_Gretta Louw

CONTROLLING CONNECTIVITY * 10 DAYS * 240 HOURS * GRETTA LOUW

2-12 NOVEMBER 2011

ART LABORATORY BERLIN

Edition #1, 2012

'Mission Patch' designed by Igor Stromajer, Photo by Gretta Louw.

_#conconn: START

Controlling_Connectivity

Gretta Louw
Art Laboratory Berlin

An Introduction to Controlling_Connectivity

Gretta Louw

_How often do you check your emails or social network pages? How many minutes/hours/days can pass without internet access before you start worrying about who may be trying to contact you? How many seconds can you wait for a webpage to load before becoming impatient? Remember when we used dial-up internet and waiting for sites to load was standard and indeed probably comprised a substantial portion of the total time spent online.

The internet is the technological advancement that has the greatest capacity to change society since industralisation. The question is; *how* is it changing us? What does it mean that many of us (compulsively) check our emails, even when we know we won't reply at that time? Can one call this addictive behaviour? If so, what is the defining difference then between the internet and other mediums, ie. television, books, or telephones? Many people spend a great deal of time with those media too. However you might choose to answer these questions it is certainly hard to deny that the influence of the internet, within a couple of short decades, has spread into almost every aspect of contemporary life. So what are the broader implications of any changes for society, culture, art?

This question - what the impacts are of the rapid penetration of the internet and online social networks into our daily lives, social interaction, and indeed mindsets - was at the root of this project. I wanted to understand, by eliminating normalising factors (natural light, direct personal contact and interaction, home environment, visual stimuli), and giving myself over for 240 hours wholly to the internet and the people with whom I connect through it, more about the ways in which we are unconsciously - and perhaps to some degrees also knowingly - affected by our growing reliance on this still relatively new technology.

"In many ways the participation in the elaborate communication networks that now underlie social interaction is no longer a matter of choice, since failure to participate is, in many demographics, akin to social withdrawal. Our decision to connect with and performance within online networks also plays an increasingly large role in determining social popularity and professional success. "
- Controlling_Connectivity project proposal, 2010

Taking all necessary supplies with me, I closed the doors, windows, and shutters in the gallery space at Art Laboratory Berlin, completely removing myself from any analogue contact with the outside world, and from midday on the 2nd of November to midday on the 12th of November, 2011, I was available day and night for contact over the internet. Any contact or 'friend' requests that I received through Facebook, Skype, or Google + I accepted; any message that I was sent on any platform re-

ceived an immediate response; I talked with dozens of friends and strangers via VoIP and video conferencing. When there were pauses in communication I rested, or ate, or worked on editing the documentation from previous days - but whatever I did, I was always interruptable. I could be awakened at 4am and asked to comment on complex issues about the project, my practice, or media theory; or it might have been an old friend worrying about the changes in my appearance, speech, or behaviour over the duration of the performance.

I was interested in investigating whether and to what extent the much eulogised connecting and networking capabilities of the internet were accompanied by a hidden psychological burden. As I wrote prior to beginning the project: "with the opportunity for connectivity and limitless access to information, comes the obligation to be increasingly available to receive and transmit; to be perpetually connected". This growing requirement to be in a constant state of readiness and availability seemed to me to be a rather heavy new load on psychological functioning - now, many of us find it nigh on impossible to fully retreat or 'shut down' for any real length of time. The traditional dichotomies between work / leisure and public / private seem more and more meaningless in our intensely networked society: these shifts bring with them both undeniable advantages in increased flexibility in working and living situations and opportunities for social interaction regardless of distance or physical location, and the potential cost that our time and psycholog-ical resources are split into ever smaller parts and spread increasingly thinly across friends, contacts, tasks, and obligations.

It is not just personally that we feel the effects of the changing world order, consider recent court cases where people have been ordered to pay million dollar fines for breaching online copyright[1]; the privacy debates raging around Facebook and now Google; or the controversy around the censorship inherent in the SOPA bill in the USA. How are we handling these issues as a society and are we really aware of how our decisions will mould and change our world? And, on the other hand, are we taking full advantage of the myriad potential benefits of a new, networked society?

This book presents a selection of documentation from the Controlling_Connectivity performance and the subsequent exhibition together with theoretical texts covering various aspects of the performance and the underlying concepts at the intersection of art, psychology, and the internet. I often bring elements of experimental design and psychological theory to my art practice, however, as an artist and not an academic, I do not attempt to definitively answer the questions that I raise; I am far more interested in opening a dialogue. I hope you will be provided with some interesting food for thought.
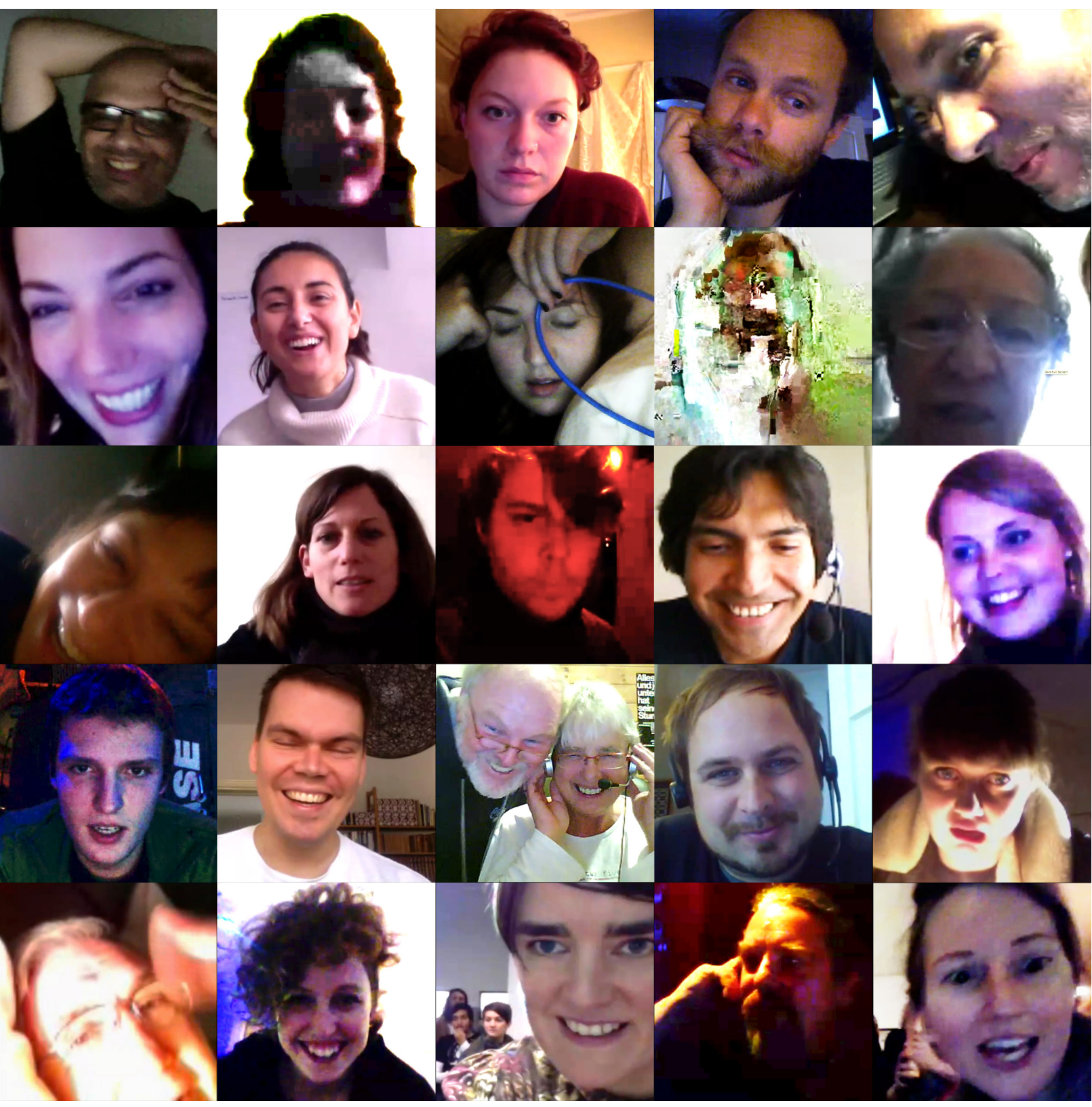</END>

1. "Jammie Thomas hit with 1.5 million verdict"; http://news.cnet.com/8301-1023_3-20021735-93.html

Images from digital performance with Douglas Paulson as part of Controlling_
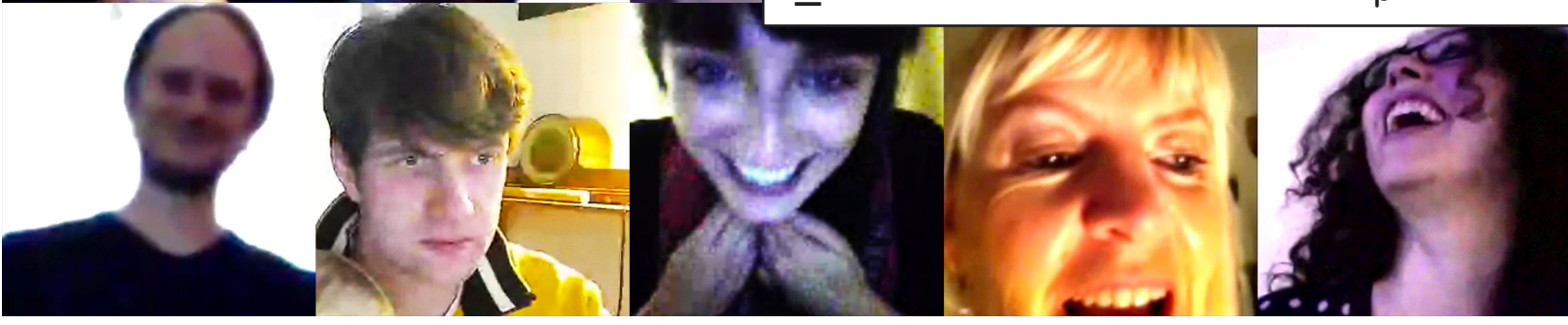Connectivity, © 2011
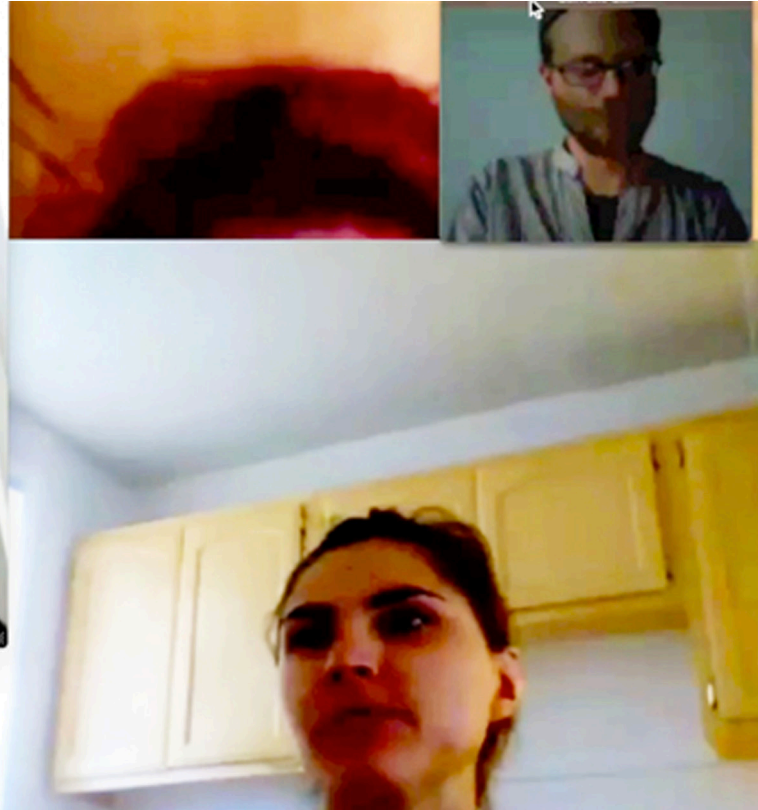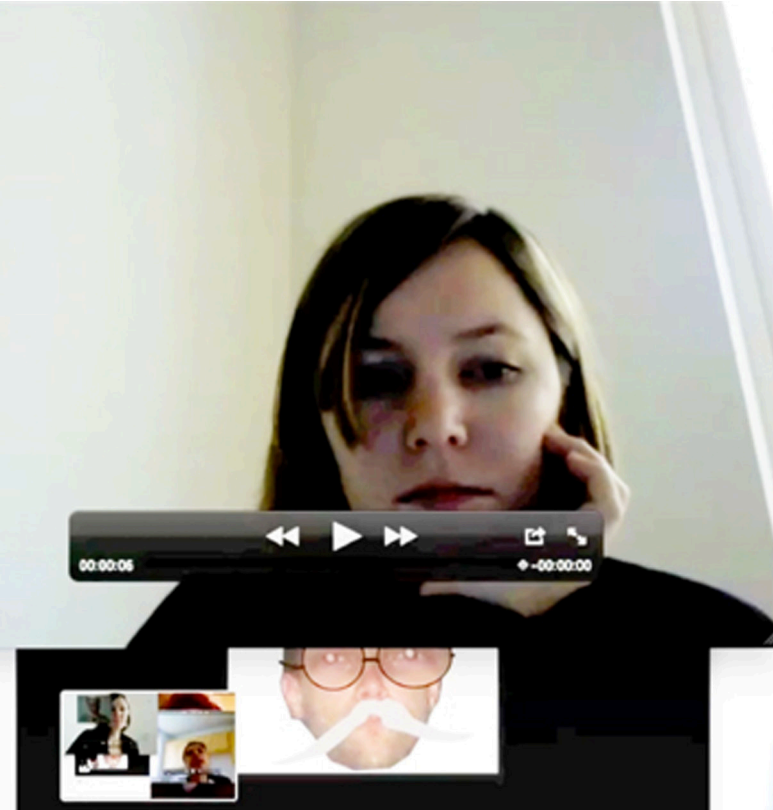
_Performance & Participants

intima Igor Štromajer

@GrettaLouw I also have mixed feelings when tweeting w/ u, 'cause I know that u "have to answer", it's your project/concept to talk to us...

7 Nov

GrettaLouw Gretta

@intima I understand, but me committing to responding doesn't mean the connections can't be useful/interesting for both, does it? #conconn

7 Nov

intima Igor Štromajer

@GrettaLouw Sure, but I'm actually not talking with u now. I'm talking to a project, a concept, an idea, an artwork. Not to a person, right?

7 Nov

GrettaLouw Gretta

@intima not at all. The parameters of the project are that I respond to all contact, there are no stipulations about content. #conconn
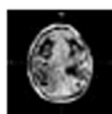
7 Nov

intima Igor Štromajer

@GrettaLouw But you'll do it only for 240 hours. And after that? Than you'll stop being an artwork and you'll become a real² person again?

7 Nov

MatildeHoffman Matilde Hoffman

@GrettaLouw @intima I think the artwork will continue to exist b/c it will be within you. You will carry what you learned onto the outside

7 Nov

GrettaLouw Gretta

@intima I think the real person and the artwork are coexisting right now. And after 240hrs? I don't know what happens then. #conconn

7 Nov

Excerpts from Twitter #conconn

2 Nov 2011

GrettaLouw:
#conconn START

annalena:
@GrettaLouw have a good start! I'll join you in the hangout #conconn
passengerfox:
@GrettaLouw Won't you sleep during the performance?? for 10 days???
MarcLandas:
@GrettaLouw Hey good luck with the project! How's it so far?

3 Nov 2011

GrettaLouw:
Quote from yesterday's #conconn online discussions: "[social media are] a platform for my existence".

