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Reach Out and Touch Someone: Technology and the Promise of Intimacy

> 'These days, insecure in our relationships and anxious about intimacy, we look to technology for ways to be in relationships and protect ourselves from them at the same time.'
>
> (Turkle, 2011: 20)

In 1979 the Bell Companies[1] came out with an advertising campaign that featured the feel-good tag line of 'reach out and touch someone' to promote their long-distance telephone service. In the ads, happy families camping or eating dinner 'reach out' and 'touch' family members who are not able to be with them by phoning them. Gauzy images of children speaking to grandparents, mothers speaking to fathers and smiling teenagers speaking to their friends portray the merits of long-distance telephony as harbingers of a more connected age of always available intimate encounters.[2] The advertising campaigns promised that technology (in this case communication technology) would bring people together and create a better sense of closeness amongst families. It is telling that in most of the television commercials for this

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[1] The Bell Companies are now called AT&T.

[2] The ad can be viewed online at http://youtu.be/HO17B-ACRn0

campaign the image of a phone is not seen until the end of the ad and even then it is not shown in any particular context. The phone, in these ads, are overshadowed by the smiling images of people 'reaching out and touching' each other, as it were.

Fast forward thirty-two years and major communications companies are still promising to make our lives more satisfying by bringing people closer together via the magic of technology. CISCO, the telecommunications giant, released a series of advertisements using the slogan 'The Human Network' to promote their range of products. These ads are filled with smiling couples, a woman giving birth while her family watches on a video link, a grandmother joining a birthday party for her grandchild remotely, and other scenes of intimate experiences made digital (or perhaps, more accurately, digital experiences wearing the guise of intimacy). The ads end by encouraging us to *be* the 'human network', a suggestion that implies that we are becoming more and more part of a society of convergence where the bounds between the human and the machine are blurred.[3]

The notion of 'the human network' is clearly an evolution of the Bell Companies' earlier entreaty; the ad does not specifically mention technology, although it features heavily in its imagery. Instead, the ad focuses on the intimate connections that these technologies might make possible. I would like to suggest that the term 'possibility' may be useful for making sense of the changing landscape of intimate encounters we face in this era of technological

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[3] A version of the Human Network ad can be seen online at http://youtu.be/_5B-Ygv7s48

advances of the social-networking kind. I believe that the 'always on' and

'portable' mobile Internet, the proliferation of high speed internet connectivity,

and the mix of social networks and augmented reality experiences, which

define the landscape of the early twenty-first century offer us, as artists and as

humans, the possibility of finding new ways of experiencing notions of

embodiment. However, they do not *implicitly create* more intimate encounters

or even more opportunities for intimacy. To return to the Bell Companies' tag

line – can these technologies *bring us closer together* or do they highlight the

separations that exist in our offline/online lives?

In an online debate called 'Reasonable People Disagree About Connectivity'

between Dalton Conley, Dean of the School of Social Sciences at NYU and

his wife, artist and director of NYUs xDesign Environmental Health Centre

Natalie Jeremijenko, we see two opposing views about whether technology is

bringing us closer together or eroding our private space. Conley says:

> The more that we're on stage (posting on Facebook or Twitter, or
> otherwise broadcasting our daily states and moods), the less of a
> backstage there is. The boundary between public and private is
> increasingly blurred. I think of intimacy as selectively granting passes
> to your personal backstage, where you let certain people see your
> grumpy side, or get the update on how you're feeling at 3:00 in the
> afternoon. But if you're using social media as a soapbox to post one-to-
> all, then there's no backstage anymore.
> (Conley and Jeremijenko, 2010)

Conley's impression that communicating through social networks, which are

inherently one-to-many platforms for expressing ideas, emotions or locations,

is somehow eroding the notion of a private, 'backstage' touches on a growing

trend, observed by Sherry Turkle (2011: 58) in her studies with teens that

suggests we feel more anxiety and isolation the more we distribute ourselves. In her words, 'as we distribute ourselves, we may abandon ourselves'. Turkle (ibid: 57) also suggests that although the current proliferation of communication technologies is making us feel more anxious and busy, 'the solution will be another technology that will organize, amuse and relax us.' In Turkle's view, then, we see a solution being proposed by the very thing that caused the problem to begin with.

