Bodies in Space: Identity, Sexuality, and the Abstraction of the Digital and Physical

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Postinternet promised, albeit with much confusion, an analysis of our contemporary condition, which supposedly is indelibly and foremost influenced by the advent of advanced technology. While much knowledge has been generated by postinternet pursuits, it has become increasingly clear, via the popularity of the Occupy Wall Street movement in 2011 and projects such as Andrea Fraser’s manifesto on income disparity and its effects on the artworld, “L’1%, C’EST MOI” (2012), that the advance of technology may not be the overarching narrative through which we should understand our contemporary condition. In light of several factors, such as growing income disparity and the art market’s remarkable bloat, it seems clear that a more complex framing needs to be utilized, one that looks at the intersection of both technology and late capitalism run amok.

One of the great failures of postinternet is its dogmatism toward conventional modes of authorship (the objective, intellectual auteur) and the aesthetics paired with it (often described as trendy and unrelated to the subject matter at hand), which seems cognitively dissonant with the internet’s cultural democratization that it seeks to address. We see a surfeit of artwork dealing with theoretical themes such as artwork documentation, new philosophies such as speculative realism, and the ever-loved topic of image circulation, yet none of these directly addresses our lived experience, which is increasingly ineffable amid global economic and political turmoil. While artists are increasingly gripped by the imaginary vision of a posthuman body, artistic discourse surrounding identity, the body, and sexuality has been almost completely elided.

This text, organized in three parts and guided by the work of artists, acts as a historical corrective to shed light on such discourse. Titled “Bodies in Space,” it will consider how the body is mediated by both virtual and physical space. The first section, “Radical Identification: The Body Online,” is guided in part by a reading of Laura Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” and convenes artists who seek radical sources of personal or sexual identification in the internet age: Bunny Rogers’s self portraits as a mop or cat urn, Ann Hirsch’s retelling of her preteen online relationship with an older man, or Laurie Simmons’s photographs of the “dollor” subculture. The second section, “The Body In Public,” focuses on the organization of the body in pubic space and focuses on Magali Reus’s custom-produced stadium seating, Alice Channer’s floppy clothing cast in aluminum, and Nicolas Deshayes’s slightly skewed public interior architecture. Lastly, the work of AIDS-3D, which often considers how corporate studies effect interior architecture (such as buffet sneezeguards), leads into the text’s final section, “Corporate Bodies,” which considers more directly the dissolving of offline and online binaries via a
RADICAL IDENTIFICATION: THE BODY ONLINE

One of the most dramatic developments in the nature of social interaction since the advent of the internet is the emancipation of our identities and sexual lives from the body and “meatspace” interaction. We are no longer bound to our own bodies and the social encryptions that they carry while we socialize, and we no longer must seek out sexual or romantic partners in physical spaces dedicated to such. We can see the effects of this emancipation from our physical nature perhaps most clearly in hook-up culture: While geographic “cruising zones” still exist (bars, parks, and the like), they’re no longer the only way in which we find partners—these sites streamlining such encounters via searchable terms (“SWM ISO SWF,” “uncut,” “drug and disease free,” “420 friendly,” etc.). While Craigslist and, later, smart phone applications such as Tinder and Grindr are but three obvious meeting points for no-strings-attached sex, other web platforms such as Tumblr and YouTube have become host to lesser-known communities of sexual fetishists. These fetishes, oftentimes extremely strange to the heteronormative orthodox and sometimes quite niche, are amplified by the privacy of and supported by the blank slate of the internet. Fetishes range from just about anything to just about anything—furries, wet clothes, celebrity feet, and so on and so forth. The tendency to make fetishistic porn out of everything is so pervasive online that the notorious 4chan “Random” message board /b/ wrote in their “Rules of the Internet” that “34: If it exists, there is porn of it. No exceptions;” “35: If no porn is found of it, it will be created;” and “36: No matter what it is, it is somebody’s fetish. No exceptions.”