NGF77:
@GrettaLouw Happy birthday Gretta!
_SamCross:
@GrettaLouw It'll be interesting to print out the tweet feed to see how your sanity goes by the end :)
MarcLandas:
@GrettaLouw Oh hey, many happy returns!
MatildeHoffman:
Happy Birthday @GrettaLouw #conconn
GiovanniTorre:
@GrettaLouw The internet will devour you. Also - HAPPY BIRTHDAY! #conconn
GrettaLouw:
I'm tougher than I look. Also, thanks! RT @GiovanniTorre @GrettaLouw The internet will devour you. Also - HAPPY BIRTHDAY! #conconn

MarcLandas:
@GrettaLouw You know me so well and yet not at all. Funny, that.
GrettaLouw:
That's how the internet works. #conconn

GrettaLouw:
I have been online for 24 hours and will continue to be for the next 216 hours.
nateXhill:
@GrettaLouw what do you eat?
GrettaLouw:
@nateXhill I brought supplies!
nateXhill:
@GrettaLouw I feel like I'm talking to a person in a cage. Are you in a cage?

GrettaLouw:
I feel like my brain is working at twice its normal speed but time is at half speed. #conconn
annalena:
@GrettaLouw you're going to turn into such a nerd, darling. I love it.
manbartlett:
Girl you gon be craycray! I wanna film you AFTER it's over. :D PS Will check in. Good luck! RT @GrettaLouw: synapse. info/synapse/gretta... #conconn
AFS_sundberg:
@PrattInstitute ARTtalk: @ManBartlett told @carla_gannis and me [Alan] "check out 10-day-performance by @GrettaLouw". Alan say GOOD followup

4 Nov 2011

GrettaLouw:
My 94 year old grandmother's first ever video skype. #conconn

jamiexmorris:
@GrettaLouw Reading Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics by Claire Bishop in class next week, mind if I use you as an example ;-)
GrettaLouw:
@jamiexmorris better yet, live skype me into your class! p.s. hisashi buri yo!

intima:
@GrettaLouw How come that u look so fresh, happy, affable & full of energy on all the videos? Aren't u also tired, sleepy, angry sometimes?
GrettaLouw:
@intima feeling good, so far v. interesting, engaging discussions - with strangers and friends. Feeling positive about humanity. #conconn
intima:
@GrettaLouw But honestly - why will you end your performance after 10 days?
GrettaLouw:
@intima you mean why exactly 10 days, why not longer or shorter?
intima:
@GrettaLouw Well, yes, I mean why to end it after 10 days, why not to go on for a month, a year, or even longer?
GrettaLouw:
@intima making yourself available for 24 hours a day? It's about testing something, learning something, exploring a concept.
intima:
@GrettaLouw Sure, it's not an easy thing to do. But the idea of a limited time somehow confuses me. 10 d sounds very long, but is it really?
GrettaLouw:
@intima obvious answer would be try it and see. 10 dys with no sunlight, regular sleep, physical contact. I will tell you how it is for me.

intima:
@GrettaLouw In my opinion, the most radical artistic action an artist can do today, is the one he/she does not do. The absence of art = art.

5 Nov 2011

GrettaLouw:
Awesome! @intima is going to design a uniform patch for my mission. #conconn
intima:

@GrettaLouw You've got mail.

GrettaLouw:
Hoping these multi-vitamins are going to help with the alarming dark circles growing under my eyes. #conconn

GrettaLouw:
I've been online for 72 hours. #conconn

GrettaLouw:
Conversations today with participants from: Argentina, Puerto Rico, Egypt, Australia, Germany, and the US. #conconn

6 Nov 2011

GrettaLouw:
I am still connected. #conconn

fkuhlmann:
@GrettaLouw gibts eigentlich auch irgendwo ne webcam auf der du zu sehen bist?
GrettaLouw:
@fkuhlmann nein, gibt es nicht. Das Projekt geht darum, immer verfügbar im Netzt zu sein, nicht immer sichtbar zu sein. #conconn
fkuhlmann:
@GrettaLouw was war das längste was du am stück geschlafen hast?
GrettaLouw:
@fkuhlmann wahrscheinlich 1.5 bis 2 Stunden ungefähr...
fkuhlmann:
@GrettaLouw nicht schlecht. das geht ja noch 6 tage. da werden die gespräche irgendwann sehr surreal werden...
GrettaLouw:
@fkuhlmann kann gut sein. Ich finde es jetzt schon relativ schwierig, die Tage in meinem Kopf einzuordnen. Bin 84 Student online. #conconn

GrettaLouw:
My 1000th tweet: I've been online for 96

hours. #conconn

GrettaLouw:
Had to turn the brightness on my screen down to the dimmest setting, otherwise the light burns my eyes. #conconn

TarshaHasan1161:
@GrettaLouw These folks might be insane for supplying zero cost iPads here: tinyurl(dot)com/freeipad9
GrettaLouw:
hello @TarshaHasan1161 are you a spambot? #conconn

MatildeHoffman:
@GrettaLouw I feel like you are having a relationship with the internet just as much, if not more, as with people
GrettaLouw:
@MatildeHoffman yes, I feel like I can anticipate the moment when someone will tweet me. #conconn
MatildeHoffman:
@GrettaLouw really? Like an internet premonition? that's so interesting. I guess you are in tune and fully immersed with the web.
GrettaLouw:
I'm even accepting what I'm pretty sure are spam skype accounts now, wonder how that conversation is going to go?
intima:
@GrettaLouw Yes, go! Spambots, web robots, worms, viruses & other automated software, that's the real cruel Internet you should fight with.
GrettaLouw:
@intima @MatildeHoffman haha, wish me and my computer's virus protection luck!
intima:
@GrettaLouw Perfect, @MatildeHoffman, that's it! For me, this is the most exciting part of the project: @GrettaLouw fighting with algorithms!
GrettaLouw:
@intima I know, I feel like I just hit the

dark, internet underbelly! #conconn
MatildeHoffman:
@GrettaLouw I will talk to you later today hopefully. I am going to go catch a couple of hours sleep

7 Nov 2011

_SamCross:
@GrettaLouw good morning! (my time :) Was thinking - what are you trying to achieve as far as online presence is concerned?
GrettaLouw:
@_SamCross I am interested in experimenting with the growing tendency to always be reachable and online - what does it do to us? #conconn
_SamCross:
@GrettaLouw so it's about u being co-present 24/7 with everyone wanting to contact you?
GrettaLouw:
@_SamCross I guess so, & exploring the burden of connectivity.
_SamCross:
@GrettaLouw do u anticipate disconnecting for quite sometime when the experiment is over?
GrettaLouw:
@_SamCross I've been wondering if I'll be able to. #conconn
_SamCross:
@GrettaLouw do you have a clock in there with you? Does it make you more tired to know the time?
GrettaLouw:
@_SamCross yes I have clocks but the meaning is not the same

_SamCross:
@GrettaLouw there are some theorists which liken the facebook platform to a museum, where the platform acts as a curator...
GrettaLouw:
.@_SamCross saying we are the artist and FB is curator implies a more equal

relationship or exchange/dialogue than what actually exists.

_SamCross:
@GrettaLouw see, I think we are the artist who provides the works, and then facebook is the curator determines how it is viewed by others

GrettaLouw:
I guess my question would be- what's the curatorial concept then? According to what criteria do they sort, filter, and edit info?

MatildeHoffman:
@GrettaLouw If social media platform is the curator, the info is filtered based on what the audience wants from the platform

_SamCross:
@GrettaLouw facebook selecting potential friends from other friend's lists is an example of an attempt to order "artifacts"

MatildeHoffman:
@GrettaLouw @_SamCross Even with the suggesting friends on fb, it is as if fb or other social platforms know what you want before you do...

MatildeHoffman:
@GrettaLouw Or I guess what is expected from the audience is to desire... kind of like the psychology behind products and marketing products

GrettaLouw:
I think the danger lies in systems where it either isn't clear that it's been edited or the editing principles aren't transparent. #conconn

MatildeHoffman:
@GrettaLouw If people didn't use/enjoy these social media platforms as much as they do, they wouldn't be sell-able...

GrettaLouw:
@MatildeHoffman @_SamCross social platform corporations are good at selling us their desires/goals as our own. #conconn

MatildeHoffman:
@GrettaLouw oh absolutely. It went from corporations using psychology to sell us products, to corporations using it to sell us "ourselves"

_SamCross:
@GrettaLouw with facebook the communication is almost always asynchronous and more than one person can influence your online presence

GrettaLouw:
@_SamCross I see. Yes but I don't feel that I have control, there are too many factors and I don't know how my info is used once out there.

_SamCross:
@GrettaLouw that is true, there are definitely limitations - we always relinquish a certain amount of control in the public sphere

MatildeHoffman:
@GrettaLouw we perhaps have taken some control of these platforms by using them to spread word on movements and occupations around the world

hyblis:
The Proteus Effect: How avatars can change behaviour stanford.edu/bailensopape... @GrettaLouw

GrettaLouw:
Quote from skype chat: "it is a funny feeling to have a friend on skype, who is supposed to be there for you all the time." #conconn

intima:
@GrettaLouw I also have mixed feelings when tweeting w/ u, 'cause I know that u "have to answer", it's your project/concept to talk to us....

GrettaLouw:
@intima I understand, but me committing to responding doesn't mean the connections can't be useful/interesting for both, does it? #conconn

intima:
@GrettaLouw When it's over, than it's u again, a private person. You can walk out and say: that's it folks, thank you very much and goodbye.

GrettaLouw:
@intima true but that always exists in any communication between two people.

intima:
@GrettaLouw Sure, but I'm actually not talking with u now. I'm talking to a project, a concept, and idea, an artwork. Not a person, right?

GrettaLouw:
@intima not at all. The parameters of the project are that I respond to all contact, there are no stipulations about content. #conconn

GrettaLouw:
@intima I am responding according to what interests me, asking questions, learning, exploring. That's real. #conconn

MatildeHoffman:
@GrettaLouw @intima As much as the conversations are sparked by the project itself, they are not fake, and the content won't vanish

intima:
@GrettaLouw But you'll do it only for 240 hours. And after that? Than you'll stop being an artwork and you'll become a real^2 person again?

MatildeHoffman:
@GrettaLouw @intima I think the artwork will continue to exist b/c it will be within you. You will carry what you learned onto the outside

GrettaLouw:
@intima I think the real person and the artwork are coexisting right now. And after 240hrs? I don't know what happens then. #conconn

intima:
@GrettaLouw In a way, you will only exist for 240 hours.

8 Nov 2011

MatildeHoffman:
@GrettaLouw do u feel like you are 'nowhere'?

GrettaLouw:

No, but I feel like where I am is somewhere I haven't been before. #conconn

intima:
In this video, you already look strained, overwrought, almost irritated and overexcited. Nervous. It was not easy to watch it.

GrettaLouw:
@intima I have to keep editing out the huuuuuge paaaauuuses in my speech.

intima:
@GrettaLouw Still rapturous, excited? Still not angry, enraged? Still able to work? Not lying on the floor, desperate, sleepy, and crying..?

GrettaLouw:
@intima feeling more subdued and dreamy now, although manic tendencies are never far away. #conconn

intima:
@GrettaLouw Would be interesting to see the point where the #conconn takes over, when it starts controlling u, instead of u controlling it.

GrettaLouw:
@intima I wonder if control is an illusion though. I am saying a lot about my work and this project in particular in the public realm...

GrettaLouw:
@intima and I can only hope that I will feel afterwards that I said the right things. Now there is no time or clarity to assess.

intima:
@GrettaLouw I always believed that the more we communicate, the less we say. Communication is often broken, especially when it's intentional.

GrettaLouw:
@intima differences / changes in psychological functioning are subtle, breakdowns and deteriorations are too.

GrettaLouw:
5 x 24 + 8.5 = 128.5 hours. Online. Reaching the point of feeling like I'm floating. #conconn

Panoplylab:
@GrettaLouw is living on the internet! Follow her + talk to her this weekend!

endaism:
@GrettaLouw what I haven't understood, are you sleeping? For the duration of the project, are you deducting your hours of sleep?

GrettaLouw:
@endaism no, I take rest when/if I can get it. The parameters of the performance are that I will respond to every online contact. #conconn

endaism:
@GrettaLouw are most of the correspondences to do with the project, what I mean is do you find yourself only talking about the experience?

GrettaLouw:
@endaism not only, also about performance art, social media, other artworks and artists, psychology etc. It's been interesting!

endaism:
@GrettaLouw I see so I shouldn't ask about the experience...

GrettaLouw:
@endaism no you can ask about that too! Whatever! Or just tell me something...

GrettaLouw:
Comment from talk today, that it is a comfort to know I am now always there, will always answer. I am a 'virtual soul'. #conconn @rrrrapp

intima:
You're just an illusion, @GrettaLouw. A computer algorithm. A flow of data. You're too artful to be a virtual soul. #conconn

9 Nov 2011

GrettaLouw:
I am a cyberspace caveman and the sandwich maker is my campfire.

GrettaLouw:
I have been online for 168 hours. #conconn

intima:
I have been online for 16 years. Check controllingconnectivity.tumblr.com RT @GrettaLouw I have been online for 168 hours. #conconn

carla_gannis:
@GrettaLouw Oh my there are 168 hours in a week dear floating, virtual illusion of data called Gretta.

intima:
@GrettaLouw OG rhizome.org/editorial/2011... writes she can't think "of many examples of a critical practice that examines [social net] platforms"...

intima:
@GrettaLouw ...and that this is what you're hoping to do. Can u already give us some interim conclusions of your critical practice research?

GrettaLouw:
@intima I am much more interested in raising questions and starting discussion than handing down conclusions...

GrettaLouw:
@intima I don't think I can answer in 140 characters, maybe a discussion would be better?

GrettaLouw:
Ok, in no particular order, some random thoughts so far about the internet, connectivity, and social media... #conconn @intima

GrettaLouw:
1. The net & social media have the capacity (& have already begun to) effect a radical shift in society/communication/information. #conconn

GrettaLouw:
2. This shift can be very positive (outreach, therapy, fight loneliness & isolation, remove handicaps) but it is not innocent. #conconn

GrettaLouw:

3. There are massive and incredibly powerful (not innocent or unbiased) structures at work, which run beneath all the +ve aspects. #conconn

GrettaLouw:
4. An excessive reliance on technology puts us at risk if it fails & places excessive power in the power structures that run it. #conconn

GrettaLouw:
5. It's nigh on impossible to talk about internet/new media/modern communication without every 3rd word being a trademark. #conconn

GrettaLouw:
6. The internet is an additional force amongst many in contemporary society that encourage an artificial (?) mind/body dichotomy. #conconn

GrettaLouw:
7. The internet can change our perceptions of time, space, our own bodies (avatars), and give a sense of (false) omnipotence. #conconn

10 Nov 2011

_SamCross:
@GrettaLouw does time feel different locked in the room?

GrettaLouw:
Yes it does, longr and shorter, elastic and irrelevant. #conconn

GrettaLouw:
I refuse to think purely in tweet-form. #conconn

MatildeHoffman:
@GrettaLouw how would you photograph being in the moment? being present? I am trying to do this for a project and it's kind of difficult

GrettaLouw:
@MatildeHoffman Ha, hmm.. let me think about it for a minute. Isn't this sort of like me doing your homework for you though??

MatildeHoffman:
@GrettaLouw I guess I am looking for inspiration. trying to find what makes me feel present in this chaotic world and representing it

GrettaLouw:
@MatildeHoffman I work in series. Photographing the moment I might consider trying2 emphasise similarities in being, across multiple frames.

MatildeHoffman:
@GrettaLouw I went to the desert and tried to do some photos there because it is so centering for me. but I am not sure what they reveal

GrettaLouw:
@MatildeHoffman I don't think being present is about going somewhere particular or a special object but a state of mind. It's internal.

MatildeHoffman:
@GrettaLouw I guess I went out there to clear my head and reconnect with that internal state that gets "lost in the networks"

GrettaLouw:
@MatildeHoffman it's the 21st century term for 'rat race' probably. The networks.