Artist Natalie Jerimejenko, however, suggests that we simply need to learn to take agency or control over how we behave with these new technologies. She says:

> We can use technology to connect with one another or to disconnect. The question becomes: To what extent do we exercise that agency? And why don't we feel more in control of it? My position is that we have more agency than we often exercise.
> (Conley and Jeremijenko, 2010)

Jeremikenko is not suggesting that the pervasiveness of these technologies does not exist; she just sees them as another set of configurable elements in our daily lives that require processing. The feeling of being out of control may be a side-effect of the always-on Internet environment that we live in. Jeremijenko's position seems to suggest that we merely need to make the decision to turn off. I wonder whether it is as simple as turning off. Are we, possibly, becoming more like addicts: aware of the danger of getting swallowed by the non-stop media-verse, yet still consuming it against all caution?

The difference in thinking between Conley and Turkle versus Jeremijenko frame a landscape of questions that ask whether the current wave of technologies are just another set of tools for us to engage with at our discretion, or if they are actually altering the way we think, behave, educate ourselves, conceive of space and intimacy, and collaborate. Others have argued that in a landscape of mediated interactions that 'place greater emphasis on physically absent others', 'trust has become [a] more valued commodity' than ever before (Raiti, 2007). I want you to keep these perspectives in mind while we look at two projects that fall into the realm of emerging digital experiences – one of them is a dance/theater rehearsal process and the other is an augmented reality performance. In looking at these projects, hopefully we might get a better sense of what the impact of these technologies might be and what the potential is that they might offer artists, thinkers and users of digital communication technologies.

Before going into a a further discussion, it is worth noting the many definitions of the word intimate, (and intimacy by proxy). According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the primary definitions of the adjective use of intimate are:

> 1. a. Inmost, most inward, deep-seated; hence, Pertaining to or connected with the inmost nature or fundamental character of a thing; essential; intrinsic. Now chiefly in scientific use. b. Entering deeply or closely into a matter.
> 2. Pertaining to the inmost thoughts or feelings; proceeding from, concerning, or affecting one's inmost self; closely personal.
> 3. a. Close in acquaintance or association; closely connected by friendship or personal knowledge; characterized by familiarity (with a person or thing); very familiar. Said of persons, and personal relations or attributes. Also transf. of things, Pertaining to or dealing with such close personal relations. b. euphem. of sexual intercourse. c. Familiarly associated; closely personal. d. Used allusively of women's underclothing. e. Of a theatrical performance, esp. a revue: that aims at

establishing familiar and friendly relations with the audience. Also of a theatre itself.
4. Of knowledge or acquaintance: Involving or resulting from close familiarity; close.
5. Of a relation between things: Involving very close connection or union; very close.
(OED, 2012)

Of particular interest to this discussion are the many references to familiarity, connection, the 'fundamental character of a thing', relations, and closeness. Throughout this discussion, I am drawing from the definition above to try and understand intimacy, rather than relying solely on generic, instinctive understandings of the word.

In 2007, I began working as a dramaturge and performance director with Tiffany Mills Company on a dance/theater piece called *Tomorrow's Legs*. As I live in the UK and Tiffany Mills Company are based in NY, and because we did not have a huge budget to pay for my travel, we rehearsed using SKYPE. My role in the project was to help the choreographer and the dancers to develop text that they could speak and to structure the piece so that the interplay between movement and speaking made sense. In our SKYPE sessions, the dancers and Tiffany would use a laptop and a camera to live stream rehearsals to me, and I would sit in my office watching and intervening in rehearsals remotely. We were attempting to step into the human network promised in those CISCO advertisements; we imagined the screens we were using would act as portals to allow us to feel as though we were in the same space together. This was a naïve expectation.

Working over SKYPE presented a number of technological problems including an odd delay in sound that would sometimes happen between when we spoke and when the other person heard our voice, the relative textural flatness of the images of the dancers that I was seeing, and the fact that I could not control the view of the camera without interrupting rehearsals and asking for the shot I was seeing to be reframed. We overcame each of these challenges in different ways, but the structure of our rehearsals and the final performance itself altered significantly as a result of rehearsing through SKYPE. For example, SKYPE is built to serve as a tool for people speaking to each other over the Internet. To get the best quality experience, those speaking should really use a headset and headphones. In rehearsing a dance/theater piece, however, headsets are not practical. This meant that in order for me to hear the performers clearly, we had to alter how we rehearsed. In one section of the performance, dancers were telling intimate, personal, true stories that were in contrast to/or in relation to movement happening in the space. Because I could not hear the dancers speaking amidst the cacophony of sounds from the space, the 'person speaking had to come to the computer and talk to me directly. Although this was a practical, *rehearsal* solution, it impacted the final shape of the piece. We became accustomed to having the intimate texts near to where I was stationed (via a laptop) in rehearsals, and this fed organically into the final performance, which featured intimate texts performed downstage. In essence, the spatial logic of SKYPE transferred itself to the different spatial logic of the live performance.