The videos of Glasgow-based Charlotte Prodger track this march from the geographic cruising zone to online fetish community. She rips footage from a YouTube account that records ritualistic acts imposed upon collectable Nike sneakers that embody the very definition of commodity fetishism. Prodger’s videos are overlaid with both audio recitations of comments received by the YouTube user, who goes by the very apropos name NikeClassics, as well as queer diaristic passages chosen by the artist. In one video, we see only the torso and legs of a young man as he dissects collectible sneakers, cutting them in half and ripping off layers of leather. In another video, two young men in track pants exchange their sneakers back and forth. As the men continue to occupy each other’s respective negative spaces with their feet, the actions become an analogue for sex. It is apparent that the viewing, in addition to the production, of such videos is sexually enticing for some, and even constitutes a supportive community of video producers and viewers. This is evidenced by a comment left on NikeClassics’s video by the YouTube user “Wetrev,” apparently a wet clothes fetishist: “Should both play in the mud or water in those nikes and trackies too – squash each others nikes into the water.”
Though Laurie Simmons is largely known for her photographs of dolls and the cultural assumptions about femininity and domesticity that we project onto them, she has recently produced work tracking the advent of the “doller” cosplay subculture. Here’s where things get a little hairy if you’re unfamiliar with the rabbit hole of cosplay, itself a portmanteau of “costume play.” The Japanese term “kigurumi” describes a person dressed in a full-body costume of a cartoon character or animal. “Dollers” wear latex kigurumi masks emulating female anime characters. To be a proper doller, you must wear a kigurumi doll mask with a full-body latex suit in order to adequately mirror the matte quality of a cartoon character’s skin. Simmons purchased several kigurumi masks intricately painted by an artist in Russia and cast models to wear them, latex suit and all, in variably sexualized poses. Redhead/Pink & Black Outfit/Orange Room (2014) captures a doller wearing heels, pink thigh-high socks, and a miniskirt while tugging down a pink shirt and gazing into the camera. The photograph Blonde/Acqua Sweater/Dog (2014) depicts a blonde doller holding, in a bathtub, a skeptical-looking dog, while another, Purple Hair/Purple Coat/Snow (2014) shows a darker-skinned kigurumi taking a selfie. Given our growing predilection for finding sex and love online, and the increasingly niche forms that sexuality has taken since fetishes have become indexible and searchable, Simmons’s interest in such online subculture seems a prescient front. Those at odds with culturally determined ideas about normativity once sought to alleviate their frustrations in physical spaces—the cruising park. Simmons’s photographs reiterate the weirdly beautiful agency in such subcultures and the tragedy of the repressive cultural conditions that precipitate them.

[Insert Simmons_YellowHair]

Performance artist Ann Hirsch looks not to fetish subcultures, but to the early days of web chat circa 1998, where conversing with strangers was the rule, not the exception. Her piece Playground (2013) is a play with two characters: Anni, who is mostly autobiographical and based on a plucky twelve-year-old Hirsch, and Jobe, a twenty-seven-year-old hacker who has a penchant for chatting up preteens online. The play begins with Anni and Jobe sitting at their respective chipboard desktop workstations, enraptured by the chat playing out on their respective chunky monitors—a nostalgic mise-en-scène for anyone born pre-Y2k. Their conversation, projected behind them for the audience to read, revolves around their chosen chatroom politics and quickly takes on a creepy tone, with Jobe asking Anni to be his online girlfriend. This honorific comes with probing sexual questions and a masturbation coaching session through the telephone, with Anni lying and hilariously faking orgasm. “lieshadow: Did you cum, Anni? / XoaNNioX: yes did u? / lieshadow: Yes, I came for you. / XoaNNioX: me 2 / lieshadow: You did so good Anni. I’m so proud of you. / XoaNNioX: me 2. im proud of me too / lieshadow: Are you being facetious with me? / XoaNNioX: noo. / XoaNNioX: well I dunno. whatz facetious?” Anni and Jobe waver between breaking up and getting back together. Anni begins to doubt Jobe after he asks her to stick a pen up her vagina and send it to him in the mail, and his subsequent desperate, last-ditch request for soiled
underwear prompted Hirsch to formally dump Jobe. After a brief break, they get back together, hugging and declaring their eternal love for each other, as the play ends. While Hirsch’s two-hander represents an obvious case of sexual abuse to the audience, such is not the case in the eyes of Anni herself, who desired a romantic relationship and was unwittingly manipulated by an older man. The play importantly casts light on those early, yet-to-be processed days in which we were still getting to know the internet, and how many men and women had their first romantic and sexual experiences online.