GrettaLouw:
Is the internet slowing down or is it just that I am getting faster? #conconn

MatildeHoffman
@GrettaLouw Do you think you might be 'outsmarting' the internet sometimes?

GrettaLouw:
No, definitely not. RT @MatildeHoffman @GrettaLouw Do you think you might be 'outsmarting' the internet sometimes?

GrettaLouw:
"Can you whisper on the internet?" (via @douglaspaulson)

11 Nov 2011

GrettaLouw:
11/11/11. I've been online for 207 hours. 33 hours to go. #conconn

MatildeHoffman:
@GrettaLouw But I've come to realize, as you have said as well, that we might be putting too much power in the hands of the web networks

GrettaLouw:
@MatildeHoffman there need to be alternatives.

MatildeHoffman:
@GrettaLouw I agree. I have been struggling to find what alternatives there could be to this vast 'monster' that has been created

GrettaLouw:
#conconn = [different kind of reading = new way of thinking (?) ≈ new self / identity].

12 Nov 2011

GrettaLouw:
It occurs to me that if certain people are complaining that it's not art, you're probably on the right track.

GrettaLouw:
Just spoke with a nurse, she thinks my melatonin levels will be awry, potentially causing "the worst jetlag known to man" after #conconn

GrettaLouw:
5 minutes till sunlight. #conconn
intima:
@GrettaLouw When they (you?) open the door, don't forget to say something for the history, something significant. A sentence to remember.

GrettaLouw:
240 hours online. #conconn END

13

_how much sleep do you get?

_what do you eat?

_did you get any sleep?

_did you bring in all your food?

_so you're really going to be online for the whole 10 days?

_why are you doing this?

_how much longer are you going to do this?

_do you have a shower in there?

_what time is it there?

_are you getting any sleep?

_how long have you been in?

_is it boring? are you getting bored?

_are you really going to stay awake for 10 days straight?

_how's it going over there?

_so you won't even have any visitors?

_so you're not going to go outside for 10 days?

_did you get some sleep?

_do you know what time it is? are you tired?

_how do you feel?

experiment.

Pedi Matthies okay, extreme is the key word – do you really believe there is a ´growing obligation to be constantly connected´?
2 November 2011 at 18:46 · Like

Gretta Louw – Controlling_Connectivity yes I do. There is a growing amount of social contact and the exchange of important information that is happening almost exclusively through online social networks, thus choosing to not be a part of those networks can have a significant effect on your social and, in some fields, professional interaction.
2 November 2011 at 18:51 · Like

Pedi Matthies interesting that you think you will miss something if not online. wish you luck and endurance with your performance! looking foreword to hear how your experiment goes. for me i´m going offline now – i will miss something if i stay online... you probably have enough digital friends to keep you occupied... be well.
2 November 2011 at 18:57 · Like

Gretta Louw – Controlling_Connectivity I think it's something we, as a society and as individuals, need to think critically about – that's what I was trying to get across. Thank you for your comments, feel free to get in touch any time over the next 10 days!
2 November 2011 at 19:03 · Like

Pedi Matthies well you got me thinking about your art work and about "the obligation to be online" and it is probably a question of life–style. You are a young artist living in the city, having to be hip and cool, so yes, you probably do have an "obligation to be online". however it is still a question of how you choose to live your life – how are you going to spend your time on earth?
3 November 2011 at 10:01 · Like

Gretta Louw – Controlling_Connectivity It is not about my individual choices but about a societal trend. There is a massive cultural lag on internet and telecommunications technologies and I am proposing that we as a society think more critically about what these new opportunities mean.
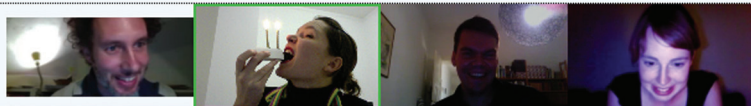3 November 2011 at 10:12 · Like

Pedi Matthies but aren´t you the one that is choosing your own actions and the proceedings of your own life? societal trend or not. as for me, being critical of online activity is given, because there are manv far more important ´real world´ activities to take care of.
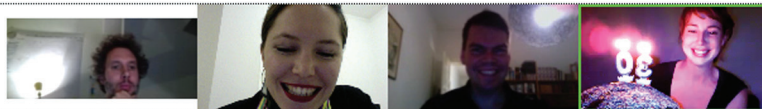3 November 2011 at 10:26 · Like

16

Gretta Louw
ciao! xx

Call started

Virtual Cake Decorator
save the mess - send an e-card

Happy Birthday Gretta

create new

Excerpts: Discussions with Second Life Users

_Remo Campopiano: [Our discussions] could be in Second Life (SL) too.

Gretta Louw: I think the learning curve would be a little steep to set that up so quickly, so if it's possible to [have the conversations in] Skype that would be better.

RC: I could make the learning curve simple for you, if you just took my avatar, one of my avatars... You just have to feel it. Just a couple of hours, I'll show you around, then I think it'll all be a lot clearer.

-

GL: How would you explain your lifestyle choices to someone who doesn't use the internet [regularly]?

RC: When you go into a virtual world... at first it's just like a video game. But you start to realise very soon that the people you're talking to are just like you, they're real, behind these pretty avatars there's a real human being. It's not like you're shooting at monsters, you know? What seems to happen is some people get that and they start to really live in SL as a real person. Some don't, some just play - serious people try to stay away from [them], because they are very hurtful. Once you... start to see that this IS real, it's very exciting, and that SL can either supplement, or even take the place of Real... It can just take you away. Now that's good and bad; a lot of people talk about SL addiction. Most of the people here are addicted.

GL: How would you define SL addiction?

RC: I would say that it's on a continuum. The extreme would be when you're on SL all the time, you neglect your Real to the detriment of your physical and financial stability. I have tried to quit unsuccessfully and successfully at different times... I have pulled away... when I have found "Real" - the woman that I want to be with in Real - when I move in with somebody or whatever, I pretty much turn SL off.

GL: Do you see the two things [SL and real life partner] as competing?

RC: Yes, I think they do, they compete for your time.

-

RC: I really want you to experience SL, and I'd like you

to let me guide you through it... I have a female avatar, I can just give you the name and just guide you through.

-

RC: It's so beautiful, it's so interesting. It's so real! It's sort of like living a soap opera instead of watching it. But, the people are real and the pain is real.

GL: I think I would find it really difficult to be unaware of... my context.

RC: If you spent any time in SL it would just be a couple of days before you would be able to feel this immersion. It's true, there are some people who come in and say 'I don't want this, this is scary', but not usually.

GL: What about people who come in and say 'I don't want this, I find it boring'.

RC: If they find it boring, it's because they can't see. They can't see the depth of it... Anything that's in the real world, you will find a counterpart in SL.

-

(Interview with members of a SL 'Vampire Clan' and RC)
V1: I have been on SL for almost 2 years now... I've tried lots of other things and it's... all sexual stuff... I just wanna have fun and enjoy friends and I've met a lot of great friends... I followed Mom to this new clan.

Mom: I am Mom.

V1: Yeah, that's Mom. She's my Mom.

RC: Mom's the Queen [of the Vampire Clan].

V1: My story is that 3 years ago my Mom in real life (RL) got cancer... In May my Mom passed away from cancer, and I almost gave up SL. I didn't want to do anything, and this mother here and my family have kept me going. They are my family, they are my friends. I mean everyone thinks it's just a virtual world, that it's just a game, but I have made actual friends - and if it wasn't for them, I probably would have laid down and gave up.

GL: Something that I'm interested in... is this idea of a dichotomy between the virtual world and the real world; could you tell me a little bit about how you see that.

V1: People will go on Facebook, it seems like Facebook has hit it off real good. But really and truly Facebook is no different to what SL is... You go on there, and you have people and you become friends with them and stuff, and that's the same as what this is, except that we can do a whole lot more... Facebook seems to be acceptable to everybody, but really and truly SL is no different than Facebook.

GL: Most people that are using Facebook are adding people that they've met, that they know in real life.

V1: That's the theory but... like on Farmville, you have to have so many neighbours to even get anywhere in the game... It's really not just your friends because then your friends will recommend people for you to add so you can play these games.

RC: But without the whole sense of having a body, I think I'd like it much, much less.

Mom: It's not nearly as animated as a virtual world. And over here you can go sky-diving, hot air ballooning...

V1: You can go anywhere, we went to Paris one time and climbed up the Eiffel Tower and hot air ballooned off of it.

GL: Would you want to see the Eiffel Tower in 'real life' more or less [than in SL]?

V1: I would love to see the Eiffel Tower in RL, but I know I'm never going to. So, this is just like being there.

GL: So SL is a chance for you to do things you don't think you'll be able to do in 'real life'?

V1: I feel like I've actually been there. How can I explain it?... I mean, I can change my hair 15 times a day, I can change my clothes 15 times a day - I can't do that in RL.

Mom: And everyone is beautiful.

V1: It makes you wonder why we don't get along in RL. In SL everyone fits in, everyone is family.

RC: Well, I wouldn't say everyone gets along in SL!

V1: I'm not gonna say that everybody on SL has real life problems, but there are some that just don't fit in in RL. And when they come to SL, they fit in. They have the family, they have the friends... RL can be really, really cruel. They look at you, or they see what you do, or they see that you don't have the fancy car. And on SL we don't care about any of that.

Mom: Not only that, in RL how many people can you reach? Right now our family is 150+. We've had deaths in the family, we've had attempted suicides, break-ups in RL - and they all come together here. Whereas in RL, how many people can you reach at one time when you need them the most? ... I'm kinda like a social worker, as the Mom. People come to me as the leader, and I help them... I did 27 years of law enforcement, I'm retired.

V1: It's almost like in RL, even if you think they're your friends, you have to put on an air. They expect you to be a certain way.

GL: [How do you think] internet-related technologies might be changing society?

V1: I'm hoping it changes everybody's outlook on RL because if we can get along on here and we can all be family... how come we cannot do it in RL.

Mom: [On SL] you have power of selection... You can select who you want to be friends with. If there's someone who's being very negative... you mute them.

GL: How many hours do you think that each of you spend online each day?

V1: Oh my goodness! (laughs) Sometimes I'm only on for an hour a night, but sometimes... we can be on for hours, and hours, and hours.

GL: Would you say that you were addicted?

V1: I could stop at any time, I just don't want to. I wouldn't say it's an addiction, it's more of a choice. This is my family, these are my friends.

Mom: We need to be there for our loved ones... And we can dance all night long and in the morning my feet don't hurt! And I never have a bad hair day!

GL: If you could take 10 or 20 of your favourite clan members and move them into your town, would you still spend as much time online, or seeing them in real life?

Mom: I think I would do both. We would get online and go to Italy, to Spain. And it would be fun because everyone would be there.

-

(Skype talk with RC during whilst in SL)

RC: Do not do anything. I have to get you dressed first.

GL: Yikes.

RC: So what do you think about the way you look?

GL: I can see [the avatar's] butt!

RC: (laughs) I know, well I guess that's my choice of things, sorry about that. That's one of my favourite outfits... I think you look great.

GL: I thought you didn't look at the avatar - that's what you said to me before.

RC: Well, I lied (laughs)... Let me show you a few things. We're going to dance. You click on the pink ball and allow it to animate your avatar...

(avatars dance)

RC: I think you look lovely... I'm just gonna go through a couple of the other dances so you can...

RC: So what kind of music do you like? Do you like jazz? What I'm going to do is take you to a jazz bar. I'm going to teleport you now. Did you accept it?

GL: Yes, I'm there now.

RC: Click on the pink ball in front of me... Ok, excellent. Now we are dancing.

GL: So basically people are going on here mostly to meet other people, right?

RC: Yes, it is a social place, a social medium. Some people call it a game, but serious people here shun that word.

GL: Do people get upset if someone just comes here to play?

RC: Not if they're just exploring, but... You know like married men come on here and date all these women, and say they're single and lie to them and stuff.

GL: Would you classify this [SL] as a dating program?

RC: No. You're getting that impression because that's how I use it.

GL: So I can also dance a single dance by myself?

RC: Yes. Did I make you uncomfortable?

GL: No I just want to try out other things.

RC: I'm going to put on a couple of other things that I like now... Ok here's something you might wear if you want to be a little more intimate... This is my tarzan look. Do you see my body now?

-

RC: How did coming in [to SL] change your perception of the world?

GL: Well there are some very interesting visual effects...

RC: It's gorgeous! It still has that edge of cartoonishness, but every year it gets more and more real looking.

GL: Well, I wouldn't say that it looks real at all, but it has a very particular aesthetic, which is amazing when you think about how many people are building it. That's an interesting aspect, this shared aesthetic across hundreds if not thousands of builders.

</END>

Lucie Brentley

Second Life avatar created by Remo Campopiano, screenshot by Gretta Louw.

Excerpts: Discussions with Google+ Hangout Users

_Samantha Villenave: During the day I will paint and work and, um, hangout. It's like I have people in the studio but I can hit the button and they can leave whenever I need them to. At first I thought "oh, you can't be an artist and do that", but you know Da Vinci had people read to him when he was working... Tell me about your project. What are you doing exactly? I understand that you're staying in there for hours and hours and hours and hours and you're gonna go crazy?!

Gretta Louw: Well, I don't know if I'm going to go crazy, we'll see. I'm making myself available for 10 days straight whenever anybody wants to contact me, I will connect with them online.

SV: I've been doing that for a month! I mean, I haven't been announcing it, but...

GL: But you go home when you log out?

SV: Well this is my home... A lot of times I'll fall asleep, but I do black out the screen because I don't want people watching me sleep. I'm probably on here 16 hours a day. I'm very ashamed but whatever. (laughs)

GL: So you've been doing this for a month? What were you doing before?

SV: I was working.

-

SV: The Twitter, Facebook, Skype, Google+ thing; is it for the project, or were you doing that on your own?

GL: I started preparing for this project over a year ago, so when that started I got into Twitter and started trying to learn about it more... but now I don't know - once you really get into it, it's hard to think about not being [constantly connected].

SV: As an ex-pat it's been wonderful to be connected. I'm not a tech person but the Hangouts drew me in because I just wanted to speak english... In the winter time I always get down because french people don't go out... so it's always a low period, and my husband was like "wow, you're October blues didn't hit this year" and I'm like "nope". There's a really good vibe here.

GL: You were telling me last time Samantha that you've been doing Hangouts for less than a couple of months and it's already such a massive part of your life. I find it sort of wonderful and sort of terrifying, how the internet can pull you in.

SV: If it was gone tomorrow, I'd be ok. Some people might not be, but I would be. And I do disconnect... I'm actually an extremely introverted person, but this is a controlled environment. Like we were in a Hangout an hour ago and a guy came in and offered to show himself to us naked, so we blocked him. You can set your boundaries in here... You can't do that in real life.

GL: This is something that the SL users were saying as well [about control].

SV: I've never really understood SL. I feel like here, it's like, really YOU... It's like your internet reality becomes real reality.

<CM joins the Hangout>

SV: Cam's doing the same art project as you are too, but he's got a bedroom instead of a gallery!

CM: This is my gallery.

SV: So Cam's 'performance art' is sometimes he doesn't shower... I came in here the other day and Gretta was, like, telling me about her project, and I was like 'oh a bunch of us do this without having galleries', but I'm not knocking your project at all Gretta... The reason I'm on here is to connect with artists.

GL: Do you think you will meet in real life?

CM: I have met now 31 people that I've only met in Hangouts, in real life. I hurl every single day. I started 5 days in San Francisco with about 12 different people from Hangouts. Then I get back into town and like an hour later another guy I've never met just shows up at my house. It's like big slumber parties.

LV: Hanging out in real life is one of the best parts. I've been doing social media for a while now... it's so convenient.

<BS joins the Hangout>

BS: Is this the party Hangout?

CM: This is the hangover Hangout! (laughs)

BS: I found the right place then. So, I'm trying to sleep last night and I hear a Hangout going on in my room, were you guys there? I think Samantha was there.