We used SKYPE to allow me to be present at the same time as the performers, so that I could interact with and effect the rehearsals *as they happened, in real-time.* Paul Virilio (1993) would find this telematic rehearsal process incredibly problematic and philosophically vexing. He describes the 'so-called real time' of telepresence as killing '*present* time by isolating it from its presence here and now for the sake of another commutative space that is no longer composed of our *concrete presence* in the world, but of a *discrete telepresence* whose enigma remains forever intact' (ibid: 1). In other words, there is something inherently different about presence when it is mediated across time and space via a technology like SKYPE. For Virilio that difference is about the disassociation that occurs between space and time when using tele-technologies. He suggests that when the 'present duration, an accident of a so-called real instant, is suddenly disconnected from its site of origin or inscription, from its here and now, for the sake of an electronic dazzle' via 'telecommanding', a kind of rupture occurs that in which the human environment loses control to the electronic, image environment (ibid: 3). He suggests that 'images win over the things they are said to represent' (ibid: 4). It could be that, following Virilio's logic, the image of the dancers working in the rehearsal room replaced the actual dancers for me. Perhaps the sometimes out-of-synch audio-visual array of our SKYPE rehearsals became *the thing itself*, replacing the physical rehearsal process taking place in a studio somewhere in New York.

Indeed, for months we worked remotely with a rehearsal space that seemed to be both in NY, in the UK and in the 'SKYPE space' between us online.

Working within the limits of the screen forced Tiffany and I to be very verbal

and descriptive as we developed the piece. True to Virilio's prediction, the

image on screen and the quality of the audio coming through SKYPE began

to overtake the dance happening in the room. Tiffany and I could not count on

body language or nuance; we had to work at the literal and extreme end of the

scale in terms of communication. SKYPE does not, yet, offer the ability to

detect the subtleties of communication that being physically next to someone

does. Perhaps using a more advanced (and expensive) technology might

have provided us with more sensory data, but without an outsized budget, we

worked with commercially available technologies. It is possible, however, that

with increased sensory data the validity of the *image* over the *embodied*

action might have only increased.[4]

Eventually, in the December before the piece premiered, I was able to be in

New York City to attend rehearsals. Being physically present in the rehearsal

room with the dancers was revelatory and surprising. I discovered that there

were many more layers of nuance in the work than I had anticipated through

my virtual presence working over SKYPE. I also discovered I had

misunderstood the way space worked, even miscalculating the relative sizes

of the dancers. I had assumed one of the male dancers was taller than one of

the female dancers because the SKYPE camera had always been positioned

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[4] It may be worth noting that I follow Farman (2011: 19) and others who say that 'embodiment is always a spatial practice'. It is impossible to think of embodiment without reference to space just as it is impossible to think of space without embodiment. The crucial distinction might be that how we define *space* and what we mean by *embodiment* might be being altered by the digital universe in which we live.

low to the ground, looking up. By being present in the room, and being able to change my position, I found that in fact their heights were reversed.

Interestingly, I have still not seen *Tomorrow's Legs* live. I have seen it on video and feel as if I know it intimately because of the year or more that I spent working on it, but my experience of it is very much tied to the language of the screen. I know that my remote experience is not the same as being in the theatre to watch it. At the same time, I know that this collaboration would not have been possible without SKYPE, and that the way SKYPE forced us to work - at the extremes - made the resulting piece richer and more surprising to us than it might have been if we worked in another way. *Tomorrow's Legs* is really unlike the work that either of us normally create and is not simply a combination of our two aesthetics. The piece was altered by SKYPE - for better or worse. Thinking back to that Bell Companies commercial, although this process did not allow us to *reach out and touch* each other, it did feel like we had a more intimate sense of collaboration than had we used only email, or phones, or postal mail to collaborate. Sherry Turkle (2011: 88) describes how children sense that robotic toys are 'alive enough'; they create a simulation of 'aliveness' which allows for intimate bonds to be created while still signaling their mechanical nature when they break down, for instance. In many ways, the experience of working on *Tomorrow's Legs* via SKYPE could be thought of as being 'intimate enough' or 'present enough': we had a sense of closeness built on being able to see and hear each other over SKYPE, but we were aware that it was not quite the same as being physically together in

the same space at the same time. If the choice was to collaborate over

SKYPE or not collaborate at all, SKYPE would certainly win out for me.

