Hunting notes from Outernet: The embodiment of images after the Internet

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Abstract

This paper describes the infiltration of the image from the Internet to the everyday environment, what is beginning to be called the Outernet. However, this shift toward the physical space – architectural, urban, geological – is performed by prioritizing the technical and informative character of the image, which reduces the body to stationary and dissociated situations. From this point of departure we propose a parallel situation, in which we present the body as a transducer between image-providing devices and environments. We will consider the Outernet from its rereading as a low-fidelity Wilderness, a hybrid landscape where the body can hunt and embody image in a wild way – not entirely rational –, here described as performative research. Shifting the intentionality of our movements, we unfold a field of relationships in which the image is distributed along the body, the device, and the environment.

Keywords: Internet, Outernet, Wilderness, landscape, body, hunter, embodiment, performative research.

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I. Internet Splashes Across the World

We are beginning to hear the infiltration of a new term – Outernet – that defines the expansion of the Internet beyond the boundaries of the online environment (Rehder & Hentschel, 2010). Despite the commercial connotation of the term, Outernet may well define, in another moment, the heterogeneous set of technical image deployed towards augmented reality devices or geolocation, to name a few. Outernet is based on the inoculation of visible [1] information – that demands attention while it provides sets of decipherable data – in objects thanks to a suitable device: lenses, screens or cameras that add new layers of visual information to specific spatial areas. At first glance, Outernet applications reveal a true merging of our surrounding offline environment, commonly – but loosely – accepted as *real life*, and the digital features available for such environments. The distinctions between online and offline seem to shift from computerized mediation in communication to the lack of distinction between the real and virtual (Papaiannaou, 2010: 3). Here we equate the term offline *AFK* (away from keyboard) described in Simon Klose's documentary *TBP AFK* as a subsequent variation of the term *IRL* (in real life). Thus, *AFK* describes a particular mode of temporary absence within the online dwelling. It is the temporary suspension of interaction with devices while maintaining those devices in a latent state [2]. Therefore, offline – real life – is a difference of measure regarding the proximity or the distance to the devices and their images, but never an absence of them.

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If the technical images of the Outernet fall precisely into the scope of what we were shown previously, the informative image is literally panelled and superimposed. The separation between human and non-human, described in other cases (Bennett, 2010: 10; Harman, 2009: 13; Latour, 1996: 136) is here reduced technically from the presence or absence of information.

In the implementation of the Outernet, the image is not displayed, but is instrumentally exerted. The technique unfolded here is not the techné interested in having practice, being understood, be, "*bringing-forth*" (Heidegger, 1973: 13); instead, it is reduced to the notification based on the formal production of signs. Thus, this instrumental technique not only anticipates and determines knowledge technically – as method, device and laboratory – (Latour, 1993), but also what can be said.

The staging of the Internet as a highlight, architectural or geolocation extension comes about together with a shift of the speakable and the visible towards technical information signs. Concurrently, the overabundance of the image is accompanied by a reduction of our lead-with-them. Outernet therefore defines a restriction on the ecology of the image [3], in its policies of alteration and redistribution. But we could also borrow the term to pry the Internet when it is away from the keyboard. Outernet could be Internet when it is posited outside of the Internet, with regard to method and format. To this end, our relation should be extended from stationary interactions to relationships in which our body is displayed, and where the image after the Internet [4] splashes the world as an open relationship from its aesthetic and objectual scope (Doulas, 2011; Lonergan, 2008; Olson, 2008). To do this, we distance ourselves from the meaning of new media art prioritized by trends such as the numerical representation and the mathematical method (Manovich, 1999: 49). We recognize Outernet image as something that not only coexists in online and offline environments, but that also allows us to embody [5] the attributes in which the image negotiates agreements between humans and non-humans. From this premise, we describe Outernet as the relationships where the post-Internet image is embodied and translated by a body that participates dynamically. Far from setting itself up as the axis, the embodiment of online and offline environments positions the body at discrete and changing distances from environments and devices, from humans and non-humans.

