THE BIOPOLITICS OF “INTERNET ADDICTION DISORDER”

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE DIVISION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI’I AT MĀNOA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN POLITICAL SCIENCE

DECEMBER 2014

By
Brian C. Gordon

Thesis Committee:
Jairus Grove, Chairperson
Michael Shapiro
Sankaran Krishna

Keywords: Internet, Addiction, Biopolitics, Digital Politics, Pathology, Vital Materialism
Table of Contents

Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 3
What is Internet Addiction Disorder? ............................................................................. 8
   Medical Discourse or Internet vs. "Human"................................................................. 8
   Contemporary Media Depiction ....................................................................................... 13
Clinical Pathology and its Metaphysical Discontents .................................................. 16
Prognosis without Diagnosis ......................................................................................... 23
   "Treatment" Programs .................................................................................................. 24
Theoretical Approach for a Critique of IAD Pathology .............................................. 33
   Historicizing Clinical Pathology .................................................................................. 33
   From Essentialism to Vital Materialism ....................................................................... 36
Tyranny of the useful: Critical Scholarship and Gamification ................................. 38
   Illusions of Control ..................................................................................................... 39
   Gamification ................................................................................................................ 45
CONCLUSION .................................................................................................................... 47
Biopower operates when a hegemonic bloc organizes the reproduction of life in ways that allow political crises to be cast as conditions of specific bodies and their competence at maintaining health or other conditions of social belonging; thus this bloc gets to judge the problematic body’s subjects, whose agency is deemed to be fundamentally destructive. Apartheid-like structures from zoning to shaming are wielded against these populations, who come to represent embodied liabilities to social prosperity of one sort or another. Health itself can then be seen as a side effect of successful normativity, and people’s desires and fantasies are solicited to line up with that pleasant condition. But, again, to call embodiment biopolitical is only to begin a discussion, not to end it.

- Lauren Berlant (Cruel Optimism p. 106)

Power is tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms.

- Michel Foucault (History of Sexuality v.1 p. 86)

Materiality is a rubric that tends to horizontalize the relations between humans, biota, and abiotica. It draws human attention sideways, away from the ontologically ranked Great Chain of Being and toward a greater appreciation of the complex entanglements of humans and nonhumans. Here, the implicit moral imperative of Western thought—“Thou shall identify and defend what is special about Man”—loses its salience.

- Jane Bennett (Vibrant Matter p. 112)
Introduction

The graphic above from Serenity Now, a for-profit addiction center in Florida, suggests that of the 1.8 billion Internet users in 2010, 225 million exhibit “problematic” use that merits addiction therapy. Governmental figures paint a less sensational, but much more sobering picture. Since 2008, over twenty million Chinese citizens have been clinically diagnosed with Internet Addiction Disorder (IAD) and treated at military-style rehabilitation boot camps, of which there are more than three hundred throughout the country. In South Korea, the world’s preeminent online video games exporter, official government figures indicate that thirty percent of Koreans under 18, or 2.4 million people, are at risk of developing IAD through improper use of the Internet.
The clinical, juridical, and cultural definitions of “proper” Internet usage constitute an aporia of the Digital Age. There is a troubling disjuncture between the prevalent conceptions of proper Internet usage and the trajectory of capitalistic technological development and its cultural symbiosis—the “digital natives” it individuates, and the vanishing boundary between the digital and the physical. The ever-expanding corpus of speculative literature that falls under the rubric of [technology] + [sexuality/politics/aspirations of millennials] is shadowed by the concomitant pathologization of certain kinds of Internet usage and an explosion of medical taxonomy; Internet Addiction Disorder (IAD), Maladaptive Internet Use, Excessive Internet Use, Netomania, Pathological Internet Use (PIU), Impulsive-Compulsive Internet Usage Disorder (ICIUD). The goal of this paper is to investigate the doxogenic regime of “IAD” through a discursive analysis of medical, governmental and popular literature on the subject, in a bid to identify the political motivations and ramifications of this event on citizens and governments. Following Ian Hacking, some disorders are “iatrogenic”—caused by doctors—or “doxogenic”—caused by a belief system cultivated by therapists and the media.\(^1\) It seems that IAD would fall into the latter category, as despite almost two decades of research and a growing volume of attempted pathologies, there is no empirically verifiable definition for IAD. Nonetheless, millions of people are being clinically diagnosed as addicts and subjected to a multiplicity of treatments that range from digital abstinence to shock therapy and beatings.