SV: I was there right before you fell asleep.

LV: I was at one the other night, Cam was there, where

you were all lounging in the hotel room.

BS: It was weird to come home at like 4am and see all those guys, wasted. Ryan was actually in Cam's window.

CM: Was he using my account?

BS: It was weird because it was his account but he was in your room.

CM: That is weird. I never would have known that guy EVER if it wasn't for G+, and that's a fact. I've lived this long and not met him and now he's sleeping in my house. (laughs) Facebook existed we never met, Myspace existed we never met, Twitter existed and we never met. It wasn't until HANG-OUTS that we met. It's all about the Hangouts.

LV: I think the Hangouts give you a more personable connection with people because you can actually see and talk to them.

GL: Are Hangouts a replacement for TV?

CM: They are, they are. I don't watch TV but I was walking through the living room and my roommate was watching... some show. So I sat down for a second, just to get off the computer for a second. And there's two people, they're talking back and forth, it's flipping between their faces, but I couldn't interact with it! (laughs) They were talking and they were talking right over me, whatever I said they didn't respond back - so I got right up and walked right back to the Hangout and I had drama again that I could interact with. So it's definitely a replacement because TV is just not interactive.

GL: So what is this doing to our society... this craving for interaction?

CM: I think... some people will learn how to make [Hangouts] more real, more eventful, more like TV. They'll have people with talents in there... I think you'll start seeing something similar to regular programming on Hangouts.
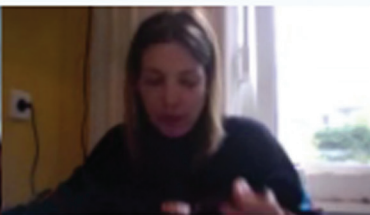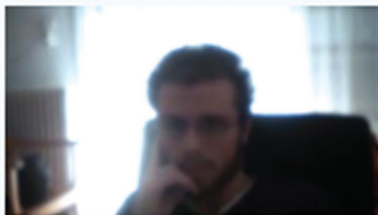
GL: You mean like reality TV?

CM: Yeah, you'll be able to log in and watch 5 entertaining people who are, like, almost PAID to be there... I don't know if that's gonna happen.

AF: I personally can't wait for that to happen.

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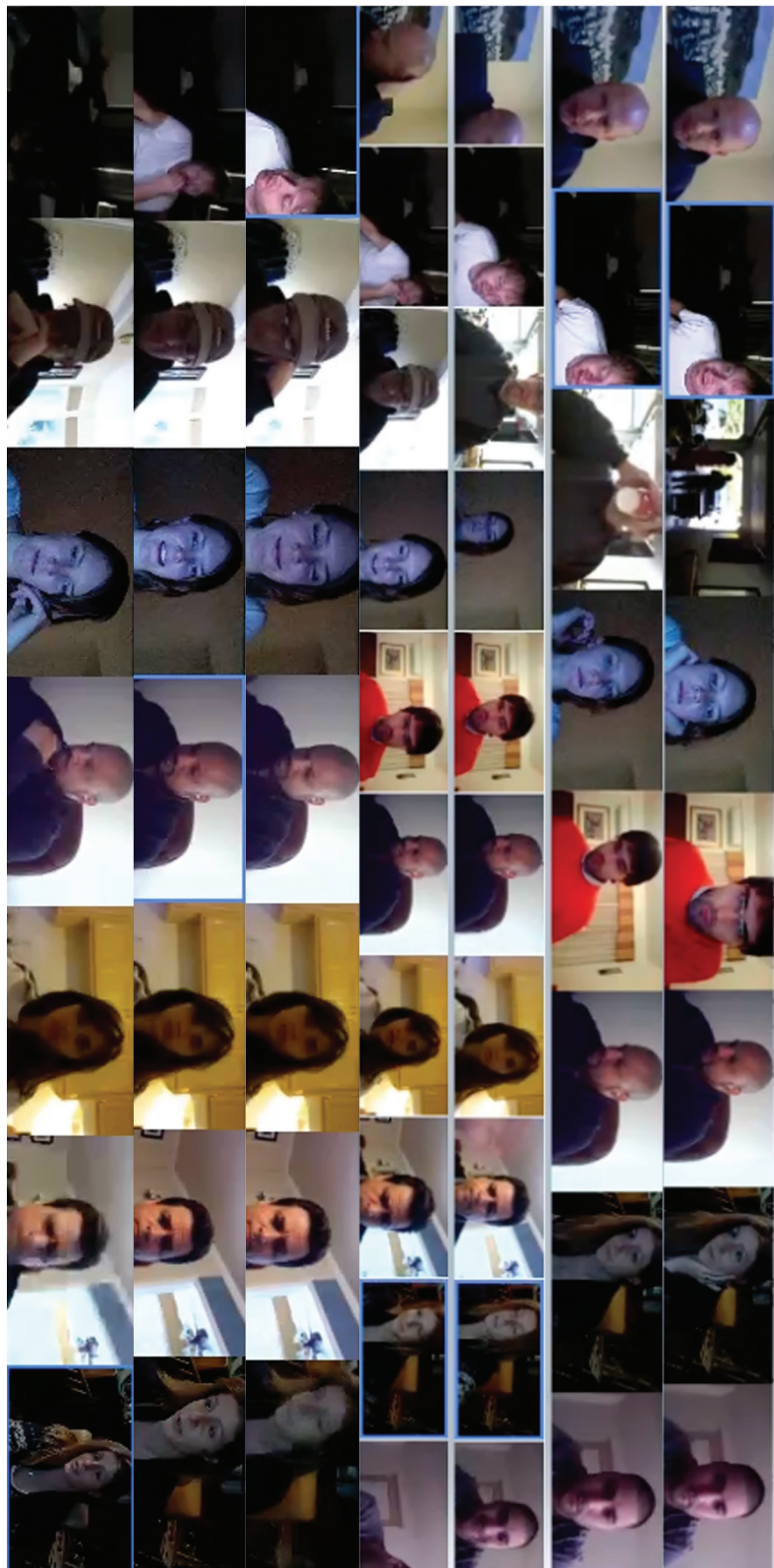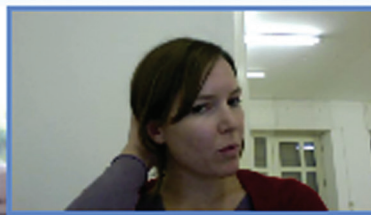
Controlling_Connectivity Day 1 in the Art Laboratory Berlin space, Google+ Hangout, screenshots courtesy of Regine Rapp.
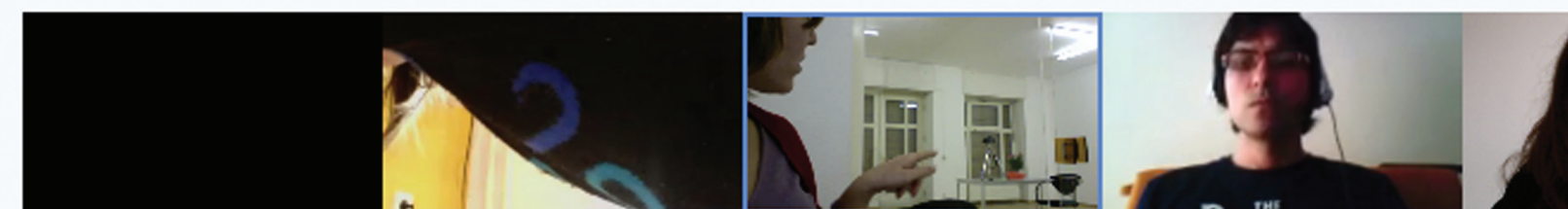
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_Exhibition @ Art Laboratory Berlin

Photo by Gretta Louw

"Too Artful to be a Virtual Soul": Performance, Psychology and Social Media

Christian de Lutz

_From 2-12 November, 2011 the Australian artist Gretta Louw staged *Controlling_Connectivity*, a 10 day online performance. Locked into the shuttered rooms of the arts centre Art Laboratory Berlin she spent 240 hours online, offering her availability around the clock for chats, video conferences and Twitter dialogues. She chose a popular set of social networking sites – Skype, Facebook, Twitter and Google+ as well as documenting the performance on a tumblr blog (http://controllingconnectivity.tumblr.com/). The main purpose of the performance was to research the psychological effects of total internet immersion, but almost immediately a sociological component competed for her attention and that of many of the performance's viewer/participants. In fact, the project attracted a number of participants from various online sub-cultures: users of Second Life; enthusiasts of Google+'s multi-user video conferencing platform 'Hangout'; a long time internet artist, whose own oeuvre has included online performance; a psychoanalyst who studies the therapeutic effects of virtual realities.

Louw, having studied Psychology before becoming an artist, saw the project as a combination between arts practice in the fields of performance and digital arts as well as psychological research. The interdisciplinary structure of the project combines traditions as diverse as Performance Art, New Media, Psychology and Sociology to investigate a set of current cultural structures that are changing with such speed that society at large seems only half aware of them. Yet it is the current speed of technological change, as well as new media's seduction and its unknown side effects on our psyche that the artist is investigating.

From Performance Art to the Digital World

By choosing the gallery (and later location of the exhibition) as the actual site of her performance Gretta Louw is referencing the tradition of durational performance and the history of Performance Art. In the run up to the performance Orit Gat wrote an article on rhizome.org comparing the piece's use of location to Joseph Beuys' iconic *I Like America and America Likes Me* from 1974[1]. Other examples of durational performance inside the white cube include works by Marina Abramovic's *Lips of Thomas* and Vito Acconci's *Seedbed*. A duration of ten days may seem rather short when compared to the performances of Tehching Hsieh, whose works often lasted for a year, but Louw's constant promise of online availability meant that she had as little as one hour of sleep per day.

Her choice of the gallery space, shuttered like Plato's Cave, also provided a Spartan location – she brought a mattress and ten days provisions – which aided in keeping her focus solely upon her virtual endeavours. On the one hand she was available to anyone in the world with an internet connection, interacting with people on six continents, on the other hand her sole contact with the human race during the ten days was via technology. This contrasts to a further tradition within the history of Performance art: that of the studio performance, like that of Bruce Nauman, which the viewers only experienced after the fact[2]. An intermediate variant, also used by Nauman, as well as Ulrike Rosenbach and Heinz Cibulka in their *Video Live Performances*,[3] used the video camera as a virtual intercessor. Yet all these examples from the 1970s are generally one way performances, in which the audience is usually passive, or at best an object of provocation.

During the 1990s and the emergence of various artistic strands that have fallen under the categorical title of 'New Media' the importance of interaction grew from

the passive participant as victim (as in Nauman's room installations from the 1970s) to a position of collaborator. The emergence of the internet, an open technological structure that has come to duplicate and represent the actual world, offered a number of artists an additional platform, not only for showing their work (whether it be representations of analog art or the software manipulations of early net.art) but also as a performative arena. Artists such as Igor Štromajer (who would become involved as a participant in *Controlling_Connectivity*) and Annie Abrahams have pioneered the web as a platform for performance. Eva and Franco Mattes (0100101110101101.org) have recently used virtual platforms such as Chat Roulette and Second Life as both a stage (*No Fun,* 2010) and as virtual gallery for an art history of Performance Art (*Synthetic Performances*, 2007-2010). The logic seems to be that as the general populace (especially those under 40) spend ever more time online, it makes more and more sense to investigate and utilise this 'new world'.

The Psycho-social Rupture

Gretta Louw's studies in Psychology have also played a vital part in the way she has structured and carried out both the performance and exhibition. During her preparations she took a battery of tests in cooperation with her alma mater, the University of Western Australia, and consulted a number of studies on internet addiction. In particular she was interested in recent studies that suggest that large amounts of time spent online can change the structure of the human brain.[4] She prepared herself for the inevitable effects of lack of sleep and the change of her internal clock due to being sealed off from daylight. On a deeper level she was interested in the effect of 'disinhibition' that is often part of intense involvement with online platforms, and the danger of manipulation by participants.

'Online disinhibition' refers to the phenomena where people do or say things online that they wouldn't do in the 'real' world. This is often the result of perceived anonymity, the feeling that others online cannot "see me" or "know me" or that online activities are "only a game", enabling people to enact their "true desires".[5] There is a budding field of psychology and psychoanalysis which investigates the therapeutic value of virtual reality, especially in the treatment of phobias. Dr. Leon Tan (who also participated in the performance) has written on the therapeutic use of Second Life, enabling, in one case, a woman with extreme agoraphobia to overcome her condition.[6] Ironically it was in Second Life that Louw had her riskiest experience during the performance. After a conversation with a participant who invited her to join him in Second Life, Louw was offered an avatar whose form was created by the participant, who most likely saw the events as a sort of date. Of particular note was the participant's constant reference to the avatar he had created as 'you' (meaning Louw). Before entering the Second Life platform Louw was asked by the participant to wait before he 'got her (sic) dressed' and one of his first comments (they were also talking live through skype during the interaction) upon entering the virtual world was to ask Louw "what do you think about the way you look".[7]

Of course, it was exactly the built in constant of outside participation that made the performance not only a psychological experiment on deprivation and immersion, but also a sociological investigation. Each platform contains its own sub-cultures, who thrive on the particular characteristics of that platform. Google+, not yet five months old at the time of the performance, has attracted diverse groups of individuals from different locations, who meet for long multi-user video conferences using Google+'s hangout feature. Twitter, which the artist began using only a year before the performance, has proved prone to vibrant text dialogues, often surprisingly complex and intellectual given the medium's 140 character limit.

The combinations of social milieux and the effects and risks of 'disinhibition' point to a blurring between the fields of Psychology and Sociology. As Bruno Latour re-

is your avatar YOU?

YOU'RE JUST AN ILLUSION
A COMPUTER ALGORITHM
A FLOW OF DATA
(YOU'RE TOO ARTFUL TO BE A VIRTUAL SOUL)

\<br\>

you are having a relationship with the internet just as much, if not more than with people.

different kind of reading = new way of thinking(?) ≈ new self/identity

staccato thinking = internet thinking

oh my, there are 168 hours in a week dear floating virtual illusion of data called Gretta

YOU WILL ONLY EXIST FOR 240 HOURS

"THE INTERNET WILL DEVOUR YOU"

?Reality?

deep reading = deep thinking

Do you feel like you are nowhere

And perhaps there is even too much of the person in your communication to be a virtual soul. WHO KNOWS?

CAN YOU WHISPER ON THE INTERNET

marked in his essay "Beware, your imagination leaves digital traces": "The ancient divide between the social on the one hand and the psychological on the other was largely an artefact of asymmetry between the traceability of various type of carriers."[8] This divide is being relentlessly erased in a virtual world in which we partake in social communication from the isolation of our individual computer screens and keyboards (or more recently smartphones). The supreme seduction of online social networks is one's ability to present oneself without leaving the chair. In the process one can also indulge in a number of desires, games and experiments that would be discouraged in 'real' social space.

The performance *Controlling_Connectivity* was in part an experiment and investigation into what various regions of cyberspace and their denizens chose to offer the artist in a ten day window. She in turn, became a symbolic other for whom they performed, introducing her to their not so private online worlds, acting out their desires, curiosities and intrigues. As one participant wrote: "You're an artwork, not us. We can go to sleep, you can't. You have to be strong, not us.", "During #conconn, you 'have' to communicate w/ us whether you like it or not, right? It's not you talking to us, it's your project" and "Sure, but I'm actually not talking with u now. I'm talking to a project, a concept, an idea, an artwork. Not to a person, right?"[9] and two days later "You're just an illusion, @GrettaLouw. A computer algorithm. A flow of data. You're too artful to be a virtual soul. #conconn".[10]

In fact one could argue both for and against the veracity of this statement: Gretta Louw was most definitely present as a human being. Her consciousness, by turns frailer and more adrenaline filled, sat in the gallery space, monitoring and recording her online experiences, and the psychological effects of the performance, which by the end of the performance included loss of sense of time, memory lapse and a sense that her mind was "5-6 cm above her head".[13] On the other hand for many of the participants she was, due to her special role as 'performer', less a real person than a form of 'meta-avatar', a cybernaut exploring new virtual territories.