Slightly younger than Hirsch, the artist Bunny Rogers came of age in a time when both television and the web capitalized on programs and websites for kids. Like many digital natives, hers is an identity formed amid the blooming mass media of the early ’00s. It could be argued that those who grew up since this era experience identification processes via both television and computer screens, which introduce increasingly more remote content (say, a cartoon clone of Joan of Arc) upon which a child may project identification. Rogers has illustrated this phenomenon of elastic identity via her various self-portraits as inanimate (often lugubrious) objects: a mop dyed purple and festooned with ribbon (Self-Portrait [Mourning Mop] [2013]), a hand-made ceramic urn with the image of a cat on its front (Self Portrait [Cat Urn] [2013]). Similarly, she has a penchant for all things “goth”—both the mass-produced, Hot Topic and seriously antisocial varieties. For a recent body of work titled “Columbine Library,” shown at Société in Berlin in the summer of 2014, Rogers took inspiration from the 1999 Columbine High School massacre, using two mainstream goth cartoon characters as stand-ins for the shooters identities: Joan of Arc of Clone High representing Dylan Klebold and Gaz of Invader Zim representing Eric Harris. That Rogers assigns these twee-goth cartoon characters as avatars for the seriously deranged shooters is another exercise in such elasticity of identification, this one specifically speaking to a personally felt sense of social alienation that vacillates between the pop and psychotic. Rogers is not alone in identifying with Klebold and Harris, as we see countless online communities dedicated to them and other unlikely heroes.

One may wonder how it is possible to both forget the cruelty of the shooters and to depersonalize the victims of the Columbine massacre to such an extent that entire communities valorize its perpetrators. To better understand the collective identification with the shooters, let’s consider Laura Mulvey’s take on active scopophilia in cinema within her landmark 1975 essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” and recontextualize it for the web. She writes:

The mass of mainstream film...portray a hermetically sealed world which unwinds magically...producing [for the audience] a sense of separation and playing on their voyeuristic phantasy. Moreover, the extreme contrast between the darkness in the auditorium (which also isolates the spectators from one another) and the brilliance of the shifting patterns of light and shade on the screen helps to promote the illusion of voyeuristic separation...these conditions giving the spectator an illusion of looking in on a private world.
Think about the subject of this passage not in a theater, but sitting at their private desk, staring into the alternate world of Facebook, a chat room, Tumblr, or a role-playing game. “[Scopophilic pleasurable structures must] be attached to an idealization [and] pursue aims in indifference to perceptual reality,” she continues, “creating the imagized, eroticized concept of the world that forms the perception of the subject and makes a mockery of empirical objectivity.” That is to say, the physical separation of the body from the screen begets a psychological separation between the ego and the screen’s subject, allowing the ego’s ideal version of the world to manifest, leading to this break with reality. Yet, given the somewhat active, rather than passive, nature of online participation, this world can further be reaffirmed and constructed via involvement in online echo chambers such as Google-indexed online communities (i.e. Mens Rights forums, which Elliot Rodger frequented 9), role-playing games, or even Facebook. Take into consideration the algorithmic EdgeRank system that Facebook employs in determining what posts show up in a user’s feed (simplified here): the more frequently User A clicks on or comments on User B’s posts, the more User A will see posted information by User B. Further, should User A have an abundance of friends all creating edges with a User C, the more User A and associated users will see User C’s posts.10 Thus, through click-tracking Facebook effectively creates an echo system tailored to whatever and whoever incites users’ feelings most ardently, including and not including peripheral voices based on their proclivity to manipulate this system.

One need only look to World of Warcraft to witness an idealized world created via the egos of its players. World of Warcraft is an extremely successful “massively multiplayer online role-playing game” (MMPORG) that celebrated its tenth birthday in November 2014. According to Wikipedia, World of Warcraft has grossed over ten billion dollars as of July 2012 with over one hundred million accounts registered over its lifetime. Its users, who pay a monthly subscription fee to play, are also predominately male. The artist Angela Washko, who has been playing World of Warcraft since 2006, quickly noticed rampant misogyny, heightened male-gendered language, and a dearth of female players—males oftentimes play female characters. In early 2012, Washko founded “The Council on Gender Sensitivity and Behavioral Awareness in World of Warcraft” as an intervention within the game. As part of this intervention, Washko approaches various characters and asks, via the game’s chat function, what he or she thinks of the term “feminism,” which she then screen records or captures and uploads to her Tumblr. She also asks the players about their professional and economic backgrounds, which are surprisingly disparate. The artist has spoken to the unemployed, pregnant teens, doctors, lawyers, paraplegics, angsty kids, and so on. As most participants are earnestly interested, Washko’s project surveys a likely more diverse pool than say, an art world panel on feminism. She, of course, gets quite a few off-color comments. Upon asking a male person why he was playing a female character, he said “I’d rather stare at a girl’s ass all day than a guy’s,” as if it were inherently homosexual to play a male character. Again channeling Mulvey, Washko noted to me in a recent conversation that this is a classic fantasy of the ideal
female projected onto the female on screen. When asked why this misogynistic behavior is so rampant online, Washko replied that she thought that, because there’s no body-to-body public accountability in online space, such communities act as a “moral free” safe zone through which we can act out our base desires with no consequences—in other words, it’s a playground for scopophilia.11

