IMMATERIAL

LABOUR

UNION

Editors' Note

Lídia Pereira and Δεριζαματζορ Προμπλεμ ιναυστραλια

We bid you all welcome to the fourth issue of the Immaterial Labour Union Zine!

We dedicate this issue to the question of the user profile, the digital ID which supposedly allows you to represent your networked self. Of course, this raises more questions than it answers. What is representation? What are the political consequences of the constructed, heavily curated online persona? Which protocols define the process of identity formation? How are they economically engaged? Do template restrictions outweigh the possibilities for self expression? Who is the default template?

Contributions range from reflecting about anonymity, feedback, self-performance and the economical instrumentalisation of identity, to the presentation of cynical platforms of interpersonal unification and anatomies of the categorised online self.
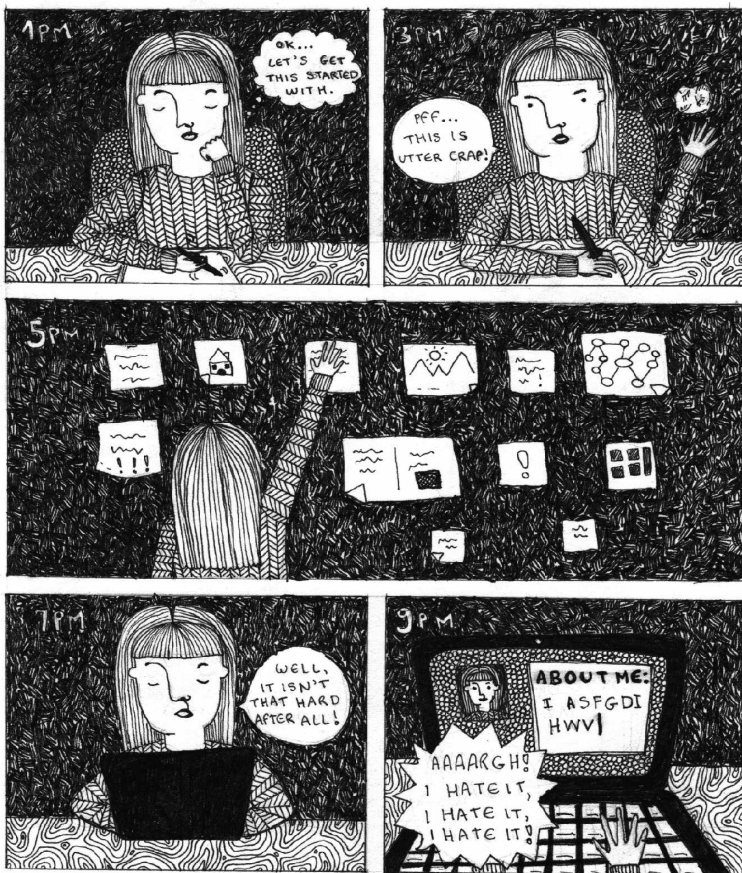
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Identity Crisis

Lídia Pereira and Mathijs van Oosterhoudt

Facebook's Registration Process

Δεριζαματζορ Προμπλεμ ιναυστραλια

1. first we identify you and verify your existence
2. please also provide us your birthday for a customized experience according to your age
3. then decide if you are a man or a woman and decide this now
4. and what else... you can't become without agreeing with our terms
5. this bondage starts hardcore (gmail notification sound!)
6. we have established a cross platform collaboration for your convenience
7. connectivity rules! you are not alone
8. while we categorise your geolocation we also want to start building your cultural profile
9. please begin with the educational and academic aspects of you
10. connectivity didn't go away, do not worry
11. find your friends, they might feel lonely without you here
12. is connectivity obvious?
13. if not obvious enough we are offering you a chance to see it by connecting to the world through your face
14. the history of cameras has always been a strong fight against surveillance and face recognition for state purposes
15. we build your profile through tagging and assigning yourself to particular categories
16. we all deserve one more coherent layer in our face recognition and connectivity within the network
17. and here we are you just have to classify yourself under these interest categories while our algorithm will provide you with what you like what you want to see and what you are
18. in case of unstable identities this is the place to understand who you really are, don't rely on yourself, it's meaningless
19. what makes you what you are is your endless fight with our apparatus

