VIRTUAL DOPPELGÄNGERS: EMBODIMENT, MORPHOGENESIS, AND TRANSVERSAL ACTION (PANEL INTRODUCTION)

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In 1969 Gilles Deleuze theorized the Body without Organs (BwO). The term refers to the virtual dimension of the body likened to the egg as site of embodiment (in Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Anti-Oedipus*)—a set of multiple potentialities and dysfunctional repetitions. In this panel we seek to explore the relations between fleshly bodies and digitized ones as sites of embodiment for our current, informatically energized existences.

In 1969 Gilles Deleuze theorized the "BwO" or Body Without Organs (in *The Logic of the Sense*, after Antonin Artaud's origination of the term in 1947). [1] [2] BwO refers to the virtual dimension of the body and its potentials, likened to the egg as the site of embodiment. [3] This BwO-as-egg is further described by Deleuze and Guattari as a set or "*spatium*" of multiple intensities or potentialities. Deleuze and Guattari's body without organs is not against organs, per se, but opposed to the *organism*—the body subjectivized through organization. [4] Moreover, there must remain a connection between the organism and the BwO. D&G: "You have to keep enough of the organism for it to reform each dawn; . . . you have to keep small rations of subjectivity in sufficient quantity to enable you to respond to the dominant reality." The BwO is a way of transcending the strata of subjectivity and freeing its lines of flight.

The image of the BwO is one that, for many, has suggested the analogy with the digital or avatar body, clearly a BwO, but only insofar as it is fluid and unsubjectivized and occupies what D&G call the "plane of consistency," for which the virtual world stands as a figure. Slavoj Zizek even calls Deleuze the "philosopher of the virtual." [5]

In the spirit of the BwO thus interpreted, then, this panel explores relations between fleshly bodies and digitized ones as sites of embodiment for our current, informatically intensified existences. From Facebook to online games and performances in Second Life, many of us experience various parts of our lives virtually today. But how are these experiences absorbed into our so-called "real life"?

There have been controversies and supporting studies (esp. concerning virtual games) suggesting that too much virtual mediation is harmful to our "sense of reality" and ability to interact well in society. This idea has been around for a long time as progeny of old, unresolved debates about violence on TV. Clinical studies of violent virtual games are still ongoing and as yet inconclusive, but speculation continues. And many say online socializing, which (like gaming) offers action free of consequences, has encouraged the growth of bullying and even occasions of lynch mob mentality, pointing to phenomena such as the responses to the recent Casey Anthony trial in the US (the young Florida woman charged with murdering her infant daughter). That trial, which used virtual simulations in the courtroom itself, was the subject of obsessive coverage in both TV and social media including animated simulations on YouTube of the crime scene for "virtual jurors." Media pundits speculated as to whether or not heightened access to visualizations of the case incited members of the general public, who repeatedly mobbed and fought

each other to gain entry to limited public courtroom seats, and demonstrated for a guilty verdict, outside.

In our session, Patrick Lichty will discuss the scientific discovery of mirror neurons, which attach us to others, or the images of others or ourselves, on an autonomic level. Researchers like Jeremy Bailenson (Virtual Human Interaction Lab, Stanford University) and Nick Yee (Palo Alto Research Center) provide evidence for the idea that our conduct as avatars in online worlds has an aftereffect, a "Proteus effect" as Yee calls it, such that our behavior and feelings in real life are adjusted. In a study in which participants were given tall avatars and asked to negotiate tasks with other (shorter) avatars, subjects were then told to negotiate similar tasks with people in real life. The study found that persons experiencing taller avatars negotiated more advantageous results, and this effect also carried through when they negotiated a similar deal face to face—they "acted" taller, in effect. [6]

Bailinson's group did studies of *doppelgängers* - specifically, avatars that are built to look exactly like us. In a series of studies, Bailenson and co-researcher, Jesse Fox, at Ohio State, used doppelgängers as theraputic tools. Test subjects who observed their near mirror images exercising and losing weight, for example, were followed after the test and shown to be more inclined to exercise than a control group. Subjects who observed their virtual selves manipulated to look much older, displayed heightened interest in their retirement savings. Studies were, of course, suggestive rather than conclusive.

But similar effects are the focus of simulations like the multi-platform "Always in Season Island" an educational and consciousness-raising project in which (when the Second Life portion of the site is released) visitors will participate in reenactments of lynchings and torture that took place in the American South from the 18th century through the mid 1960s. [7] Participants will see their clothing transformed to period dress, and they will become virtual witnesses. They will also receive information about historical lynchings and be connected to the project's Twitter or Facebook pages to share their feelings about the SIM. The project aims for responses that show real concern for the scenarios because of the experience of virtually witnessing them and bearing the moral tension such witnessing holds.

According to philosopher and researcher Philip Brey, there are clear ethical issues entrenched in our behavior as virtual selves, and these involve two categories of assumptions; he writes:

According to the argument from moral development, it is wrong to treat virtual humans cruelly because doing so will make it more likely that we will treat real humans cruelly. The reason for this is that the emotions appealed to in the treatment of virtual humans are the same emotions that are appealed to in the treatment of real humans . . . The argument from psychological harm is that third parties may be harmed by the knowledge or observation that people engage in violent, degrading or offensive behavior in single-user VR . . . [8]

Clearly, our evolving abilities to mash up real and virtual existences has both therapeutic and educational potential, but also responsibilities. It holds promise of empowerments—Deleuzian *intensities*—but also of manipulation and subjectification.

Sherrie Turkle suggests that most of us already live in both virtual and physical realities and our "life mix," as she terms it; our "multi-lifing," has become the norm. It can function efficiently or go off the rails, but Turkle finds that the most beneficial doppelgängers - beneficial, that is, for their real operators

and overall life mix - are those who participate in "real" online relationships, or situations with consequences. [9]

The session addresses both artworks and theoretical frameworks that engage our replicated bodies, the relations they create, and their transversal effects across multiple platforms and modes of existence. Greg Little will tell us more about the metaphysics of the BwO in the context of avatars. Micha Cárdenas and Elle Mehrman explore how virtual experiences can transform our real-world identities. Stephanie Rothenberg will discuss the mash-up between work and play. And Patrick Lichty discusses affective potential of virtual performance art.

References and Notes:

1. *G. Deleuze, The Logic of the Sense (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).*
2. *A. Artaud, "Body without Organs," Pour en Finir avec le Jugement de dieu, Radio Française (Paris, November, 22-29 1947).*
3. *G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, Anti-Oedipus (London: Continuum, 2004).*
4. *Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 158.*
5. *S. Zizek, "The Reality of the Virtual," in Organs Without Bodies, (London: Routledge, 2003).*
6. *N. Yee, "The Proteus Effect" (PhD. diss, Stanford University, 2007): 46-50.*
7. *"Always in Season Island" is created by Jacqueline Olive with consultants. See: http://www. alwaysinseasonisland.com/*
8. *P. Brey, "Virtual Reality and Computer Simulation," in Handbook of Information and Computer Ethics, eds. K.Himma and H.Tavani, 361-384 (Hoboken: Wileyand Sons, 2008).*
9. *S. Turkle, Alone Together (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 160, 223.*