[Insert Angela Washko_WoW]

THE BODY IN PUBLIC
Perhaps the most redundant platitude in both media studies and art writing is that advanced technology has so sped up our quotidian chronologies that we “can’t keep up” or are inundated by media with harrying, damaging persistence.12 So much art that consciously relates to technology is unfortunately contextualized with this dogmatic, if not completely false, perspective. Yet there is a kernel of truth here—our lives have become streamlined by quickened information recall, our smartphones, their apps, and other handheld technology, as well as our laptops, and the linked networks connecting all of these—to both our betterment and detriment.

There are artists who consider technology, and how it can serve as an extension of the body, in an investigative rather than critical light. Further, we live in a fast and cheap time equally characterized by the disposability of mass-produced, common objects as well as a bevy of cultural producers ranging from graphic designers and restaurateurs privileging the slow, the reskilled, as it were. Could this throwback to artisanship and craft relate to this trend in artistic production? The artisanal could brush up against the outsourced, alienated modus operandi that has largely come to define Western culture as of late. We see sculptors such as Nicolas Deshayes, Marlie Mul, Magali Reus, and Alice Channer return to specialized, often industrial production processes as an attempt to logically and emotionally connect with common objects and even public spaces. Their work returns again and again to the body: the body as content, the body as viewer, the body as maker, the body as the tool through which we experience the world—yet it often builds upon the formal and conceptual logic of Minimalism and Postminimalism. As in Minimalism, this reskilled work considers the phenomenological presence of the viewer in the exhibition space. It becomes activated, or embodied, in the presence of the viewer, but also works to question what the definition of the body is.

Nicolas Deshayes customizes industrial production processes through works that pit aesthetic referents to the body against the sterile backdrop of corporate and public interior architecture. The French-born, London-based artist anodizes his own aluminum at a metal anodizing plant and creates his own vacuum forms from warty, body-conjuring plaster spills at a molded plastic fabricator. These panels appear at once painterly, slightly digital and exceedingly chemical. Several anodized works take on the appearance of gasoline swirling in a puddle. Deshayes uses either heavy-duty aluminum sheets or “public amenity board”—the artist’s euphemism for the antiseptic boards that line urinal walls—as backdrops for his vacuum-form plastics.
These industrial, spill-proof and scratch-resistant materials consciously consider the human body and how best to neutralize the fluids, vapors, and other contaminants it produces. That Deshayes pairs these human-resistant backdrops—the heavy-duty canvas of corporate interior decor, the piss-resistant bathroom cubicle wall—with vacuum forms indexing the more base parts of the human body suggests that the public spaces created to shepherd humans almost apologize for the body’s baseness. His plastic carbuncles enforce the idea that each of us is essentially a big sac of occasionally leaking liquid and need not apologize for our corporeality. Deshayes’s recent body of work created for the summer 2014 exhibition “Pool” at kestnergesellschaft in Hannover utilizes vitreous enamel—again a material created to withstand heavy public footfall. (Vitreous enamel can only be produced in a factory, as it’s essentially glass that is fused onto steel in a furnace to create a super resilient and permanent ceramic surface.) The artist collaborated with a company that makes signs and cladding for the London Underground to create the vitreous enamel works, which feature photographic representations of life-size bodies on a generic panoramic plane. Next to oozing pools of glass paint and sprinkles of glass powder, the figures appear flat, pressed up against body-proof ceramic panel.