Consider the juxtaposition of two archetypal Internet users, the Food Blogger and the Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Gamer. The blogger is an “elite Yelper” who cannot eat a meal before posting it to Instagram and checking in to the restaurant on Facebook; they create elaborate Pinterest boards about wine and cheese pairings, and bloviate about farm-to-table brunches on their blog. Every gustatory moment is exhaustively chronicled on the maximum number of online channels. The online gamer, by contrast, wages epic battles between warrior clans, and socializes online as a unique digital avatar, often for long periods of time, and

\(^1\) Hacking, Mad Travelers, 11
\(^2\) In this case ‘queer’ refers to unproductivity or uselessness to the hegemonic order; it does not
often in lieu of conventional social activities. These two individuals are equally dependent on the Internet for their sociality, yet while the blogger’s activities are regarded as a productive and proper use of the Internet, the gamer is derided, marginalized, increasingly pathologized, and in some cases, incarcerated. The differences between the two Internet users are materially arbitrary, but semiotically significant. The food blogger is a productive node in the political economy of signs; a catalyst for consumption that impels people to yearn for things they never knew they needed. Conversely, the online gamer is a queer disruptor to the hegemony of conspicuous consumption and many of the components of bourgeois heteronormativity that undergird capitalism and propagate the tyranny of success. The following testimony of Stacey, a woman who sought treatment at reSTART clinic, provides an example of the tension between her subjectivity as capitalist consumer and subjectivity as online gamer:

When I’d go out shopping with the girls at the mall, all I could think about was going back and playing on the computer again. So, even if I was physically present, my brain was still on the computer.

Is the loss of the mall’s appeal really something to be mourned? It is telling that Stacey relates her “loss of self” in terms of consumption habits, and furthermore, that the media portrayal of this shift valorizes neoliberal modes of subject formation, such as work, shopping, and looking physically appealing. However what amounts to propaganda and the vilification of unproductive Internet usage cannot be traced to a conscious, coordinated undertaking. Asking why certain kinds of Internet users are being pathologized implies that this project will reveal who is making this so, which imputes a Kantian rationality onto a process that is anything but rational. Thus I seek to understand the conditions of possibility that enable or even encourage public health apparatuses to mobilize against a disease that is not scientifically legible. The following sections trace the particular distribution of the sensible and legible that governs what can and cannot be

---

2 In this case ‘queer’ refers to unproductivity or uselessness to the hegemonic order; it does not connote sexual preference. Gamers can simultaneously be queer disruptors to biopolitics while espousing misogynistic or sexist politics, as evidenced by the August 2014 controversy #Gamergate, where a pervasive culture of misogyny in video game journalism was brought to

said, known, and pathologized with regard to Internet usage. In other words, the aim is to demonstrate the emergence of an Internet usage dispositif.

Central to the Internet usage dispositif is the normative conceptualization of the Internet as a “thing” that we consume, or as a platform that merely enables consumption of information, goods, and services. Kantian rationality undergirds the tendency of the global community of clinical pathologists to equate Internet usage with alcohol, which intones that it is fine in moderation but harmful if imbibed heavily or frequently. This awkward analogy forces pathologists to articulate a model of healthy Internet use akin to “one glass of red wine with dinner”, that can be a static referent used to establish deviation and “unhealthy” usage. Of course, we are at a moment in history when new devices and applications change the way we interface with the digital world every day, and connectivity is an inescapable fixture of everyday life. Yet pathologists of IAD are determined that the analogy holds, and we are no different from the martini-guzzling characters on Mad Men, only ubiquitous bar carts are swapped for smartphones. It seems that many in this medical community believe that we have naturalized a self-destructive behavior akin to pervasive alcoholism, primarily because Science hasn’t yet established the digital equivalent of cirrhosis of the liver. This conviction explains, in part, why pathologists stubbornly persist in their attempts to lock down a static definition of IAD. But the irreconcilability of this analogy haunts their research, because while alcohol can be reasonably moderated (outside of a Mad Men episode anyways), the Internet pushes its way into every corner of life; poignantly, their attempts to pathologize the Internet would be patently impossible without the resources availed by the Internet. The Internet is dynamic, evolving, speeding up, mutating, and becoming evermore autonomous—and taking us with it, for better or for worse. By contrast, alcohol and the human tolerance for it remains more or less constant. I have parsed this analogy to illustrate that what may seem like an innocuously clunky apple- to-oranges comparison is in fact an elemental component of the dispositif of Internet usage. The alcohol analogy appears in thousands of news articles, pathology reports, and legislative agendas, constituting an aporia in the discourse on digitality, which of course catalyzes anxiety among
population being subjected to a discourse that seems compelling and related to their lived experience but viscerally and pragmatically, doesn’t make sense.