Beyond Performance

In the end, on Saturday 12 November 2011 at 1PM Central European Time, Louw logged off her computer and opened the gallery shutters. After a few days she began to examine and edit many hours and pages of material. The exhibition *Controlling_Connectivity* not only documents the performance, but analyses the diverse activities of the artist and the participants who interacted with her. Away from the blurring speed and giddiness of virtual worlds, the exhibition offers a rational insight into these events.

Divided into two rooms the exhibition offers us unsequential points of entry. In one room we find three works, a projection, mostly of text, quotes from conversations and various tweets. The accompanying soundtrack is a conversation between Gretta Louw and Dr. Leon Tan. Opposite is a digital print which at first resembles a Tachist painting, but is actually a map of cursor movements from the artist's computer using IOGraphica software. Nearby on a monitor screen recordings play excerpts from the artist's 30th birthday (3 November 2011) and an online performance in collaboration with artist Douglas Paulson that was screened at Flux Factory, New York on 10 November 2011, in which the artists layer various screen recordings and live Skype transmissions. In the second, darker room we encounter an installation which combines various screen recording footage from the performance with a mattress and various detritus from the performance. Here as well, a layering effect, through quantity of footage, takes place – a projection and TV Monitor compete with three miniature digital frames showing the artists adventures in second life, time lapse footage of the artist from the ten days, and images of participants.

From ubiquitous email to seemingly convenient Facebook pages which 'allow' us to share images and infor-
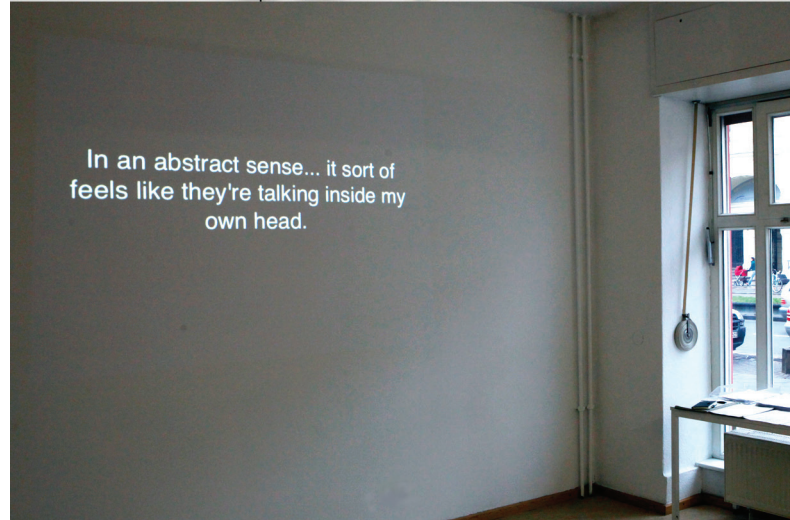
mation with friends and family to subtly addictive Twitter, the pure commonplace existence of virtual communication has captured more and more time in our lives. How many of us could exist without email? What would be the cost, professionally and personally, if we ignored various social networks? We almost seem to have forgotten that hardly any of this existed 20 years ago. In all the speed of acclimatising to new technologies, we have had little, if any time to reflect on how it has changed us; changed our minds, souls and our society. Gretta Louw's project Controlling_Connectivity provides a unique and long overdue starting point.

</END>

1. http://rhizome.org/editorial/2011/oct/18/performance-public-and-online-presence-grettalouw/ accessed 24/11/2011
2. Michael Rush, *New Media in Late 20th Century Art*, London: Thames & Hudson, 1999, p. 48-50.
3. Ibid, p. 59.
4. http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=does-addictive-internet-use-restructurebrain and http://www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0020708 accessed 10/11/2011.
5. For an overview of this phenomena from a psyhological standpoint see J. Suler, „The Online Disihibition Effect" , http://users.rider.edu/~suler/psycyber/disinhibit.html accessed 24/11/2011 and Suler, J. (2004), in: CyberPsychology and Behavior, vol 7 Nr 4, p. 321-326.
6. Tan, Leon, "The Use of Virtual Realty for Peer Support", in: The Use of Technology in Mental Health, ed. by Kate Anthony, DeeAnna Merz Nagel, Stephen Goss, Charles C. Thomas Pub Ltd: October 2010, pp. 170-77.
7. Conversation between Louw and the participant, source: Gretta Louw
8. Bruno Latour, *Beware, your imagination leaves digital traces*, in: The Times Literary supplement, 6 April, 2007
9. Tweets from @intima from 7 November 2011. @intima is the Twitter moniker of internet artist Igor Štromajer.
10. Ibid, from 9 November 2011.

In an abstract sense... it sort of feels like they're talking inside my own head.

Top and bottom images courtesy of Tim Deussen, Fotoscout © 2012; middle image courtesy of Art Laboratory Berlin.

A COMPUTER ALGORITHM
A FLOW OF DATA
(YOU'RE TOO ARTFUL TO BE A VIRTUAL SOUL)

EMONITIONS

= [different kind of reading = new way of thinking(?) ≈ new self/identity]

staccato thinking = internet thinking

Y REAL

YOU WILL ONLY EXIST FOR 240 HOURS

"THE INTERNET WILL DEVOUR YOU"

deep reading = deep thinking

WHO KNOWS?

CAN YOU WHISPER ON THE INTERNET

you are present with your online presence right now.

Photo courtesy of Tim Deussen, Fotoscout, © 2012

You're Just AN ILLUSION
A COMPUTER ALGORITHM
A FLOW OF DATA
YOU'RE TOO ARTFUL TO BE A VIRTUAL ...

Internet Presentations
#random = [different kind of reading = new way of thinking(?) ≈ new self / identity]
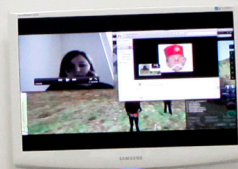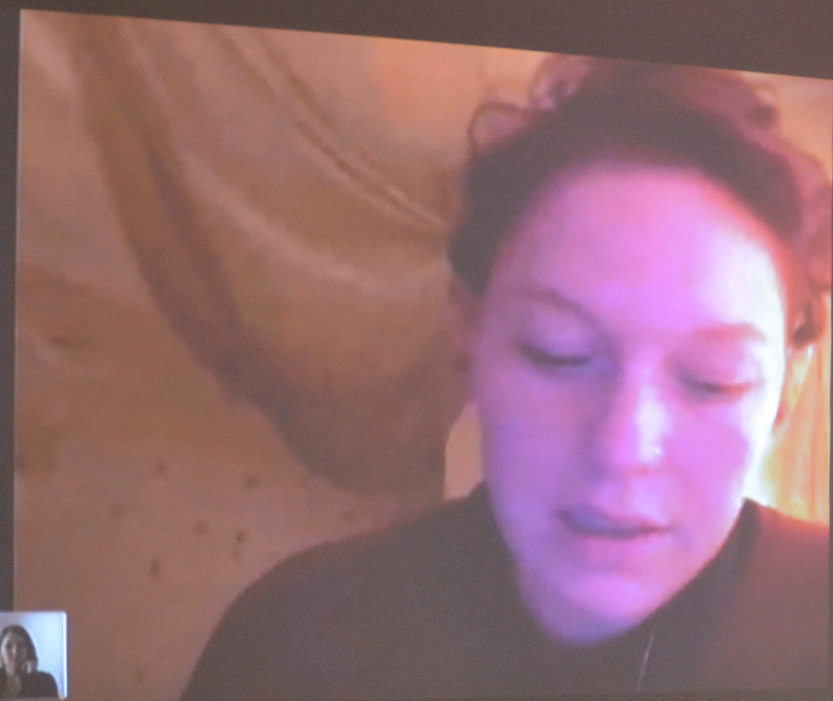
staccato thinking = internet thinking

YOU WILL ONLY EXIST FOR 240 HOURS

"THE INTERNET
... FOR YOU"

"It Feels Like They're Talking Inside My Own Head": Formats and Image Strategies in Gretta Louw's Controlling_Connectivity

Regine Rapp

_Gretta Louw's Controlling_Connectivity is an artistic reflection on the use of recent developments in digital communication forms. Louw investigates the pervasiveness of online social networks and the parallel obligation and opportunities created by constant connectivity.

The following text examines the various artistic formats that Louw employs in her project Controlling_Connectivity, with particular focus on the image-making techniques used.

Four Formats in One Project

It is noteworthy that in the exploration of her complex theme, Louw chooses to use four very different formats: performance, website, exhibition, and book. These formats connote not only diverse forms of visualisation, but also modes of reception.

The Performance:
The 10-day online performance in November 2011 forms the fundament and reference point for the entire project. The parameters were well-considered and exactingly planned: for 10 days the artist undertook a self experiment in the gallery space at Art Laboratory Berlin in which she completely sealed herself off from the analogue world in order to be completely available, 24 hrs/day, in the virtual world; she brought groceries and supplies with her into the gallery; the windows were blacked out to preclude the normalising effects of daylight or the outside world. Along with the discussions, chat ses-

sions, and other online interactions, the experiment also featured press interviews and scheduled events, which took place at regular intervals throughout the performance, increasing the social and professional pressure on the artist. Since the contacts requests originated from around the world, the regular day/night rhythm was knowingly, and almost immediately, dissolved. Thus Louw was affected by sleep deprivation and the myriad effects of her isolation throughout the performance.[2]

The Exhibition:
Louw carefully planned the timeframe between the performance and exhibition: twelve days after the end of the performance, the correspondent exhibition opened at Art Laboratory Berlin (exhibition: 27.11.2011 - 15.01.2012). The time allotted to the performance and the preparation for the exhibition were practically identical. The exhibition forced Louw to examine her own performance "after the fact", necessarily requiring distance from the action itself. Some exhibited works were developed during the performance, others created after its conclusion, however in both cases the conscious selection and editing of image and video works and materials formed a sort of post-processing of the performance experience. The motivation behind the exhibition was less a desire for a 'white cube' setting for her work, and more the intention to reflect on phenomena from within the online performance with a clear selection of image and video works.

The Website:
The website that Louw set up for the project (http://controllingconnectivity.tumblr.com/) can be seen as a virtual framework for the entire project, covering the spectrum from preparation, implementation, to exhibition. Louw consciously plays with the fluid boundaries between documentation, self-reflection, and promotion, creating an entertaining, accessible framework for the project. The website - with photos, video excerpts, texts and links - was used to communicate the current status of the project, directing the viewer to various updates, comments, feedback, and contributions from project participants. In this presentation modus, the project is formally and aesthetically confronted *with it-*

self; its own scrutiny of social networks is presented using these same platforms. The format of the website speaks clearly to the space in which Louw positioned her performance: the internet.

The Book:
This book is the only purely analogue part of the project; it forms a kind of haptic, analogue archive. Of particular interest are the "screenshots" - still images taken from the performance screen recordings. From a temporal perspective these screenshots present a moment of 'pause', in the otherwise incessantly moving and richly image-laden project. Captured in the medium of an analogue book, the screenshots seem to temporarily neutralise the temporally compressed, endless flood of images; they oppose the idea of transience inherent in the project and in much of the performance documentation.

Image Generation in Gretta Louw's Controlling_Connectivity

While half a century ago we witnessed an "escape out of the image" in art through the breakdown, negation, or media expansion of the image, we are today confronted with the phenomena of immersion; the artistic movement into virtual image worlds. Through its media-reliant transmission, this 240-hour artistic self-experiment opened the floodgates on a seemingly endless mass of digital imagery and material. Throughout the performance, and in the resulting works, the image of the artist plays as important a role as the images of protagonists, interviewers, and participants, who in turn generate new images through monitors and video projections.

An integral moment illustrating the extent of Louw's digital immersion and flattened spatial perception occurred at the conclusion of the performance, when the artist - after 240 hours of complete online presence and total analogue abs(tin)ence - first walked out of Art Laboratory. She remarked on the 3-dimensionality of the world, which, in comparison to the 10 days at her computer monitor, seemed almost overwhelming. The 'flatness' of the digital interfaces she was using constantly throughout the performance, had encapsulated her in a sort of 2D world. Furthermore she explained during her online performance that she was barely able to differentiate between the virtual space in which the communication was taking place and actual, physical space: "It feels like they're talking inside my own head".[1]

The following section looks more closely at specific works from the exhibition to consider the question of modes of image presentation and image generation strategies.

Self Image and External Perception:
The piece 'Time Lapse Recording' [part of the wall installation on P.32] is a small, wall-mounted monitor showing, in a 'fast-forward' aesthetic, a rapid sequence of portraits of the artist taken throughout the duration of the performance, using Gawker software. The artist's rapid movements while continually at her computer are presented in an almost slapstick manner; her constant availability becomes caricature. The video piece '30 Years' on the other hand, is comprised of screen recordings taken during Skype conversations with friends and family on the artist's 30th birthday on the 3rd of November 2011[3]. The well-wishers and their visible efforts to overcome the limitations of the online medium to convey their birthday greetings - particularly in the context of the self consciousness of being recorded - come across as embarrassing, awkward, and helpless. Both works play with the techniques of compression and agglomeration; one with the principle of sequence, the other with repetition.

The video work 'Remote Digital Performance' is a recording of a live performance collaboration between Louw and the New York-based artist Douglas Paulson. This video of the 'performance within the performance' is exactly as it was seen in a large projection by the live audience at Flux Factory in New York on the 10th of November 2011 - a complex overlapping of open windows (video, photos, and texts) and a cacophony of voices.

During the performance, Louw - working from Art Laboratory Berlin - shared her screen with Paulson, composing and manipulating the layers of pre-recorded material, while both performers posed each other questions live, in text form, for the 15 minute duration of the piece. Along with the intensely layered visual component, one hears conversations and competing voices, these are not live but have been recorded during previous interactions in the performance and inserted into the live feed. Louw consciously layers various temporal levels; the superimposed videos and recorded Skype and Google+ conversations are no longer comprehensible. Acoustically the densely layered voices can only be perceived as a sort of muted roar. The principle of sampling is thus evident in both the aural and visual elements.

The video work also includes excerpts from a Second Life meeting between Louw and Remo Campopiano, an extreme Second Life user. His fantasies are reflected in the avatar that he created for Louw: a cow-girl with leather-clad cleavage and extraordinarily low-slung pants, in an artificially idyllic landscape in which Campopiano's own avatar stands, heroic, with bare chest under its tuxedo [opposite]. The thread of intentional excess reverberates again here in that this excerpt from the Second Life meeting is in turn commented upon by Louw and Paulson. The piece becomes a palimpsest, a superimposition, that highlights the overwhelming demands made by simultaneous communication modi.

This still [see P.40/41] is a perfect example of the unique aesthetic of the digital computer image: the digital pictoriality is characterised by the aesthetic of the graphic user interface insofar as the single image is undermined in favour of the layering of images, forming a digital gesamtkunstwerk. Again, the principle of layering and the accumulation of superimposed windows - here, simultaneously text data, photos, videos, and websites - is at the forefront. However it is not only aesthetic aspects regarding the functionality of the computer that are considered here; this digital palimpsest also subtly reproaches us for our willingness to stretch ourselves beyond capacity when it comes to "multi-tasking" in the digital age.

The work 'Mouse Movement' [see P.42/43] stands aesthetically in strong contrast to 'Remote Digital Performance' and the two works were exhibited directly adjacent to each other. The large format print (90 x 150 cm) is marked by line structures and circles of varying sizes. At first glance, the abstract work appears reminiscent of a Tachist drawing. In fact, the piece is a graphic representation of the artist's computer activity during the 10-day online performance. In this way the performance documentation becomes a drawing, which due to the large scale is viewed almost as though through a microscope. The larger circles represent longer pauses in the movement of Louw's mouse, while the lines record the path of her cursor throughout the entire 240 hours. One can read the print as a temporal distillation of the performance; Louw's work at her computer sets the mouse in movement and the chosen software translates these physical acts of communication into an abstract drawing system, dictated by algorithms. The accumulation of lines and symbols is a visualisation of the performance, a translation of a code. What initially appears as a palimpsest of time passed, dissolves upon closer viewing into individual pixels - the illusion of a drawn line is, in the end, undermined by its digital counterpart.