Berlin-based Dutch artist Marlie Mul utilizes a similar approach by customizing elements of public architecture in her series “No Oduur.” However, unlike Deshayes’s, these works bear the mark of human usage. These weathered slivers of metal stuffed with cigarette butts recall mail slots or vents found on the facades of buildings, yet they remain unidentifiable. In actuality, Mul designed these pieces as variations of an object she witnessed in real life: a trash receptacle burned so thoroughly that just the metal plate attaching it to the wall remained. The series comprises custom-fabricated, dubiously functional metal sheets, which the artist bends, etches, and burns to convey human wear and tear. She likens the addition of smoking poles to buildings or demarcated outdoor smoking areas to the territorialization of public space resultant from increasing public concern with the dangers of cigarette smoking. Further, these awkward sheets of abused metal signify this territorialization and bifurcation of public space, as well as the media one filters to develop a for-or-against stance that dictates where you’ll end up hanging out—outside with the smokers or inside abstaining. Like Deshayes’s body-repellant corporate canvases, Mul’s work points to understated architectural elements that guide or herd bodies. Her newer series of trompe l’oeil puddles, recently shown at Fluxia in Milan and Croy Nielsen in Berlin, act similarly as receptacles for human behavior, though unlike metal, these diminutive pools of water cannot be inscribed upon. Consisting of fiberglass, resin, sand, and anonymous-looking waste culled from the street, these works encapsulate banal, fleeting scenarios that are at once unremarkably quotidian and playfully existential.

If Marlie Mul focuses on elements of public architecture that receive marks of human behavior and the territorialization of public space, Magali Reus explores how such architecture can dictate human behavior in shared space. “Highly Liquid,” her spring 2013 exhibition at Amsterdam’s Galerie Fons Welters, featured a series of
modular stadium chairs donning an inoffensive color scheme of mauves, taupes, and greens. Installed at functional height, some chairs hang alone while others cluster in groups. These folding chairs are a hallmark of space-saving public architecture. *Parking (Spine)* and *Parking (Service)*, both made in 2013, combine these custom-fabricated chairs with custom-fabricated parts of crutches. The latter straps one seat semi-closed, propping up the other with half of a green crutch, while the former places deconstructed parts of white crutches (one appearing curiously akin to a spine) on top of and below a row of four seats. Frequently found on subways, busses, ships, gymnasiums, and other heavily trafficked areas, they represent an on-or-off binary: when it’s on, it supports the weight of a human, when it’s off, it collapses into space. Perhaps it’s private to feel exhaustion or pain and need to sit down, but public to do so on a structure like a stadium chair, where you’ll almost always find yourself camped next to a stranger. The concept of bodily support structures, and even that of protection, frequently arises in Reus’s show, and is literalized in her video *Highly Liquid* (2013). The video slowly pans around a wet male body amid a shower, though never offers a “money shot.” Its gaze vacillates between the sexual and the clinical, and focuses on the protective layers of oil on the skin, which, when in contact with water, causes the oils to bead. One can view these phenomena as metaphors: How can we express support and protection in public, especially in urban areas in which it’s impossible to have meaningful interactions with the overwhelming majority of people one encounters on a daily basis?

[Insert Reus_Parking(Delta)]

Just as the anti-formalist aesthetic of Postminimalism can be read as a response to the chilly remove of Minimalist work, and an attempt to reassert a haptic or sexual material presence, it could be argued that the artists considered here attempt a similar operation by introducing the concept of emotional and bodily alienation within the discourse dominated by the readymade, corporate art pursued by many of their contemporaries. Perhaps best representative of this, especially through her diverse use of materials, is Alice Channer’s practice producing states of material awkwardness or binary, continually referencing the absent (not necessarily human) body. She deflates clothes, stretches body parts, casts the flimsy in aluminum and renders liquid as solid. She describes her work as “figurative sculpture without a body,” and herself as only one of her objects’ many authors. These other authors are oftentimes machines, or the somewhat anonymous bodies—at least anonymous in the exhibition space—that literally create her work for her in a factory setting. The pieces *Trogloodyte* and *Stalacmite* (2013) for example, cast American Apparel stretch jersey Maxi-dresses in aluminum, stretching them into a “J” shape so they rest, almost like legs, on their bottom curve. While the materiality of the aluminum suggests solidity and denseness, its cast, the clothing, appears stretched and porous. This tentative, awkward material binary is heightened by the observation that the sculptures appear as if they might topple over any moment.
When I asked Channer what draws her to these states of awkwardness, she stammered and said, “It’s just how I exist in the world, I guess.” This sentiment rings true in general: While it’s cumbersome to make constant allusion to “our increasingly networked world” and “our wired body,” there’s something to be said for existing in a state of awkwardness, tentativeness, or recursion. Perhaps this collection of work responds not to a delayed understanding of how to resolve the networked with flesh, but how to navigate an increasingly abstracted world as a sentient being. The production processes of these reskilled works and the keen attention they pay to the body also bear their maker’s affect in general: There’s an honesty, sensitivity, and overt pleasure component that comes not only from heightened materiality and practical know-how, but also from sentiment. These artists encourage us to revel in the materiality of our own anatomy, regardless of how far we’ve traveled from it.