The miscategorization of Internet usage as a consumable inebriate is discursively powerful because it generates uncertainty; it is unclear who is sick, how illness strikes, and how one can resist it. The dimensions and dangers of this effect are discussed in section II, which reviews instances of pathologization and treatment around the world. Section III suggests a reorientation of the human/Internet relation via Jane Bennett’s ontology of Vital Materialism. Section IV draws on Lauren Berlant’s concept of “slow death” to problematize the scholarship of Sherry Turkle and Jonathan Crary, two influential scholars in the digital humanities whose works, I argue, have the discursive effect of making the violent and aporetic aspects of IAD seem intractable, which depoliticizes instances of moralizing governmental intervention. In a recent interview with the Guardian, Turkle opined that while “online you become the self you want to be… [but we lose the] raw, human part” of being with each other. Despite the vagueness of such a statement, readers are made to feel that their “raw” human parts are under siege; this kind of rhetoric stirs anxiety about experiencing a loss because of the Internet, which could lead people to welcome government interventions in online and offline life in order to preserve our imperiled “rawnness”. Taken together, these clinical and scholarly discourses supply mainstream and social media with a body of literature big enough to get noticed, at which point governments, businesses, and various interested parties converge to exploit (in the name of “fixing”) this new condition. This is the stage at which populations become anxious — an anxiety that I argue could be useful to neoliberal elites as a biopolitical instrument in the digital age.

---

4 The Guardian Newspaper, May 4, 2013 “Sherry Turkle: ‘We're losing the raw, human part of being with each other’ Face to face with the one-time ‘cyber-diva’ who some now call a 'technophobe’”

5 Foucault suggests that we think in terms of “two poles of development linked together by a whole cluster of intermediary relations” (Foucault 1978, 139). One pole centers on the individual as a speaking, working, procreating entity he calls the “anatomo-politics of the human body.” The second pole, “focused on the species body,” serves as the basis of the biological processes: propagation, births, and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity.” He calls this polarity “biopolitics of the population.” (Hacking, Making Up People, 113)
Thus it is imperative to engage this anxiety, to scrutinize its organization and logics, and propose an alternative metaphysical relation to the Internet that humbly contextualizes the human as one actant among many within an Internet assemblage. Instead of consuming the Internet, I propose something more like being the Internet. If this seems a like a starry-eyed paean from an Internet loving millennial, rest assured that I am disquieted by things like Google Glass, which evoke a vision of a future where we indiscriminately embrace novelty and become hyper-consumptive cyborgs. I am less interested in the dazzling potentialities of the Internet than I am in the politics of its miscategorization and medicalization in the present day. I think this kind of engagement serves in a small way to unsettle the inevitability of a future where humans are all woefully “addicted” to the technologies we create, warp-speed consumers living in (or escaping from) a hot, depleted, ruined world like Pixar’s Wall-E. Theorizing the human/Internet relation as a dynamic and vibrant process of co-constitutive evolution is crucial to this investigation, but would overwhelm the goals of the project (and probably to author as well). Thus I turn to Jane Bennett’s *Vibrant Matter* and Rosi Braidotti’s *The Posthuman* for theoretical guidance, especially to articulate how Kantian subjectivity and the capitalist consumer ethic contribute to, and rely upon, the *dispositif* of Internet usage.