II. Wild images and Lo-fi Wilderness

Now let us look at the environment generated from the relations between the body and the devices. As we discussed earlier, the relations of the body with the offline do not presuppose an absence of devices, but rather a non-reciprocal and gradient distance to or from them. In the topology proposed, these differences in distance also denote different collective scales of natures-cultures [6] that are differentiated from the double separation between the society of men-among-them and the nature of things-in-themselves (Latour, 1993: 107). The Outernet image is splashed toward hybrid networks that cancel the distinction between non-human, nature, human, and culture, and where the human is understood as a set of relations and alliances,

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as an adaptive change or *morphism* (1993: 137). These relations between image, human, and nonhumans are here deployed operationally, woven not exclusively from the digital, and in them the body participates as an analogue translator by introducing reading patterns such as movement, thought, sensation or perception (Massumi, 2008: 140). The settings of these relationships will be areas where alliances take place between image and topology, information and vibration (Massumi, 2008: 137). The enabling environment for these relationships is irreducible to a numerical or a descriptive representation, and it is certainly not unique to humans and their tracks. This environment is explored by a body that, in doing so, tunes in with areas of that topology – some of them are describable, others are only accessible by an incorporation that is not only non-rational, but also *introduces* the topology into the body.

Here we will use the notion 'Wilderness' [7] to refer to places that are – to a greater or lesser extent –beyond human interference. Wilderness describes areas that maintain simultaneity between sensuality and opacity, and which non-human areas are accessible to the extent that the body also loses part of its humanity. From this Wilderness – not fully understood or anthropised – we could relate with the Outernet image as a non-human ecology, not wholly dependent on our presence, not reducible to a meaning.

Whether by the character of their circulation – irreducible to digitalization – or by its participation in non-human processes – of storage or translation –, the Outernet image is, to a certain degree, opaque to being documented; here, what can be said of the image is an elusive, *vanishing* content.

To think about the status of the Outernet image within the offline environment leads to integrate the experience of the body into a landscape form that survives the gaze – or its absence – by maintaining a *physiognomy* (Besse, 2010: 121). The experiences are distributed between what we see and what is given to see, between the position taken by the body in regard to the image and the unveiling of the image –which takes place even without our presence. However, this positioning of the body should occur *in motion*, in a dimension that eludes its reduction to a mere piece of technical information. Otherwise, the movement would be subject to trajectories, to quantifiable starting and ending points that add "nothing at all, multiples of zero" (Massumi, 2008: 3). Derived from the concept of Wilderness, the term Wildness (Snyder, 1990: 11) describes the intensities with which the relations between humans and non-humans take place. It is the highlight of a context inscribed into the Wilderness. To the extent that there can be no true Wilderness without a certain degree of human presence (even as a hint, a name, a rumour or a location), we cannot detach the Wildness from our bodies. The responses that our mammalian bodies produce without the participation of intellect (breathing, vertigo or panic, etc.) are incorporated wild states. Thus, our bodies are "wild" (Snyder, 1990: 23) and they remain at a certain distance from the entanglements between humans and non-humans. The savagery of our bodies is the common range, the edge of personality [8] that opens the course on the Outernet image. On the other hand, there are tensions between the bodily access to the topology of the Outernet – where the environment and the image escape from human control – and the cultural

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relations that take place there. As a result, the image shows us the Outernet precisely as a low-fidelity Wilderness. We find traces, remnants, and ruins. We have a hint of the non-humanity of the Outernet only by comparison from our settlements in the Internet, which are simultaneously nodes and *limes*. Even if relations with the device are problematic, they are still cultural because they display the body as a hybrid translator within a landscape of images and raw sensations akin to the hunter-gatherer landscape described by Ingold (2000: 47). Hunter-gatherers engage in an exchange with non-human space with a specific mode of harvest, where the hunt is not captured, but rather offers itself to us. Therefore, hunting is not understood here as an intentional access to the environment, nor as a mere resource extraction, but as temporary dwelling, from vision and movement, that extends an intimate knowledge of the environment. Investing time in these areas, even if we return with no catch, is never wasted time [9]. This participation – from the embodiment with non-humans – occurs in another area in which we are "biological objects rather than cultural subjects, i.e. bodies before persons" (Ingold, 2000: 60). The dwelling not only transforms humans in their two-way shift from the cultural to the wild, but also makes them compatible with savagery itself. When they integrate with the community cultural practice of sharing, hunters return to a human state [10] (Ingold, 2000: 44). What happens here is a kind of *fleshiness* of the experience that allows us to sense, overcoming the understanding of what we see, to emotions of welcome or rejection, to embodied experience. Hunting images involves *accepting* the savage mode in which unfolds an Internet splashed across the world.

III. Deceived Devices & Performative Presentation

So far we have seen how the Outernet image permeates into an offline context that does not need to be reduced to digital information, and where the body – and its Wilderness – coacts in a landscape not completely anthropised that allows us to translate the image. However, there is an urgent need to think not only what happens to the Outernet image – now understood as an image that is constituted in its distribution along the device, the environment and the body – but also our relation to the devices involved in this process. To do so, we are going to pry a possibility in which the body seems to split in two in its very relationship with the device – the body deceives the device – because, while it keeps distance from the intentional response towards the device, the latter is still receiving information.