Public architecture that is body-resistant (Deshayes’s sanitary paneling) or – conscious (Reus’s flip seating) studies the body and human behavior and how best to control it in the interest of efficiency and human health. Many of the works presented here analyze “analog” technologies (such as ceramic firing or a steel ash tray) that comprise decades of information accumulated by the variably successful efforts of urban planners and architects. These elements making up communal space majorly affect our consciousness, comfort, and even emotions while in public. As will be detailed in the next section, this sort of risk-mediating design has been corporatized and is now driven by data and profit. Think, for example, the shrinking airline seat, which clearly puts profit over experience—no wonder we see works, such as Channer’s, representing the body as something stretched and squeezed.

CORPORATE BODIES
If the boom of interest in postinternet practices circa 2011 saw increased attention paid to the relationship between the distinct spaces “online” and “in real life,” artists and cultural practitioners have most recently increasingly done away with this binary distinction and focused on the inverse—the blurred indistinction between the two. While there is still an obvious distinction between the “virtual” and “real” that we can intuit, one being accessed by a computer and the other the biophysical, the intertwined nature of these experiences has come to define our daily life. We can begin to understand this by acknowledging that information is not immaterial as it is commonly mistaken to be. Rather, as argued in Tiziana Terranova’s Network Culture: Politics for the Information Age, information is a volatile commodity dependent on the physical form of the servers, wires, and cables it inhabits. She writes, “The modern concept of information is explicitly subordinated to the technical demands of communication engineering, and more specifically to the problems of the “line” or “channel.” I would also argue that the geopoliticization of information refutes such claims of immateriality. As in the very valuable information stored on the servers of WikiLeaks at Pionen Data Center in Stockholm, information is a commodity that can be stolen or be protected from government
interests depending on its geolocation. The ability to protect data via governmental autonomy from other (mainly US) government interest has even given rise to micronations such as the Principality of Sealand, which is essentially a World War II sea fort off the coast of England in the North Sea. Further, anyone who has filled out a customer service questionnaire knows that experience can be quantified as data, and is often collected, bought, traded, and used by corporations—both online and off—to influence further biophysical experiences. For example, if I write “morning sickness” in GChat, Gmail’s chat client, or conduct a web search for “missed period,” Google will know that I’m likely in my first trimester of pregnancy. Once Google becomes apprised of this knowledge, it will tailor web advertisements targeting expectant mothers. Should you click on an advertisement for a baby registry at Macy’s, for example, Google will make money off of that e-commerce click-through. And then, your brother will buy you that expensive video baby monitor you wanted, and this becomes the main way you look at your child at night—perhaps this is the first machine that this child interacts with.

The now-defunct artist duo AIDS-3D (Daniel Keller and Nik Kosmas) has long considered the role of corporate interest in the creation of mass-produced objects and interior architecture. Their spring 2011 exhibition “Exotic Options” at T293 in Naples debuted a series of sculptures that are actually sneezeguards. Don’t feel bad if you have no idea what a sneezeguard is—heretofore I hadn’t either—it is a glass plane that protects food (usually a buffet) from the pesky snot of its onlookers. The sneezeguard is in essence a form of risk-mediating architecture. If you own a restaurant with a buffet and don’t install sneezeguards and something falls into a vat of food, you will lose money from having to replace that food. AIDS-3D’s sneezeguards come equipped with camouflage semi-distracting privacy film, which is a low-cost plastic mesh film that allows a person to peer out from the inside of a bus, for example, but remain invisible to outside onlookers. These semi-distracting privacy films are also commonly printed upon with large-scale advertisements. Most importantly AIDS-3D has located artistic practice, as a reflection of everyday life, as something that has come into contact with the corporate.