These are just a few of the numerous examples of the fascinating way in which Gretta Louw, through the use of diverse image generating techniques, gives structure to her performance and how she has developed an aesthetic of continuity and edurance in opposition to this time-based project.
</END>

1. Quote from Gretta Louw in conversation with Dr Leon Tan.
2. The artist undertook psychological testing pre- and post-performance, the results of which indicated a significantly lowered "quality of life" measure. [see section in this publication: Psychometric Testing Pre- and Post-Performance]
3. Louw knowingly planned the performance to fall on her 30th birthday in order to test this personal interaction through a purely virtual communication mode.
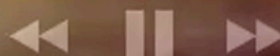
Political Magic

Lucie Brentley
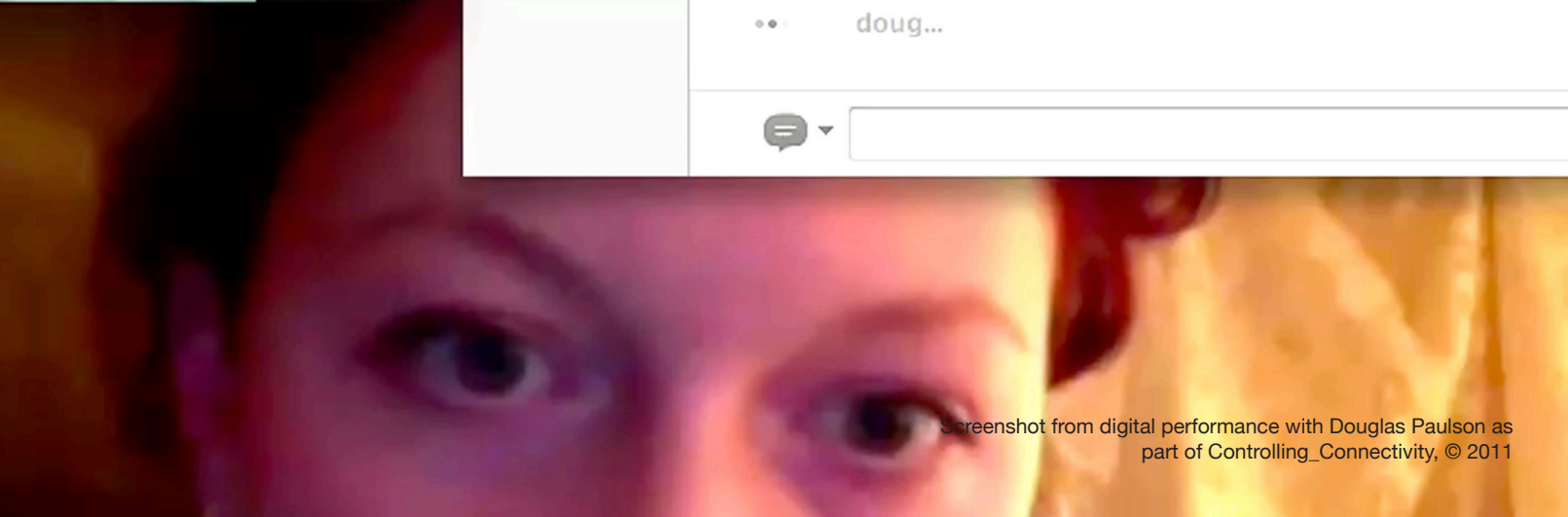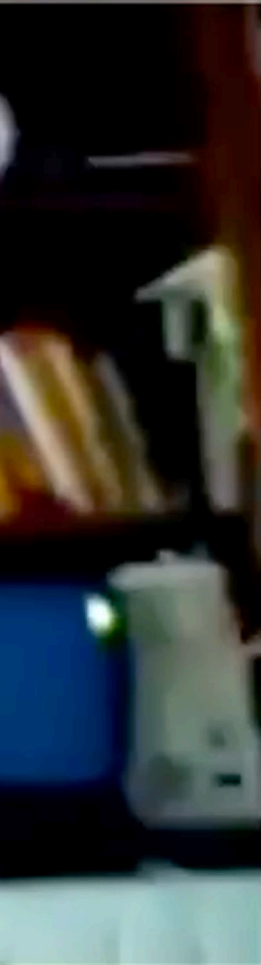
Stand

Political Magic

Lucie Brentley

Second Life avatars created by Remo Campopiano,
screenshots by Gretta Louw.

00:14:22

-00:11:59

http://www.artcat.com/exhibits/14897

http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/
susanorlean/2011/05/communication-fa

http://www.mondaynews.net/?
calls&city=&subtitle=&year=2011&today
=09

http://www.emilyharveyfoundation.org/
noologist.html

http://www.berlinartjournal.com/issue/ab

40

Skype

Gretta Louw
Add Credit

Contacts

CURRENT CALLS

doug
18:54

RECENT

Julesrebelle

Marja Ha...

Elly Clarke

History

1/1

All Friends

Gretta Louw

do you feel like you can reach me?

doug...

Screenshot from digital performance with Douglas Paulson as
part of Controlling_Connectivity, © 2011
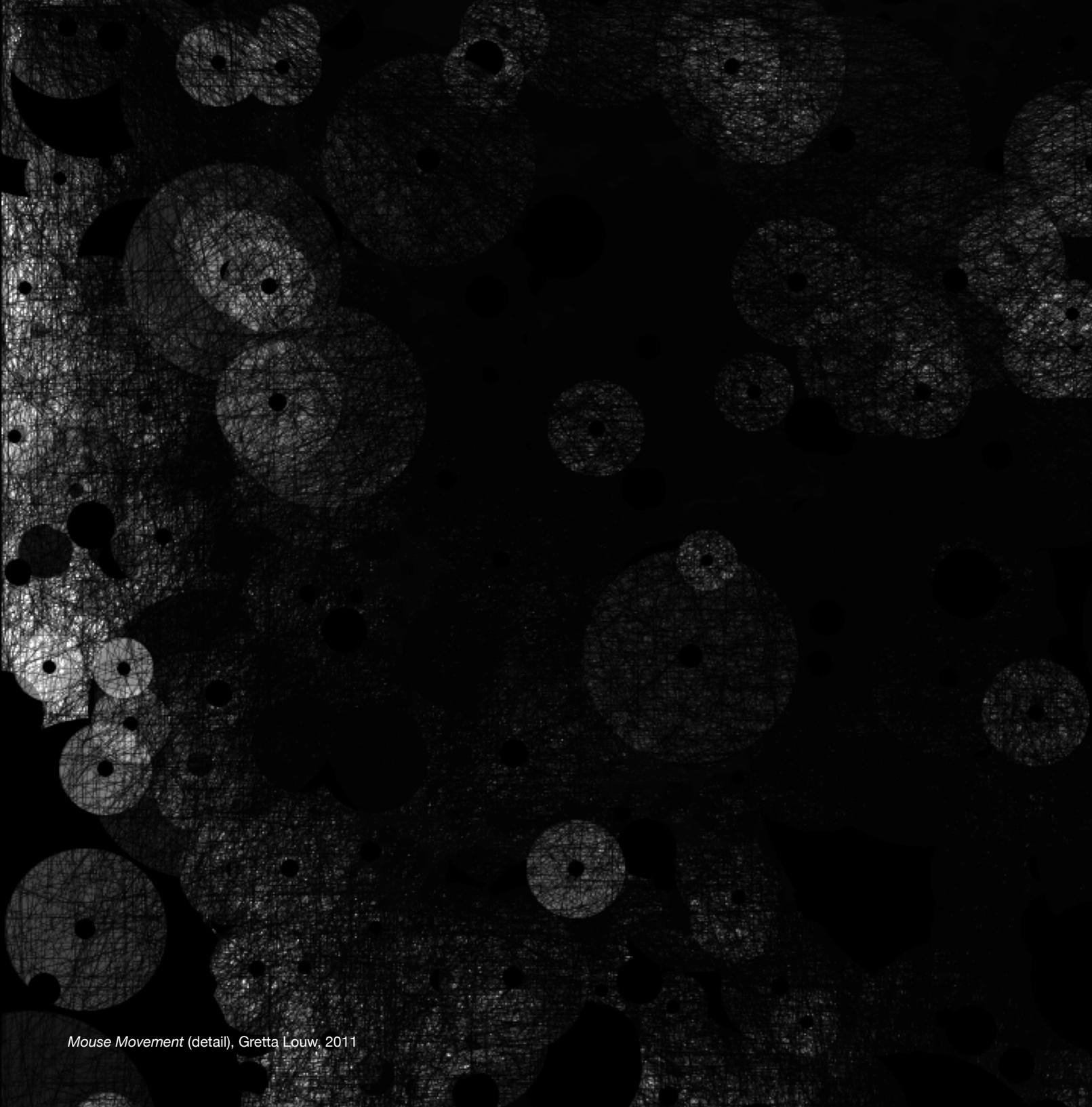
Mouse Movement (detail), Gretta Louw, 2011
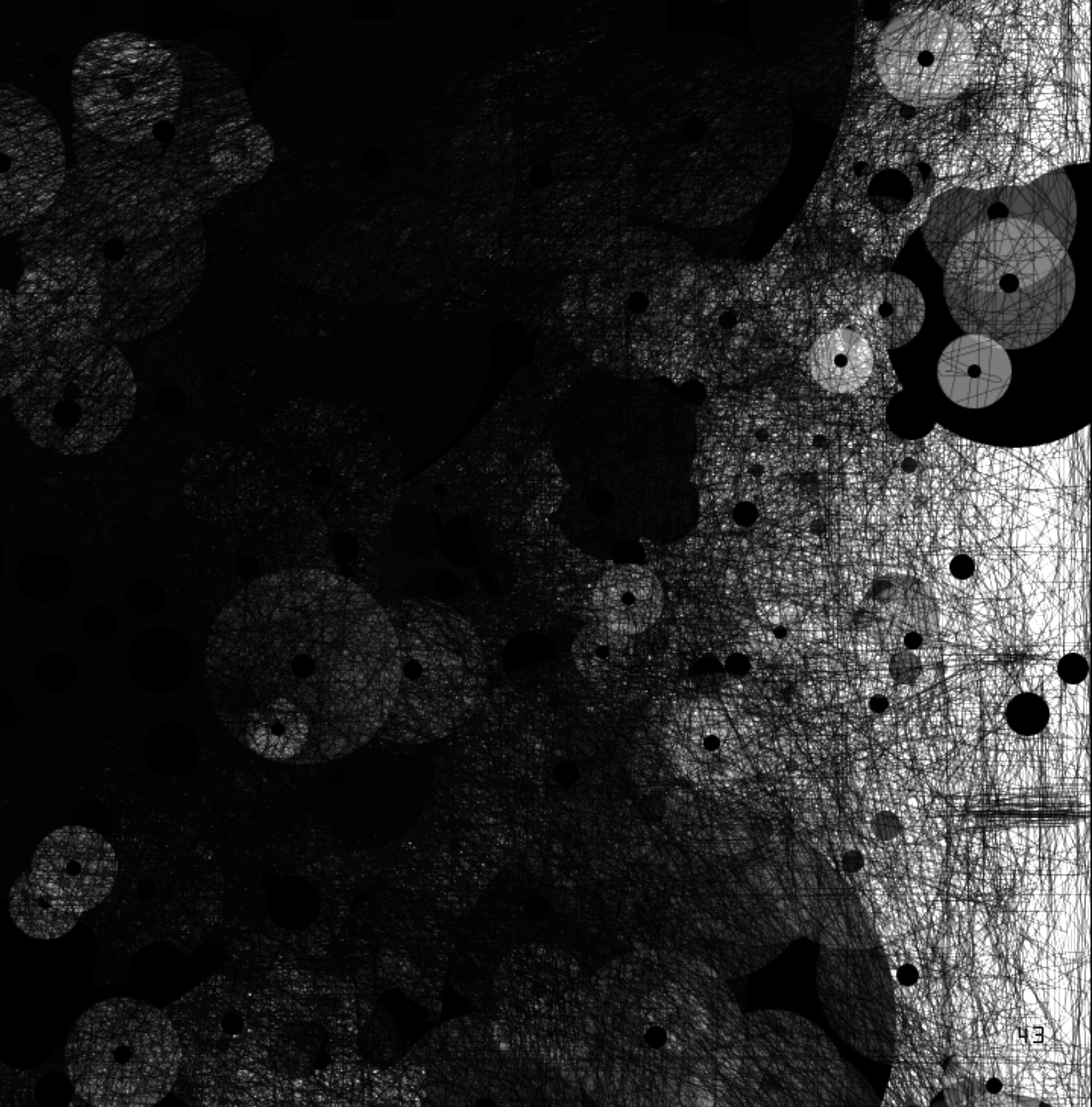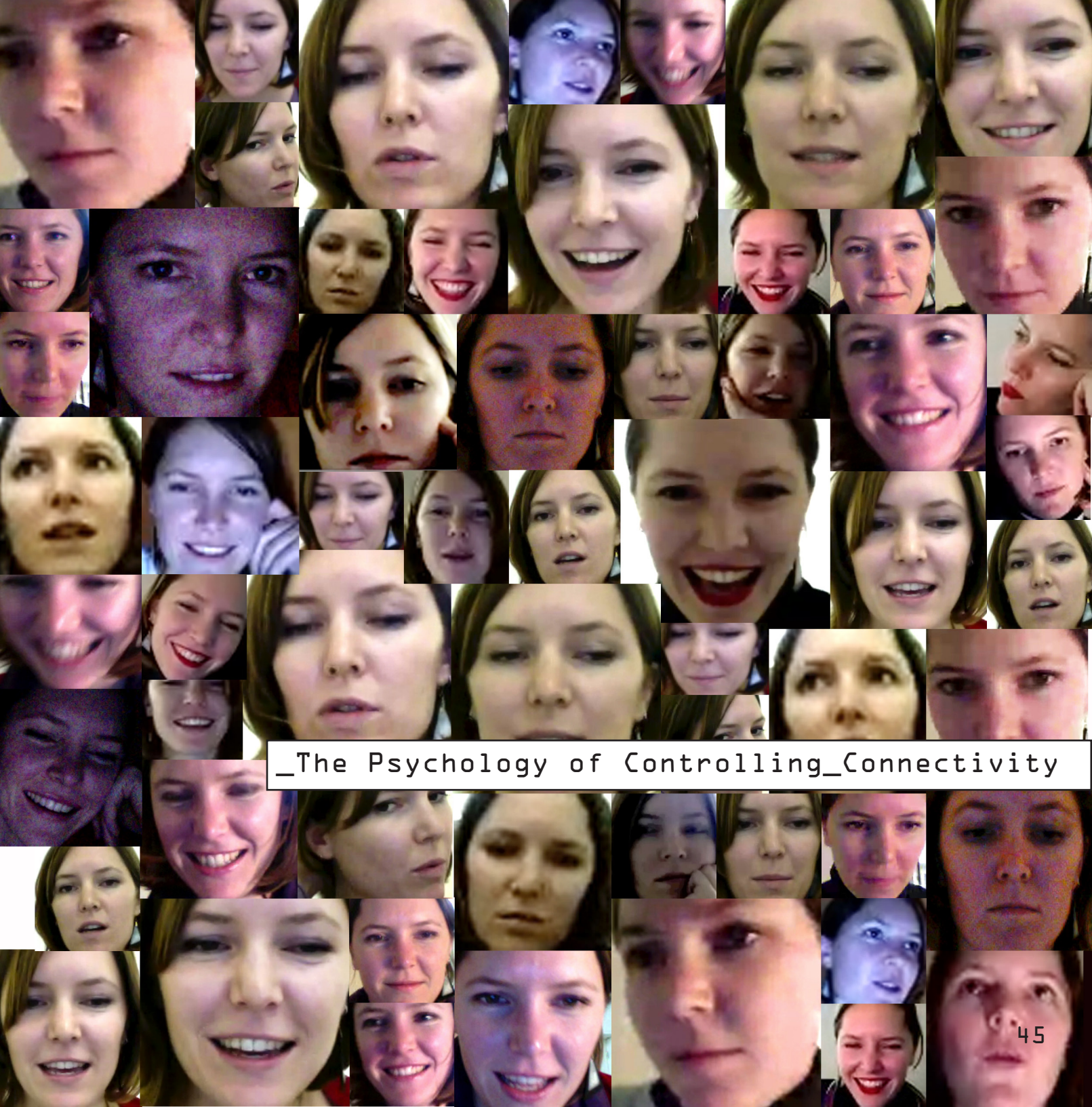
_The Psychology of Controlling_Connectivity

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Psychometric Testing Pre- and Post-Performance

Emma Doyle

From: emma.doyle@█████████
To: gretta.elise.louw@gmail.com
05/12/2011
RE: Psych Tests

_Hi Gretta,

First up, congratulations on what sounds like an amazing art installation!