This discussion inevitably brings up notions of embodiment (of inhabiting

space). Typically, when we think of embodiment in relation to art we think of

practices that require a physical presence in order to pass on knowledge. For

example, many kinds of choreographic practices are considered embodied

because you do not learn how to do a dance from reading: you learn from

doing. I would argue that everything any theatre maker does is really in the

realm of the embodied as we are nearly always working in a physical space or

preparing for work which will be embodied physically eventually. In the case of

Tomorrow's Legs I was not (for the most part) in the physical space with the

performers, although my image was physically present via the SKYPE

monitor. To understand how embodiment might work in this case then, it could

be useful to draw on Jason Farman (2011) who discusses the ways that

embodiment has changed or is changing as a result of our relationship with

technology. In his 2011 book *Mobile Interface Theory* Farman argues, contrary

to Virilio that:

> ...once enacted, embodiment does not always need to be located in
> physical space. As people connect across networks on a global level,
> what many are experiencing as they practice the space of the network
> is embodiment.
> (Farman, 2011: 21)

He draws this conclusion partly from ethnographic research done with phone

sex workers by Allucquere Roseanne Stone. She discovered that in the case

of phone sex workers who are asked to imagine and to describe physical

behaviors for their clients, what they were doing was not simply sending

descriptions over the phone line. They were sending 'bodies' (ibid). Farman builds on these ideas to discuss the way that we are gradually becoming more and more attuned to digital media and that, for many of us, our bodies are created across digital media (ibid). Farman goes on to suggest that in fact a distinction between 'real' and 'virtual' is in fact totally misleading in our current conceptions of space (ibid: 22). Very often, the virtual (as in that which is conjured up through technology) is more 'real' than something we might experience physically because our identities are more and more being configured by and for digital media, including SKYPE. So perhaps, in the case of *Tomorrow's Legs*, the technology was a surrogate for the kind of intimacy we might experience if we were in the same physical room together. Or, maybe SKYPE allowed me to *send my body* to the performers in New York even as I *received* their bodies here in the UK. In this way, maybe we were rehearsing in a space that was embodied between here and there in the space of SKYPE, and perhaps we were, indeed, traveling along the 'human network' to make our connections.

The second project I want to talk about is called *Fortnight. Fortnight* is a two-week long project where up to two hundred participants sign up to receive daily communications via email, SMS, postal mail and twitter, and which invites its participants to try to develop strategies for being creative in the city where they live. This is an extremely complicated project that in itself could fill an entire book, so for this discussion, I am going to focus on a few points that relate directly to the ideas I am exploring here. When describing *Fortnight,* I often say that it creates a dramaturgy of experience for its participants through

the use of a whole host of technologies. What I mean by this is that the project orchestrates movements, communications and interactions with the two hundred participants over the two week time, and these order the experience of the participants to encourage them to be more creative and playful in their daily lives. With *Fortnight* my company, Proto-type, wanted to deliver on technology's promise of bringing us closer together as articulated by the Bell Companies. Implicit in creating a project that deliver's on this promise is the lingering suspicion that to date that technology has not really lived up to its great promise. My suspicions stem partly from observing people in the city and noticing the way people seem to disengage from their surroundings by entering into what has been called a 'secure media cocoon' (De Cauter, 2004). The secure media cocoon phenomena seeks to describe the way that our mobile devices mediate everything about our experience of being in the city: we check in to Facebook Places or FourSquare, we tweet a photo of something we have just seen, we text as we walk, we check email at the coffee shop. This behavior might actually be causing us to have a total lack of engagement/involvement with our surroundings, despite the apparent relation it creates to real space. In fact, it might be that the always on, mobile Internet simply plots our movements in an abstraction of 'real space'. In creating *Fortnight,* I was wondering whether it was possible to make an art project that would turn this media cocoon into a tool for encouraging engagement instead of isolating us.

Fortnight starts on midnight of the first day of a two-week period with every one of the two-hundred participants receiving a hand written letter through

their postbox. The letter is a poetic musing on the notion of time (particularly the idea that midnight is a time between two days) and a call for the recipient to spend the next two weeks alert to all the tiny, magical things in their daily lives. They are given the login details to a shared Twitter account in the letter which allows participants to tweet 'as *Fortnight*'. What this means is that those who are not on Twitter have a way of engaging with other participants via tweeting; it also means that for us as the project organizers, we are able to take a temperature of the experiences that people are having as the project unfolds. We found that the anonymous nature of the shared Twitter account meant that people were really honest and playful, perhaps more so then had they only been using their personal Twitter accounts.