We accept our access to Internet and its devices from the residues of movement (Massumi, 2008: 17) derived from the idea of position; the body technically informs the device. These positional movements are refined by way of repetition, although they are limited to obtaining an effect or a result (2008: 34). We may cancel our projections – such as talking – or we may frame our view, but in the end the devices require to be fired – triggered – from our bodies. While the contextual relation with the Internet is friendly, on the other hand it is physically disciplinary. The confinement of the body to a stationary situation continues by a quasi-objective localization of the tactile sensations in the body. The tactile summarizes the body as tact; it supplants the body in its unfolding onto the world. This changes the nature of our body "not as something that is,

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but as something that you have" (Carman, 1999: 206). The body is not a part of the world, but a mediator between consciousness and external reality. The body is reduced to a casing, the hand to the keyboard, and perception to its informative content.

But let us put away the table, the chair, the computer, the monitor, the speakers... and let the body keep on performing exactly the same range of motions in its management of the devices. Let us take away for a moment the TV set, the computer, the motion recognition system... and let us keep on playing baseball. The resulting situation is that of a body stripped off its informative and technical context. It is a body without conscious intentionality. A body that, in losing its technical dialogue with the image, is despoiled in the offline as the presentation of the process itself, and blinded in its inability to unfold in a world without devices. The problem does not lie in the body, but in what sustains these two states of presentation and representation of the body. While the second – representation – evokes the absences, or invokes them as things removed from our bodies (Morse 1998: 156), the first – presentation – highlights a change, and therefore introduces our body into an changing environment (Arlander, 2013: 3). This inscription is developed as an energetic connection to a landscape (Arlander, p. 11) which, insofar as it is affected by our presence, distributes the agency [11] beyond our body. The landscape and the body participate here in a process that Arlander (2013) – following Haseman (2006) and Bolt (2008) – defined as "performative research" (p. 1), where we do not investigate a phenomenon but rather, the phenomenon is created or shaped; it is an event in which the world is acted upon. To affectively investigate these relationships, we do not relinquish the devices, but they are redistributed to other events – relations – not restricted by their technical or digital qualities. It should not be forgotten that we have access to the real by increasing the number of mediators and by removing layers of perceptual distinction (Harman, 2009: 76).

In John McTiernan's film *Predator* (1987), an alien hunter lands on the Central American jungle with the purpose of collecting humans. As a key element in its strategy, the hunter has a device that allows it to incorporate the surrounding environment. When activated, the body of the hunter is literally *bathed* with the image of the jungle. What is striking is that throughout its almost mimetic incorporation, the hunter and the environment become the same thing: the jungle. Proof of this is that at one point humans, in their attempt to discover the creature, begin to machine-gun the jungle. The vegetation is literally felled by bullets, as if the elimination of the image of the jungle could eliminate the hunter itself. Later, a young woman is interrogated about the kidnapping of a human by the creature. She only manages to utter: *"the jungle took him"*. The jungle is extended through the body of the hunter. Therefore, the embodiment of the image is accomplished by its over-identification; a sort of *exaggeration* that nevertheless does not produce separation but hybridization. In fact, the body becomes jungle too, but how does this permeate to the device? The film shows an even bolder example. One of the hunter's victims – the fugitive Arnold Schwarzenegger – discovers that the creature's vision is informed by the heat emitted by organic bodies. At a certain point in the film, the fugitive emerges from the water and takes refuge in a nearby mangrove, covering himself with the mud of the shore. The decrease in his body temperature renders him indecipherable to the device, while the position of the body adapts to the

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mangrove roots. This body also extends the offline image to the device, which results informed about the body but not about its heat. In this case, the body escapes the reduction to a digital registry – because it does not inform the device – although it cannot avoid being part of its image. The movement of the bodies plays an interesting role throughout the whole film; although by stirring the hunter becomes noticeable to humans – since movement singularizes the body in its incorporation of the jungle –, this does not happen to the same extent to the fugitive, because his absence of body temperature is what renders him undifferentiated to the device. His movement, although detectable, is no longer identifiable by the device that assumes that any movement – such as the branch of a tree – as the fugitive's body.

Predator is just one of many performative ecologies that summon different contexts for their circulation: wild bodies, splashed images – and hunted! – from the Internet, humans and technical devices. Since the incorporation of the image in our movement, we propose the body as an energy navigator (Arlander, 2013: 15). This navigation attends not only to the circulation of these images after the Internet, but to their self-explanatory capacity as described by Marisa Olson (2013) in her proposal for an image philosophy beyond verbal representation [12].