Anonymity and the Self

Geert Lovink

The hedonistic dotcom excesses at the turn of the millennium were over by the 2001 financial crisis and 9/11 attacks. The War on Terror aborted the desire for a serious parallel 'second self' culture and instead gave rise to a global surveillance and control industry. To this assault on freedom, Web 2.0 tactically responded with coherent, singular identities in sync with the data owned by police, security and financial institutions.

Within Facebook there are no hippie dropouts just a pathological dimension of commitment to the Real Self going hand in hand with the comfort of being only amongst friends in a safe, controlled environment. No punks or criminalized migrant street culture either. Differences of choice are celebrated so long as they're confined to one identity. Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg puts it like this: "having two identities for yourself is an example of a lack of integrity." Says venture capitalist Peter Thiel, "Facebook rival MySpace is about being someone fake on the Internet; everyone could be a movie star." Thiel considers it "very healthy that the real people have won out over the fake people." As a result there is little freedom anymore to present yourself in multiple ways online. Social networking sites, anticipating this movement towards security (one identity) coupled with by our personal desire for comfort, offer their users a limited, user-friendly range of choice for submitting private and professional data to the world.

The public pressure to refrain from anonymity cannot be countered without a better understanding of the 'self management' manifesting in online portfolios, dating sites and Facebook.iv In the Web 2.0 age the drive to self-realisation is deeply embedded in society. According to Israeli sociologist Eva Illouz, the modern self is an autonomous entity incapable of valorising itself, enmeshed as it is in social and political structures. Social media should be seen as only the latest incarnation of these institutions. In her 2007 book Cold Intimacies Illouz illustrates how capitalism has been turned into an "emotional culture", contrary to the commonly held view that commodification, wage labour and profit-driven activities create 'cold' and

calculated relationships. She describes the rise of "emotional capitalism" within a public sphere saturated with the exposure of private life (and vice versa, the 'hot distance'). Through the service industry, affect becomes an essential aspect of economic behaviour—and a fashionable object of contemporary theory. According to Illouz "it is virtually im- possible to distinguish the rationalization and commodification of selfhood from the capacity of the self to shape and help itself and to engage in deliberation and communication with others." There is a narrative in the making, says Illouz, which aspires to self-realization, and that plays itself out within institutional and semi-public settings such as the self-help sector and online platforms. "The prevalence and persistence of this narrative, which we may call as shorthand a narrative of recognition, is related to the interests of social groups operating within the market, in civil society, and within the institutional boundaries of the state."

Illouz emphasizes that it becomes harder to distinguish between our professional and private self. In the competitive networking context of work, we are trained to present ourselves as the best, fastest and smartest. At the same time we are aware that this is only an artificial, made-up image of ourselves and that our 'real' self is different which is what celebrities have been grappling with for decades.
In a Skype interview I did with Illouz, she stressed the long-term decoupling of private life from the private sphere. She said: "We should not blame technology for the loss of private life. The pornofication of culture and the political- economic push for increased transparency of private life have been on the rise for decades, and the internet has only institutionalized these trends."

There might be three ways to counter the self-promotion machine. One way is to disrupt its self-evidence. Talking about the dark side of positive thinking is a first step to recover from the mass delusion of smile or die, and more effective than simply joking about the absence of a 'dislike' button in Facebook or about the one-dimensional representation of relationships where 'friending' is the only option.

