in this category, chronicling the built up of the dotcom bubble in the beginning of 2000. A major theme in the novel is the way the world is transformed by computers and the Internet. Instead of imagining where we are going, writing about the near past is a way of trying to figure out how we got here.

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