I've taken a look at the measures you sent through. I'm not sure how much you know about the measures but here is a short run down.

DASS-21
The DASS-21 is a short version of a larger scale known as the Depression Anxiety Stress scales. It is designed to measure the three separate (but related) mental health areas of depression, anxiety and stress. The difference between "anxiety" and "stress", is that anxiety refers to physiological arousal (physical symptoms) whereas the stress scale refers to more generalised tension, restlessness and arousal. The DASS is based on the assumption that these three areas of mental health are on a continuum, rather than categorical. Therefore, it is not used for diagnostic purposes but can be useful in tracking change over time, particularly during acute periods of stress.
Here are your pre versus post scores on the DASS-21:
Pre:
Depression - 6 (Normal)
Anxiety - 0 (Normal)
Stress - 20 (Moderate)
Total = 26

Post:

Depression - 2 (Normal)
Anxiety - 16 (Mild)
Stress - 26 (Severe)
Total = 44

As you can see the most significant changes were in the anxiety and stress scales, which I can imagine is understandable given the context. Looking at your results, there appeared to be increases in the endorsement of restlessness and agitation, as well as some mild panic symptoms (noticing heart beat and increased respiration, dry mouth, feeling close to panic). Although the stress sclae appears high, the items that were endorsed most highly tended to reflect nervous energy and restlessness, which may be a construct of the environment your were in.

While the individual subscales are more interesting, the total score would reflect the more general dimension of psychological distress, which appears to have substantially increased.

Q-LES-Q-SF
The Q-LES-Q-SF measures "quality of life", which is a term used to describe general wellbeing. Wellbeing is interesting as it is based on an individual's perception of their positive functioning and the impact of current events, stressors (or in clinical populations, diagnoses). The Q-LES-Q is used extensively in clinical populations as the concept of "wellbeing" has been shown repeatedly to be a separate construct from symptomatology, and therefore is of interest as a separate measure of how someone is functioning psychologically.

The Q-LES-Q-SF has shown excellent reliability and validity and is sensitive to change, so it is also useful to track change over time. Higher scores indicate more positive wellbeing (i.e. better functioning).
Your pre versus post scores on the Q-LES-Q-SF:
Pre:
Physical Health 3
Mood   4

Work   4
Household activities 4
Social relationships 5
Family relationships 4
Leisure time 3
Ability to function in daily life 5
Sexual drive 3
Economic status 3
Living / housing 5
Ability to get around physically 5
Vision in terms of ability to do work or hobbies 5
Overall sense of well being 4
**Total raw score = 57 / 70 = 77%**

Post:
Physical Health 1
Mood 3
Work 5
Household activities 3
Social relationships 4
Family relationships 4
Leisure time 1
Ability to function in daily life 2
Sexual drive 1
Economic status 2
Living/housing 2
Ability to get around physically 2
Vision in terms of ability to do work or hobbies 1
Overall sense of well being 2
Total raw score = 33 / 70 = 33%.

There was a substantial drop in your wellbeing score from 77% to 33%. It certainly shows the impact of this significant change in your environment had on your sense of positive functioning.

I hope you are enjoying some well-deserved self-care activities (and that Q-LES-Q score is looking higher!)

Kind regards,
Emma

Images courtesy of Art Laboratory Berlin
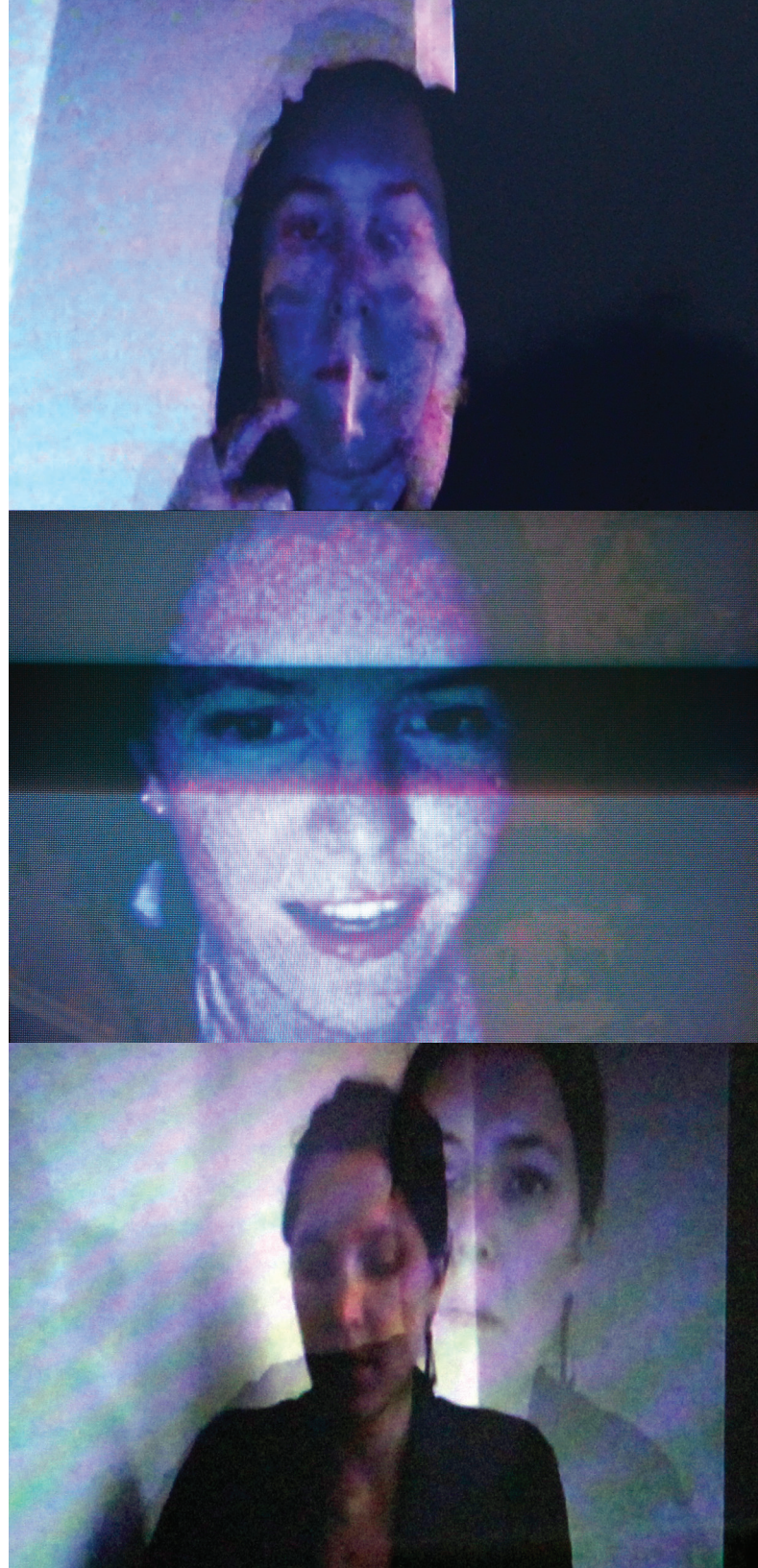
Internet Addiction. Really??

DeeAnna Merz Nagel, LPC, DCC

_What is internet addiction? What is your reaction when you hear those words or read an article in the local paper, or see a tweet that refers to internet addiction? Do you shrug your shoulders or roll your eyes… or does that phrase "internet addiction" resonate somehow?

In the peer community of helping professionals the debate about whether or not the internet can cause addiction has been going on for some time. The banter is online - in blog posts, on Facebook, on Twitter and LinkedIn. Professional journal articles are cited as proof that internet addiction does or does not exist. We debate whether internet addiction should be included in the new DSM (Diagnostic & Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) and as the DSM-V is in the works now, the conversation is quite heated. Conceptually, internet addiction could be placed under compulsive-impulsive spectrum disorders[1]; and yet some argue that this "addiction" (the tendency to involve oneself to the point of personal and social detriment - involved in gaming, social networking or cybersex, for example) does not really exist.

Most telling, is that clients are often the ones identifying with the label. "I think I am addicted to the internet…" "I can't stop gaming, I think I am addicted…", or "I am addicted to online sex". While we may not need another pathologizing label, it is important to consider how the general public, and more importantly, how people who are affected, call this out.

No doubt, research is showing that the effects on the brain are similar in people who are engaged in compulsive internet activity to those affected by other addictions.[2] Of course, these are the extreme examples. Statistics reveal that 5-10% of people who are connected online actually become addicted.[3]

With all the chatter, how do you know? How do you know if you have taken your connectivity too far, or if a loved one is "caught in the web" so to speak? Let's break it down into four central life domains:
1. Skills of Daily Living
2. Vocation / Meaningful work
3. Relationships
4. Wellness

If, for instance, someone is sitting down to the computer before eating or bathing, then this would constitute a deficit in the "Skills of Daily Living" domain. If a person cannot obtain or hold down a job because of internet use, then one might conclude that the "Vocation/Meaningful Work" domain is suffering. If the person has a difficult time establishing or maintaining relationships because of internet use, including disengagement from the family and family responsibilities, then we can conclude that the "Relationships" domain has been affected. Finally, if a person's health is deteriorating due to internet use (not getting enough sleep, food or exercise, complaining of headaches or blurred vision and other health complications) then certainly the "Wellness" domain is called into question. Many times the four domain areas overlap and it is not one or two but all of the domains that are affected to some extent.

Internet addiction is not a label (official or not) to be used lightly. Many people stay connected and are online for many hours during the day. When leisure activities such as gaming and socializing on sites like Facebook are combined with work responsibilities or even reading a book on a tablet, then we see how people might spend literally hours, sometimes all day, logged on. The cautionary note is to find the balance between what might appear to be an "addiction" with the understanding that being logged on and plugged in is part of the social fabric in which we live. Normalizing a teen's use of technology for instance, is often important for parents so that the use of technology can be put in perspective. It is not even that we are no longer building relationships or that the internet is iso-
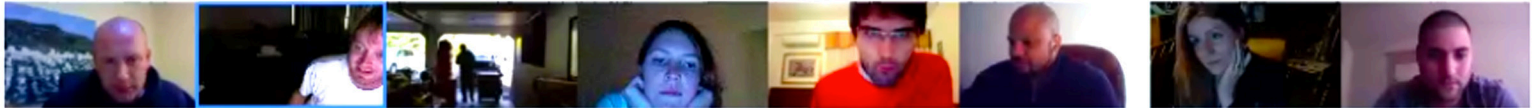
Google+ Hangout, Screenshot by Gretta Louw

lating us; rather, it is that we are connecting differently.It seems that whenever a new wave of technology hits, cultures tend to go to the extreme before we find our balance. We did this with television viewing (ergo "couch potato syndrome") and we are doing it with the internet. A small percentage of people will always find the extreme to be a powerful experience, taking the risk of falling into the addiction abyss. We should continue with prevention and intervention efforts. We should also keep in mind that most of us have much to gain from this brave new connected world!

</END>

1. Block JJ. Issues for DSM-V: internet addiction. *American Journal of Psychiatry*. 2008;165:306–307.
2. Lin F, Zhou Y, Du Y, Qin L, Zhao Z, et al. (2012) Abnormal White Matter Integrity in Adolescents with Internet Addiction Disorder: A Tract-Based Spatial Statistics Study. *PLoS ONE* 7(1): e30253. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0030253
3. Laurance, J. (2012). Addicted! Scientists show how internet dependency alters the human brain. The Indepedent. Retrieved January 15, 2012 from http://www.independent.co.uk/news/science/addicted-scientists-show-how-internet-dependency-alters-the-human-brain-6288344.html

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Controlling_Connectivity: Texts, Video projection with audio from discussion between Gretta Louw and Dr Leon Tan. Photos courtesy of Tim Deussen, Fotoscout © 2012.

Reconfiguring Co-Presence: An Ontology of Networked Social Relations

Dr Leon Tan

_Two decades after the emergence of the world-wide-web, we are plagued with a host of conventional wisdoms concerning different aspects of web-based experience. There are psychologists, for example, who argue that online interactions are 'simulations' of 'real-life' conversations, and therefore unreal, and policy-makers who fear that 'virtual' experiences are disconnecting us from our bodies. Perhaps unsurprisingly, there are even calls for 'Internet addiction' to be included in the bible of the mental health professions, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders or DSM-V. One such proponent is Jerald J. Block (2008), who writes, 'Internet addiction appears to be a common disorder that merits inclusion in DSM-V.' Block also happens to hold a patent on a technology to restrict access to computers. The following discussion aims to counter these misguided 'wisdoms,' and to put forward a rigorous ontological framework with which to understand the reconfiguration of co-presence through technological mediation.

Let's begin with the idea of Internet addiction, as this is the easiest to dismiss. First of all, among the proponents of this notion, there is the glaring absence of a unified definition of Internet addiction. What precisely is Internet addiction? Spending too much time online? What are its characteristic symptoms besides duration of access? What are the contextual variables that must be assessed in order to arrive at a diagnosis – for example, is a software architect or an anthropologist of Internet communities whose line of work involves extensive and prolonged Internet access to be diagnosed with Internet addiction? For the purposes of this article, I took the 'Internet Addiction Test'[1] developed by Kimberly Young, who is like Block, another champion of 'Internet Addiction Disorder.' The results inform me of the following: 'You are experiencing occasional or frequent problems because of the Internet. You should consider their full impact on your life.' In fact, I am not experiencing any problems because of the Internet, and as someone who formerly lectured and now consults in the area of technology mediated communication, I have considered the impact of the Internet on not only my own life, but also on the lives of research subjects, over a period of several years. Besides being completely wrong, such an assessment is also patronizing, for it fails to account for the fact that immersive online research is part of my work.

Now let's examine Block's (2008) proposal in the American Journal of Psychiatry advocating the inclusion of Internet addiction in the DSM-V. In support of his claims, the author cites cases in Korea of '10 cardiopulmonary-related deaths in Internet cafés and a game-related murder,' as well as China being 'greatly concerned about the disorder.' However, the fact that a death takes place in an Internet café, or that a murder is associated with a game, can at best only show some degree of correlation between Internet use and death/murder. We must remember the crucial point, often lost on authors of the DSM, and clearly on Block, that correlation does not imply causation. None of this is to deny that some individuals may use the Internet 'excessively,' that is to say, to the detriment of their working and family lives. However, it is quite a leap from noticing cases of excessive or detrimental use to proposing the existence of a full-fledged mental disorder. Incidentally, individuals may spend a great deal of time online to the advantage of their social wellbeing, individuals with physical disabilities for instance, whose contact with the outside world is facilitated by online relationships.