The artist Hito Steyerl has written extensively of the comingling between the corporate and the artistic, and online and offline space. In her essay “Too Much World, Is the Internet Dead?” published in e-flux journal #49 in November 2013, she writes:

But here is the ultimate consequence of the internet moving offline. If images can be shared and circulated, why can’t everything else be too? If data moves across screens, so can its material incarnations move across shop windows and other enclosures. If copyright can be dodged and called into question, why can’t private property? If one can share a restaurant dish JPEG on Facebook, why not the real meal? Why not apply fair use to space, parks, and swimming pools?¹⁴

Steyerl’s 2014 video Liquidity Inc. tackles the transformative nature between the “virtual” and the “real” head-on. It features Jacob Wood, a former Lehmann Brothers
analyst, who is laid off during the dot-com bust and becomes a free-floating agent—eventually a performance-obsessed Mixed Martial Arts fighter. It also riffs on liquid aesthetics, in a literal sense, to include computer generated imagery of waves and water, as well as the metaphoric liquidity of assets—an asset’s ability to transform into cash. Tellingly, the “inc.” in “Liquidity Inc.” speaks to another form of transformation, specifically to the term “incorporation.” The term “incorporate” describes both the processes of assuming bodily form as well as a company becoming a legal entity, which often have legal rights as human beings. (Consider the summer 2014 ruling that the arts-and-crafts purveyor Hobby Lobby has religious rights and is thus allowed to refuse to compensate its employees with health insurance that could cover abortions.) According to Oxford American Dictionary’s website, incorporation entails “the act of uniting several persons into one fictional form called a corporation, in order that they may be no longer responsible for their actions.” The term’s etymological roots further evince its function to describe the liquidity and the changing states of matter that Steyerl focuses on here: “Incorporation” coming from the late Latin incorporat- ‘embodied,’ from the verb incorporare, from in- ‘into’ + Latin corporare ‘form into a body’ (from corpus, corpor-‘body’).15

If a corporation can be considered a person, why can’t information be considered a person, or at least, again, material? Here again is Terranova on information and its abnormal physical properties:

> It is [the] ease of copying, it has been argued, that makes of information such a shifty and yet valuable commodity. We know that information can be sold and bought and that a good deal of the world economy is driven by an emphasis on the informational content of specific commodities and we are also aware that information itself can be valuable (when it is used for example to make a profit in the stock market). We know that anybody is always potentially an information-source or even an information storage-device and that science suggests that information constitutes the very basis of our biological existence (in as much as, we are told, we contain information that can be decoded within our very cells). In all these cases, information emerges as a content, as some kind of “thing” or “object” but one that possesses abnormal properties (ease of copying and propagation, intangibility, volatility, etc.) that contemporary technological developments have exacerbated and amplified. 16

Terranova importantly expounds here on the abnormality of information that oftentimes qualifies it as an abstraction. This concept of the abstraction of states, and the confusion or power it begets, seems symptomatic of both common power structure dynamics and also how we relate to the world. German media theorist Friedrich Kittler argued that it was with telegraphy that information—no longer simply a speech act—was abstracted as a “massless flow” for the first time, and it was pointed out by American information theorist Claude E. Shannon in 1948 that it is the signal, or information, that we seek amid such states of noise.17 And as we learned earlier, the conflation of the corporation as person is a further political abstraction that gains power from its lack of responsibility. Both the awkward state
that Alice Channer speaks of, and the psychologically dissonant experience of the World of Warcraft player that Angela Washko details, further prove this contemporary tendency toward an abstracted hybrid state. But this is not meant to be simply cynical. Rather, it is in the face of such noise that it seems paramount to recognize the powers of conflation and clairvoyance in order to protect the autonomy of our own information.

1 Gene McHugh, *Post Internet: Notes on the Internet and Art* (Link Editions, 2012)
3 Shorthand for “Single White Male In Search Of Single White Female.”
6 Ann Hirsch, unpublished screenplay
7 Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” *Screen* vol. 16, no. 3 (Autumn 1975): 6–18
8 Ibid.
11 What happens when the sanctity of these networks are challenged or taken away is another question. We need only look to the stories of game blogger Anita Sarkeesian or video game developer Zoe Quinn, who both have achieved success in breaking into and expanding the game industry, and who both have experienced death and rape threats from anonymous online sources.