Also in the letter is a small envelope that has a colored, hand-sewn, felted badge which the recipient is asked to wear visibly for the duration of the project. This badge has an RFID chip inside of it, which stands for radio frequency identification. This is the same technology in key fobs that are used to open doors or in touchless payment systems on credit cards. Each day of the project, participants are invited to a location somewhere in the city where they are told to look for an object. They are told to tap their badge on the object to activate it.

For example, on the first day, participants are invited to go to the lobby of a local hotel and to look for a red phone. When they find the phone, they will see a felted square on it for them to tap their badge. When they do, the phone will start ringing. They then pick up the phone and it will ask them a question,

which is unique to them. The question will be something like, 'where's the best place in Kent to see two old people kissing', or 'where's the best place in Kent to cry your eyes out?' They can then leave an answer, which the phone records, and go on their way. This little interaction than triggers a series of other messages to be sent to the participant later in the day via SMS. All of these recorded messages are used in the second week of the project to create a 'fictional' map of the city they are in, which highlights the behaviors people attribute to specific places in their city. At an end event they also get a chance to listen to all of the recordings made. In addition to these little interventions within public spaces in the city, participants also receive messages from *Fortnight* via SMS and email that develop on a set of themes around being present despite the lure of technology to lull us into our screens. All of the messages can be replied to and every message sent is acknowledged by *Fortnight*.

In *Fortnight*, we were using technology, but we never highlighted it. Most people had no idea what was in the felted badge. They came to see it more as a marker that they were part of a secret society of people who were all participating in this strange project. We instead led people to interact with objects that were already in their world, or that had some nostalgic value (like the red phone in the hotel lobby). Chance encounters became a key factor in the way it worked as well: because everyone was invited to the same locations each day, they would bump into each other, or they would just happen to see someone with a badge on their daily commute. This 'orchestrated serendipity' became a key part of the experience.

So what does this have to do with intimacy? The author Clay Shirky has said:

> intimacy doesn't scale. You can have an intimate dinner party for six
> but not for sixty. More is different, and in social settings that difference
> expresses itself in the logic of clusters.
> (Shirky, 2010: 311)

Shirky goes on to explain that in relation to intimacy 'as the system grows,

that possibility disappears' because larger groups either become 'an

audience' or they break down into clusters of people (ibid: 312). His logic

breaks down quickly though when he asserts that 'in an audience, everyone

sees the same thing' (ibid). The problem with this logic, of course, is that it

assumes that seeing (and possibly by extension, experience) is a monolithic

activity that happens the same for everyone. This assumption is

fundamentally not true; we all 'see' differently and there is no such thing as an

audience (in the unified sense), rather there are audience members

(individual people with individual experiences). Although I think he is correct in

his assumption that with scale intimacy changes, he may be making

assumptions that do not hold true in reality. For example, in *Fortnight* the text

messages that people received were all personalized to some degree, so that

whenever any of the two-hundred people received a message it felt like it was

just for them. And if they replied, every message was responded to by

Fortnight (me) with a unique response. This encounter seems to fit the

definition of 'intimate' in the OED quite closely (OED, 2012). In addition, I was

writing twenty-four hours a day for the duration of the project, which enabled a

pattern of behavior to emerge whereby people started telling *Fortnight* (me) all

manner of incredibly personal details. I, as *Fortnight*, developed intimate

relationships with all two-hundred participants and they had the same level of intimacy with me. For example, *Fortnight* was one of the first people that one of the participants told she had cancer. Through advice sought from and given by *Fortnight*, one participant reconnected with a daughter she had lost touch with. Several participants decided to quit their jobs after consulting with *Fortnight*. In addition, the tenor of the writing of *Fortnight* was often reflective and always personal, the delivery mechanisms of the content meant that participants received each message wherever they were, whenever they were in 'real time', and all of the objects had a homemade aesthetic that conferred upon them a sense of history and relation to a person or people. Virilio would certainly take issue with 'real time' having anything to do with intimacy because thinking about the project this way supposes there is some *other* time which is not real. Of course in the theater, we are constantly concerned with the false, the unreal and the fantastical, so perhaps this opposition works for me only because of the context in which I place my work. In addition, for many participants, it was not a simple creative, game-like project. Communication from participants tells me that the project was real: it impacted on how they lived their lives for two weeks and it encouraged a sense of introspection and reflection that, in many cases, lasted beyond the project's life.