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The Outernet image is constituted as something that traverses various translations among devices, the body and the savage, non-human topology of the offline environment. The environment is displayed as a Wilderness that participates as much in non-humans as in the wild body of the image hunter. The devices are weakened from their emphasis on the informative content of the images to other properties – colour, line, and vector – that kinaesthetically transform this sketch. Therefore, we dwell in an ecology of image and body, of savagery and devices, that also partakes of the world model proposed by Harman (2010: 789), the access to which requires a particular poetic that deals with a model of a "world deeper than all access, broken in advance into individuals [...] accessible through allusion rather than direct contact". As we have seen, the body – devoid of a conscious finalism – maintains its physical relation with the image despoiled of its technical vocabulary, exploring it performatively. The wild body in motion summons *misleading* thresholds that allow the device to function while liberating the body from its response to the digital. Keeping the motion formally in its shift from intentionality – from conscious to motor – makes *the image informed from the body*, because it remains exposed to a bodily movement to which it can gain access. Meanwhile, the movement of the body unfolds in the offline. The performed trail of this body collaborates not only in the hunt for pictures, but also in *being both image and environment.* For the hunter who tracks image paths, movement is not only continuous; he himself *is* the movement (Ingold, 2007: 75). The one who incorporates images after Internet is the one who wanders in them. The hunter is the territory.

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Footnotes

[1] We link here the visible – and the invisible – with the ubiquitous: "one is industrial and embedded, effectively invisible and accessed by experts. The other is consumer commodity, very visible and demanding of attention, while nonetheless affording sophisticated data-gathering" (Penny, 2013: 266).

[2] "*AFK* is a way to let others know in chat and games that they are away from the keyboard and will not respond to any talking or action" (AFK, 2013).

[3] We continue here with the assumption of the Latournian ecology implemented by Bennet (2010) where the nature-culture distinction is rejected – also by Harman (2009: 13) – in favour of a community cohabited by humans and non-humans. In this ecology, nature and culture cohabit as actants: "*which is an attempt, as is conjoint action, to pry some space between the notion of action and the notion of human intentionality*" (Bennet, 2010: 103).

[4] We locate *after the Internet* (Post-Internet) in its proximity to modernity (Olson, in Debate, 2008), where the conditions of critical description of the object are the object. "Far more interesting than the life and death of this nomenclature are the changes to which they bear witness. To call a thing to a post-thing is to say that the thing is itself precisely because of the thing" (Olson, 2013: 61).

[5] "The Internet ha[s] changed the way we understand, contextualize, curate, appreciate, create and critique art. All art will soon enough – if not already – fully incorporate, transition into, reveal, embody or exploit these properties" (Doulas, 2011).

[6] "[N]o one has ever heard of a collective that did not mobilize heaven and earth [...] along with bodies and souls, property and law, gods and ancestors, powers and beliefs, beasts and fictional beings" (Latour, 1993: 107).

[7] Here we leave behind the meanings of Wilderness that are based on terms of heritage or folklore: "To many men Wilderness living is an inherent need, a heritage of the days when their forefathers were a part of it" (Olson, 2001: 53), as well as those that reduce it to a contemplative landscape, calling it "Wilderness Landscape" (Shepheard, 1997: 100).

[8] Personality is not so much a declaration of humanity, but rather humanity is one of the many external features of personality. Thus, "it makes no significant difference whether one renders animal actions in human terms or human actions in animal terms" (Ingold, 2000: 50).

[9] We could open a line of thought where to imagine sensitive approaches to the non-human presence (Bennet, 2010: 39). Perhaps, an ethic of mutual performance, of hybrid relationships

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between body, image and environment, will facilitate modes of reciprocal transformations, similar to those that occur during feeding (Bennet, 2010: 74).

[10] The priority of hunting societies rests on the defence of collective modes of translation: "most characteristic of hunting societies everywhere is the emphasis not on accumulation but on its obverse: the sharing of the kill" (Ingold, 1980: 148).

[11] We move the anthropocentrism underlying the term towards its Latournian expansion, described here by Bennet (2010: 21): "an actant never really acts alone. Its efficacy or agency always depends on the collaboration, cooperation, or interactive interference of many bodies and forces".

[12] "If we want to split hairs about it, we could call it a post-ekphrastic image philosophy – one that comes after the understanding that images are capable of not only illustrating and describing, but also theorizing themselves, even on their own terms; even as they bring themselves into resolution for the first time" (Olson, 2013: 62).