The trickier issues to dismiss are those that propose that web-based conversations are 'simulations' of real life, and therefore unreal, and that immersion in 'virtual worlds' disconnect us from our bodies. To begin with, we can

acknowledge that avatars and architectures in an on-line community like Second Life re-present aspects of the so-called real-world that correspond to a greater or lesser degree with actual persons and objects. These may be legitimately considered simulations, but their ontological[2] status is less clear. Are they in fact virtual considering that they are built upon software code existing in a network of physical machines, and depend on actual people using them as extensions or prostheses of sorts? More importantly, are the conversations and ritual interactions between partners in web-based environments really simulations? According to the philosopher Manuel DeLanda (2006: 55), the answer is no. As he writes, 'a technological invention that allows a conversation to take place at a distance affects its identity not by changing it into some other form of social encounter but by blurring its spatial boundaries, forcing participants to compensate for the lack of co-presence in a variety of other ways.'

While avatars and 3D props in worlds such as Second Life may be considered simulations, conversations on the other hand, do not become some other kind of social encounter. Their ontological status is the same as that of conversations taking place between partners who are physically co-present. What differs is the spatial configuration of co-presence, meaning that participants are not necessarily in the same location, and therefore rely on extensions or prostheses such as avatars, photographs, linguistic conventions such as acronyms (e.g. LMAO, TTYL, AFK) and emoticons to compensate for the loss of non-verbal signals characteristically available in situations of physical co-presence. We may consider this a reconfiguration of co-presence, as such extensions allow us to be 'co-present everywhere at once,' as Marshall McLuhan (1964) puts it. With the availability of video-conferencing technologies such as Apple's Face-Time or Skype, reconfigured co-presence acquires more richness, approximating what Erving Goffman (1963: 17) calls 'full conditions of co-presence,' meaning that conversation partners can 'sense that they are close enough

to be perceived in whatever they are doing, including their experiencing of others, and close enough to be perceived in this sensing of being perceived,' at least where it concerns the senses of seeing and hearing.

What is troubling about many of the popular misconceptions of web-based interactions is the absence of rigorous thinking concerning the ontology of such relations. For the philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Manuel DeLanda, reality is not confined to the domain of the actual, but also encompasses the virtual. DeLanda (2006) also considers the minimum unit of reality to be an 'assemblage,'[3] a virtual-actual composite or social whole, nested in sets across the entire spatio-temporal scale. An assemblage has as its virtual component what is called a 'diagram,' a plan of sorts consisting of singularities defining a set of possibilities on one hand, and a physical component that consists of an actualization of the diagram (that is to say, one of its possibilities). The virtual diagram is what DeLanda calls real virtuality. This must be distinguished from the term virtual as it is popularly used to describe aspects of online communities from Second Life to Facebook to Skype.

While we can call online worlds virtual realities or virtual worlds, we must be careful not to think that these are disembodied or immaterial, as web-based or networked assemblages are all dependent on actual infrastructures; physical components such as servers, computers, and the human bodies operating such components. The difference between real virtuality and virtual reality is this: The former refers to sets of (non-spatialized) singularities or diagrams while the latter are actualizations of these diagrams. Within this theoretical framework or ontology, describing web-based experiences as virtual is misleading where it gives rise to ideas of disembodiment and immateriality. These experiences and the online spaces that afford them are more accurately actualizations of the virtual. They may seem disembodied because of the manner in which co-presence is distributed and spatially reconfigured, but they are nevertheless actual. For this reason, descriptors such as digital worlds or networked

communities may be better substitute terms.

==Bodies and machines do not suddenly disappear or become unreal when we access the Internet.== Nor are the social relations and conversations sustained by networked technologies deprived of reality. Admittedly, there can be disadvantages to health in the physical configurations associated with computing over long periods of time, as anyone who sits and works at a computer for seven or eight hours a day may attest to. This can lead to repetitive strain injuries, backaches, headaches and so on. These however, are not disembodied states, but extremely physical experiences of pain, a fact that tends to contradict the notion that immersion in digital worlds disconnects us from our bodies. As for the materiality of social encounters online, one has to remember that such communications take the form of signals within the electromagnetic spectrum. They involve the transfer of energy across organic and inorganic machines, humans and computing devices. ==Physically co-present conversations likewise depend on the transfer of energy; they differ from networked conversations only in the spatial distribution of bodies.==

The reconfiguration of co-presence through technological mediation is by no means insignificant, as Gretta Louw's durational performance, Controlling_Connectivity, demonstrated. Part artistic performance, part media-psychology research, the project involved Louw's self-imposed confinement in Art Laboratory Berlin for a period of 240 hours, during which time she made herself available for conversations on a variety of networked platforms. While social relations are real whether they take place in assemblages of physical or networked co-presence, ==Louw's experiment provided glimpses into how differences in the spatial configuration of bodies yield different dynamics and effects.== For example, the artist reported experiencing the sensation of 'living in a completely different physical space,' in which it seemed as though her conversation partners were speaking from within her own head,[4] and becoming habituated to 'seeing things in 2D.' The chief merit of the project is perhaps in pushing us to take our networked experiences seriously, to reflect on the consequences of reconfiguring co-presence. While a wealth of research already exists on social interactions in physical co-presence, at least within the fields of psychology and sociology, the same cannot be said of web-based social relations. One wonders if it is because networked social relations have been popularly misconstrued as unreal, that these have not been thought through with more rigor to date.
</END>

1. http://www.netaddiction.com/
2. Ontology refers to what we consider and are prepared to defend as 'real.'
3. For DeLanda, this means that persons or societies are not defensible as ontological units, only assemblages. In the former case, what is rejected is methodological individualism, the micro-reductionist perspective that holds individual persons to be the basic unit of reality, while in the latter, DeLanda rejects methodological holism, the macro-reductionist point-of-view that holds societies to be the basic unit of the real.
4. This effect was, however, diminished where conversations occurred through video-link (Skype).

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Excerpts: Post-Controlling_ Connectivity Interview with Participant Matilde Hoffman

_Matilde Hoffman: So how was the exhibition? It was such an internet-based performance, how did you feel about bringing it into that static space [the gallery]?

Gretta Louw: It seemed like it had the effect on people that I wanted it to have. [The] text projection piece with the soundtrack of Leon Tan and I talking... was a really different way for me to work. It seemed to work well, this contrast between listening to an interview and reading text, and trying to assimilate both pieces of information at the same time - which is almost impossible.

MH: I feel like that relates to the internet in general; you're doing something and reading something else. That's so pertinent to the performance you did.

GL: Exactly.

MH: The second room is almost like a profile page. It's all the things you were thinking about; it's describing you in these 10 days. You can't scroll through it, but you're surrounded by it.

GL: Yes, you're standing IN it... I like this idea of taking something that's digital and making it analogue... it makes it so much more tangible how much things have changed [since the advent of the internet]. In this book I've literally typed out URLs, it's funny to see them printed; now they're often in references in essays... You're never going to go [from the book] and type in a character string of 100s of characters to look at that webpage.

MH: On a computer you would just click on that... I wonder if people are going to [see it in the book] and type it into their computer.

GL: Nobody will! It's interesting how it highlights the distance that exists between online and offline worlds. In the online world we don't even think about it, it's just there... it's all so easy to access.

MH: It's automatic at this point... We use all these things, and we take them for granted, but very few people know how this really works. It's just a string of numbers...

GL: When I was putting together the Twitter conversations for this book, I was having to use screenshots I took during the performance - you can look at Tweets that you've made and Tweets that other people wrote to you, but there's no way to look at them together. The internet never forgets, the data is always stored, but it's as though all the information is stored for computers and not for people.

MH: We have all of this information at our fingertips, but... it's so hard to compile and make sense of it because there's so much of it.

GL: Having done the performance, I still really think it's important to address issues like cultural lag, and what it means that we're now such an internet-based culture... And I think there are some really important political issues about who has power online, and power structures... Having said all that, I feel it's been an amazing experience, to open myself up completely to the internet, and to the people you reach through the internet (or who could reach me).

MH: Did it make you more aware about how to approach certain people or deal with difficult situations [online]?

GL: Well, during the performance I didn't approach anyone, they always approached me... In order to do the performance I needed to remove those levels of judgement and scepticism... because I needed to open myself up to everybody. That probably wasn't so clear to me at the time... Igor Stromajer has since started calling me Joan of Arc of the Internet. (laughs)

MH: What the internet is doing is creating this dialogue between people that wasn't there before... Has the internet made us more producers or more consumers? It's very passive if you want it to be... With TV you are very passive, there's not much you can do, but with the internet you can be very productive if you want to be.

GL: That's true, it does blur those boundaries between production and consumption... The internet mimics the real world in its depth... it's almost like discovering a new country. And it changes so fast.
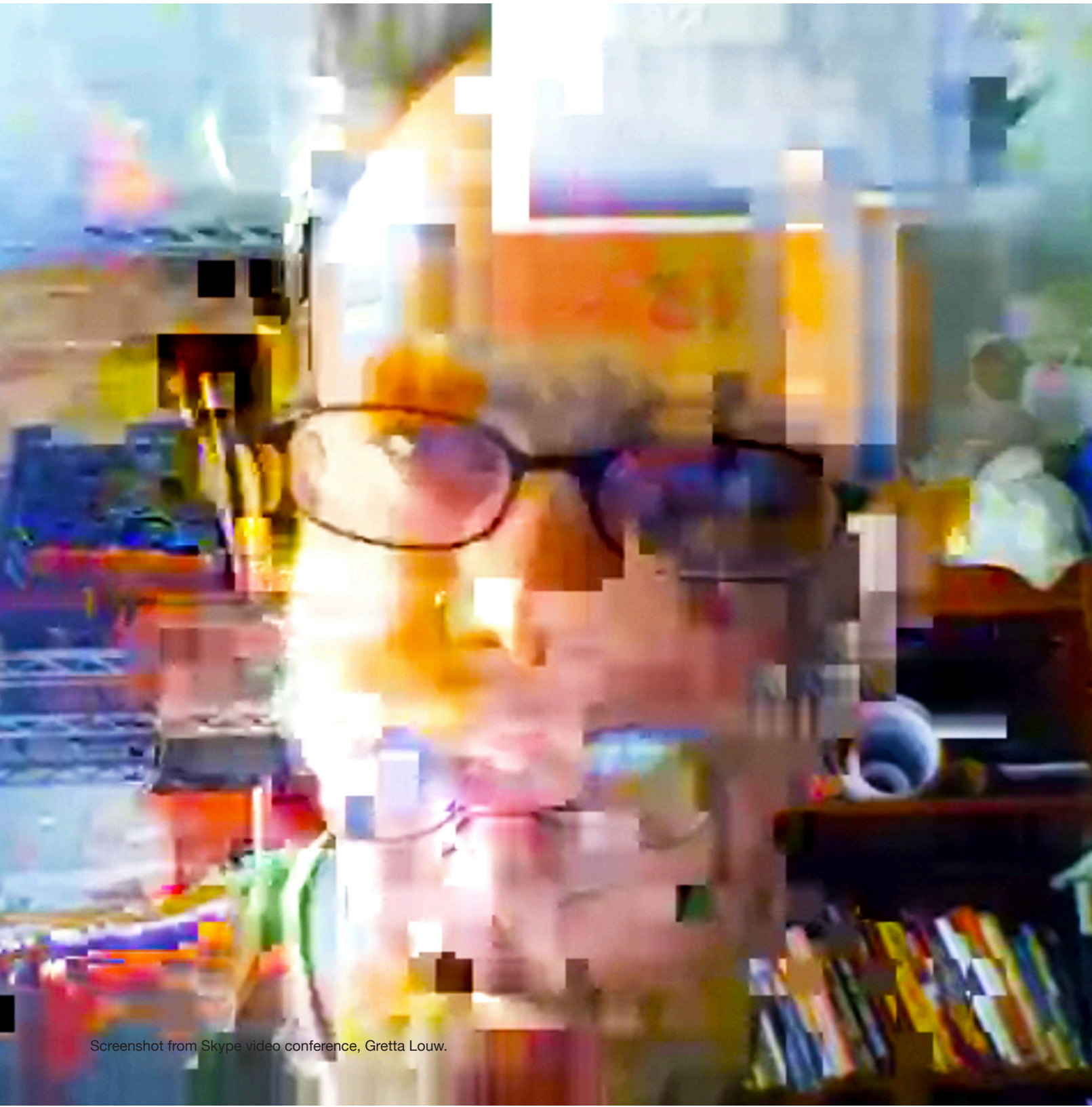
MH: Is it moving even faster than the world?

GL: It absolutely is.

MH: And it's not ever going to stop... Nobody's ever going to be able to conquer it. It's about finding your own personal balance.

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Screenshot from Skype video conference, Gretta Louw.

Acknowledgements

Contributors

_Christian de Lutz is a visual artist and curator, working in photography, new media, video and installation. His artworks deal with social, political and cultural themes, with an emphasis on technology and cultural borderlines. He has collaborated with artists and institutions in Germany, Spain and Southeast Europe and has exhibited in Europe, the USA and Japan. His curatorial work focuses on the interface of art, science and technology in the 21st century. He is Co-director and curator at Art Laboratory Berlin. www.cdelutz.net

_Regine Rapp is an art historian and curator, she co-founded Art Laboratory Berlin in 2006 and curates interdisciplinary exhibition series. She is writing her PhD thesis on the spatial aesthetics of 1990s Installation Art at the Humboldt University, Berlin. She is an Assistant Professor at the Burg Giebichenstein Art Academy Halle, where she teaches art history and curatorial practice. Further fields of specialisation include image and text as well as Russian modern and contemporary art.

_Leon Tan, PhD is an art historian, cultural theorist, psychoanalyst and occasional curator of interdisciplinary projects. He currently researches and writes on contemporary art, media-art in South Asia, globalization, intellectual property and assemblage theory. He is based in Gothenburg, Sweden. www.leontan.info

_DeeAnna Merz Nagel is a psychotherapist, educator and consultant. She co-founded the Online Therapy Institute and the Online Coach Institute and she is Managing Co-Editor of TILT Magazine. Her specialties include relationship issues, alcohol and drugs, surviving abuse, and internet addictions. Her private practice is located in New Jersey, USA. www.jerseyshoretherapy.com www.onlinetherapyinstitute.com

_Emma Doyle is a Clinical Psychologist Trainee at the University of Western Australia. Her Doctorate research focuses on how information technology can be used to monitor the progress and psychological functioning of individuals undergoing psychotherapy, in particular those at risk of poor outcomes and suicidality.

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Artist Biography

_Gretta Louw is a multi-disciplinary artist working with a variety of mediums ranging from live and online performance to installation, video, and social art practices. Her artistic practice explores the potential of art as a means of investigating individual, cultural and universal psychological phenomena. Often drawing on current and historical theories of psychological functioning, the artist seeks to test the boundaries and peculiarities of the human psyche and particularly its unconscious elements, plumbing the depths of her own unconscious with durational performances, formulating participatory actions replicating established tests of psychological functioning in an art context, comparing culturally informed differences in psychological functioning between groups, and creating installations and art objects that form a basis for self-analysis and exploration.

Louw was born in South Africa in 1981 but grew up in Perth, Western Australia. She received an Honours Degree in Psychology from the University of Western Australia in 2002, subsequently living and working in Japan and New Zealand before moving to Berlin in January, 2007. In recent years she has received a number of institutional grants from German and Australian funding bodies for participatory art projects, including two projects in Berlin and an upcoming project in 2012 in the Indigenous Warlpiri lands in central Australia. In 2011, she was shortlisted for the OK.Video Festival prize, was an artist in residence at the Glasshouse, Tel Aviv (with Lital Dotan and Eyal Perry) and at the Flux Factory in New York, as well as exhibiting and performing in New York, Berlin, Jakarta, Warsaw, Sienna, and Tel Aviv. She is currently based in Baden-Württemberg, Germany.

Contacts:
www.grettalouw.com
http://controllingconnectivity.tumblr.com/
http://twitter.com/GrettaLouw
gretta.elise.louw@gmail.com
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