Another way out is to dismantle the consumer desire that drives the self-promotion machine to begin with. In this argument the marketing of the self is not so much a narcissistic venture aiming to satisfy one's inner needs but is primarily powered by the fast

consumption of objects external to us, the unstoppable drive to collect more and more stuff—from friends and lovers to brand products, services and other quasi-exclusive short lived experiences. It has become irresistible to not sign up, in part because of the ruthless way the Facebook algorithm contacts potential new users for instance via inported email address books, inviting them to become your friend. This is the naïve model of eternal growth promoted by Facebook's or Twitter that never stop measuring you by your amount of tweets. To live a tweetless life is constructed as not living.

The third way to dismantle the performance of the self and self-disclosure is to revisit anonymity in today's context. The question is how to re-imagine anonymity not as an attainable categorical state, but as a way to recoup an energy of metamorphosis, the desire to become someone else.

In 1929 Virginia Woolf wrote in A Room of One's Own: "I would venture to guess that Anon, who wrote so many poems without signing them, was often a woman." In the context of social media the question is how to integrate offline acts into the equation without turning the real world into the next snobbish wave. Can the existing platforms only be used in the shadow of events to come? Networks prepare the groundwork through their 'weak links'; it's what they are good at. Their role in real-time communication, once events unfold, remains overrated. If everything worked out networks would have already kicked-off the erosion of existing power structures. What will happen once we overcome the fear of surveillance and control? Will anonymous action, like voting in public elections, no longer be necessary because that information will be publically available by other means? Or should we remain cautious and see the carnaval balle masque as the temporary state of exception?

(Taken from "Anonymity and the Self")

Cassandra

Lucia Dossin

Cassandra is a voice-operated chatbot, aimed at making psychological profiles during the conversations. These profiles are shown as pie charts where personality aspects are represented by a color. The graphics are accompanied by a short analysis and a list of companies possibly interested in the profile. In this sense, the bot provides data that can act as a mediator in services like job-seeking and dating. The profile then becomes a digital representation of the user and if loaded onto a card it can be used as a kind of digital key to personalize every gadget in the near future of the Internet of Things. By knowing you, Cassandra can decide what kind of music you prefer, what books you should read, what fashion brand you should wear and who will be your romantic partner so that you are free from the hassle of having to choose and can focus on what matters most: enjoying your life.

The market for code and emotions

There is a reasonably high number of similar products and services on the market as of now. They offer commercial or personal advice, simulate relationships, and in different ways intertwine code and

emotions. I hereby assume a cynical position and portray the user as a pie chart – colorful and unique, but still a pie chart. By doing that, I believe to be exercising 'playful critique' to practices like this.

Self-Performance

Steve Rushton

We ourselves are involved in an information economy every time we log on to Facebook or send an email, wherever the circulation of information heightens our visibility.

In an era when direct government intervention is despised (I don't need handouts from Big Government!), new technologies of self-control have grown to replace it, as a greater part of our lives is taken up with the 'work of watching' and the 'work of being watched'.

The reality TV show, for instance, is predicated on the idea of feedback. Indeed, one might understand the new media mix as a circuit of production that collapses the differences between producer and consumer. This has very interesting consequences economically because, although we work to make this media happen, we are paid little or no money for the work we do – in fact, in most cases we pay out of our own pocket. The profit from our work actually goes to the (TV) production companies, the phone companies and big media conglomerates, along with the media retail outlets that sell us upgraded equipment. As a consequence of all this, we can no longer say we live in the 'society of the spectacle'. We are everything but passive consumers of products; we live in a society of self-performance in which we constantly present ourselves and excite the interest of others in what we do, and this self-performance is a commodity that has a price. I don't think I am straying into the realms of science fiction if I suggest that contemporary media have created a form of immediacy in which human subjectivity is the principal object of production and consumption, and media serve to facilitate that production and consumption. Laurie Ouellette and James Hay, in Better Living Through Reality TV (2008), link Michel Foucault's idea of 'governmentality' with current neo-liberal strategies of 'privatisation', 'volunteerism', 'entrepreneurism', 'responsabilisation', which extend media production into the realm of political reasoning. By 'governmentality' I mean that we are governed by the material practices of discourse, which are distinct from government per se. It is the regime of constant

testing, perpetual visibility and self-reliance that governs and produces us as subjects.