Shirky's claim that intimacy does not scale is complicated by *Fortnight*'s structure because participants were engaged in a one-to-one interaction with an anonymous user (in real-time). For *Fortnight* (me) however, the interactions were structured as one-to-two-hundred, albeit often one-to-one of

two-hundred. It seems that in *Fortnight* technology's promise of scalable

intimacy at least partially came true. As one participant said:

> This is my feeling so far: I have never been involved in a
> correspondence that is simultaneously so anonymous and personal. It
> is sweet.
> -*Fortnight* Participant

Ironically, through anonymity, intimacy became possible. Or, perhaps, the

encounters were 'intimate-enough', to borrow from Turkle's notion of the 'alive

enough'.

This rub of the anonymous and the personal is at the heart of many of our

digital interactions and it makes bare the problem that this paper is dancing

around. How does our sense of the personal alter when so much of what

might have been considered private twenty years ago is now readily (and

permanently) available online twenty-four hours a day? Are my tweets

complaining about the inconsiderate passengers on my commute each day

personal since they come from me and are related to my experience in the

world? Or are they inherently not personal since they are broadcast publicly to

anyone who follows me? Perhaps the personal, the intimate can also be

public?

During *Fortnight*, participants were also invited to a series of in-person

gatherings. But again these were somewhat anonymous in the sense that

Fortnight was never revealed to be me or my collaborators; *Fortnight* was not

clearly present at any of the events, although those of us powering it were

often hiding in the shadows. These gatherings were structured to allow people

to meet each other in a shared physical space (if they wanted to - attendance was always optional) and to feel that the tools for the gathering was provided but how it took shape was up to those who came. For example, on the first Sunday of the project participants were invited to a park location just before sunset for a gathering that they were told would end when the sun went down and the music stopped playing. Upon arriving, they will have found that there was a Cellist playing music and a table setup with drinks inviting people to make a toast. This was the first time during the project when everyone was invited to be in the same shared space and it served as an opportunity for people to discuss their experiences and get to know one another. Although they were mostly strangers, being part of this project and wearing one of the felted badges made them less strange to each other. *Fortnight* provided a context, a structure for interactions to happen in real time and real space. Participants tweeted photos of each other, exchanged contact details, or just lurked on the edges observing as people moved into and out of exchanges with each other.

So, where does this leave us? What do these projects suggest about the way we think about technology and how it relates to notions of embodiment, reaching out and touching each other, human networks and intimacy? Are these projects merely examples of making do with tools available or do they make something more out of the kinds of connections that are possible in a highly connected age? Sherry Turkle (2011: 68) is fearful of 'technology [that] engineers intimacy' because she believes this reduces a relationship to 'mere connection', losing the chaotic and unpredictable humaneness of human

relationships. I think she is right to sound a note of caution and to be somewhat fearful. There is no doubt that the proliferation of technology around us is altering the way we behave and how we conceive of time, space and interpersonal relationships. Our expectations in relation to immediate feedback have shifted, for instance in an era where every click is counted and every profile or page view is monitored. I think, though, that it is up to us to make sure that we retain our agency (to borrow Jeremijenko's earlier assertion) so that we do not find ourselves 'connected but alone' as Turkle says (ibid). Looked at through an even darker lens, the future is bleak:

> The destruction of the Berlin Wall? That has been accomplished. The future of a united Germany? The answer is clear. The abolition of borders dividing nations in Western Europe is announced for 1993. What remains to be abolished, and urgently, can only be space and time. As we have just seen, the task is being accomplished. At the end of our century not much will remain of this planet that is not only polluted and impoverished, but also shrunken and reduced to nothing by the teletechnologies of generalized interactivity.
> (Virilio, 1993: 5)

Although Virilio was writing at the very birth of the Internet as we know it, there is a clear warning in his fear of a reduction of value in a world that favors 'generalized interactivity'. It seems to me that we have moved on, for better or worse, into an age where interactivity is deeply ingrained in our daily lives and that we have the power to make these interactions, these technologies, meaningful. We ignore technological advances at our own risk, I think, but we do not have to succumb to them blindly. We can set the rules. We can make them live up to their promises. That is our job as artists, thinkers and humans. The utopian future promised in the CISCO and Bell Companies advertisements is only ever as real as we make it.

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