The imperative to perform has been a subject of discussion form some time, of course, and has been variously described by the 'experience economy' (Jim Gilmore and Joe Pine), 'immaterial labour' (Maurizio Lazzarato), 'the control society' (Gilles Deleuze), 'the mode of information' (Mark Poster), 'the weightless society' (Charles Leadbeater), 'the networked society' (Manuel Castells), and as the engine behind the 'new spirit of capitalism' (Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello). All attempt to explain the shift from the manufacturing society, which is based on physical labor and material products, to a networked society, which is based on the exchange of information.

Through the necessary exchange of data about ourselves we are being herded into what Mark Andrejevic calls a 'digital enclosure' in which our identities (or profiles) can be constructed and in which we can be identified as very particular consumers. Ultimately, our own perfomance becomes a commodity for exchange. So the digital age essentially represents a new discipline of management relations and – perhaps, it would be fair to say – a new discipline of self-management. It also represents a new era of political management.

Anatomy of the Self

Δεριζαματζορ Προμπλεμ ιναυστραλια

data use policy

terms of service

contacts

cookie policy

e-mails

protocols

(tagged) content

real names

names

cross-platform coherence

status

alternative names

timeline

password

birthday

facebook person

gender

profile picture

family and relationships

movies

female

likes

books

male

chosen and its archive of changes

education

geolocation

music

sports

etc

employer

high school

places I've been

current city

university

hometown

- attributes
- lists
- identification/verification
- connectivity
- generation/production

App Fiction

Mihail Bakalov

DOUBLED ON-LINE

85%

55%

52%

48%

48%

With 'Online Doubled' users can experience social networks in a different way!

IF :
-> You are a user who reposts stuff that you like,
-> You are keen on posting a link and adding a smiley or not adding anything,
-> You are a person who is profiting from the information overload

and you find from the abundance of opinions online one that suits you best, instead of wasting ime to write your own,
-> You don't engage in long debates and you follow the fast pace of the Internet, trying to catch the most of it,

Then this tool is for you!

'Online Doubled' is a new search engine to help users find others with similar likes and fascinations.

First you must log in to your Facebook profile through our application. Then your profile will be analyzed and all the links you have posted will be gathered. Afterwards this information will be compared to other people's shared content. The app searches for other users who have posted the same links and shared the same opinions as you. As a result you will be presented with a ranked list showing you similar users, ordered by degree of resemblance to your content. The more descriptive you are, the more people you will find. You will then be able to connect with them!

Out now w(orld)s(ocial)w(eb).onlinedoubled.you

User Profile

Δεριζαματζορ Προμπλεμ ιναυστραλια

A User Profile is supposed to digitally represent one's identity
, but it is forming and constructing the individual, particularly
in the online world. Moreover it provides a template for exercise
of control between corporation and their users and among users
themselves. Outside the corporate definition framework one can see
that user profiles are attached to the concepts of customisation,
authentication, identification and engage the individual in an
endless process of rules accepting.

A User Profile is a linguistic construction that mediates a social
construction, one's identities, but also the choices of the
individual although they are template choices, which shows that
our user profiles enforce a controlled curation of identity.

User profiles are supposed to represent oneself in the digital and
networked context. But they construct the person and not just
represent it. They produce a self that can be organised and
remotely accessed. They algorithmically render subjects as objects
by reconstructing them field by field through data entering and
manipulation of the collections created.

User profiles mediate the human becoming in expanded information
societies. Restricted from protocols, archived, strategically
connected, unified even through multiplicity. Creating a coherent
identity through fragments.

Customisation, authentication, identification engage individuals
with restrictions limitations and obligations to an unlimited
template culture.

Geert Lovink wrote that luckily there is no true self. Databases
and profiles create a self where a self doesn't exist. A self
constructed out of information.