**What is Internet Addiction Disorder?**

**Medical Discourse or Internet vs. “Human”**

In 1995, one year before the Sokal Affair ignited a polemical debate about Postmodern theory, a psychiatrist in New York City performed an identical hoax on his own intellectual

---

6 To clarify, what I mean by “being the Internet” is entirely distinct from the gaggle of techno-utopians and futurists who seek to upload human consciousness to the Internet to achieve digital immortality. This is in fact the apotheosis of the anthropocentric ideology that I am problematizing in the context of Internet addiction. Rather, I am acknowledging how, following Bruno Latour, “the modern self feels increasingly entangled—cosmically, biotechnologically, medically, virally, pharmacologically—with nonhuman nature” (Bennett, 115)
milieu that achieved an entirely different outcome. Intending to lampoon American psychiatry’s penchant for over-medicalization of behaviors such as the emergent Attention Deficit Disorder, Dr. Ivan Goldberg posted an article to his website outlining a brief and entirely facetious pathology of “Internet Addiction Disorder”. To Dr. Goldberg’s everlasting chagrin, his paper attracted a great deal of serious inquiries from pathologists and psychiatrists around the world, and set into motion the reification of a condition that he had constructed to sound expressly preposterous. Whereas Sokal’s rebuke of Postmodernism sparked a national debate about intellectual rigor and academic ethics, Dr. Goldberg’s ruse had the opposite effect. One can imagine the good doctor’s horror one year after his botched prank, when Dr. Kimberly S. Young presented a serious (or at least intentional) pathology of IAD at the American Psychological Association’s 104th annual meeting in Toronto. In 1998, Goldberg’s ersatz diagnostic criteria became a discursive artefact when Young published *Caught in the Net: How to Recognize Internet Addiction—and a Winning Strategy for Recovering*, where Dr. Goldberg is conspicuously absent from the acknowledgements. In the introduction, Young describes the diagnostic criteria for IAD which are based on diagnostic rubrics for alcoholism and gambling addiction. The following questionnaire indicates the presence of addiction if five or more responses are affirmative.

1. Do you feel preoccupied with the Internet?
2. Do you feel the need to use the Internet with increasing amounts of time in order to achieve satisfaction?
3. Have you repeatedly made unsuccessful efforts to control, cut back, or stop Internet use?
4. Do you feel restless, moody, depressed, or irritable when attempting to cut down or stop Internet use?
5. Do you stay online longer than originally intended?
6. Have you jeopardized or risked the loss of a significant relationship, job, educational or career opportunity because of the Internet?

Although Dr. Goldberg has removed the original posting from his website, his satirical criteria can be accessed here: [http://www.psycom.net/iadcriteria.html](http://www.psycom.net/iadcriteria.html)
7. Have you lied to family members, therapists, or others to conceal the extent of involvement with the Internet?

8. Do you use the Internet as a way of escaping from problems or of relieving a dysphoric mood?  

Now seventeen years old, this quiz still serves as the basis for tens of millions of diagnoses around the world, and is cited on Google Scholar in 2,025 publications. In a chapter titled *the terminal time warp*, Young notes the average weekly usage of Internet addicts as defined by the criteria above is 38 hours—a figure that shows the age of this text and the radical contingency of any norms for any technology use—but is meanwhile still being used as a benchmark to diagnose and treat people in the present day. Young then elaborates the downward spiral of the hopelessly addicted:

When you reach this degree of usage, you most likely have fallen into a habit that leads to the sort of real-time problems that constitute addictive behavior: the craving, the concealing, the lying. You turn to the Internet for emotional support. You use it as a substitute for what is missing in your real life. You create an on-line fantasy world that’s more fulfilling than your own. You act differently toward others when you’re around the computer. You think about the Internet when you’re not on-line, and when you want to avoid disturbing questions about yourself. And your dependence grows.  

Reading this in a world of smartphones and wifi, where thirty-eight hours online sounds more like a minimum than a maximum, one is inclined to shrug this off as a quaint artifact of the early digital age. But despite the patronizing tone, the theoretical mangling of the “real”, fantasy, and fulfillment; this text has an enduring discursive significance, most visibly in China. Importantly for this project, Young makes a persistent case for conceptualizing the Internet as a drug. To wit, she shares the stories of two tortures souls named Robin and John:

*When Internet addicts explain their rapid progression of hours invested on-line, they sound like someone hooked on a physical substance. Robin, the once-disciplined woman whom we saw staying up all night with the Internet at the start of this chapter, says that when she’s on-line she feels like “I’m taking some drug, and I just can’t stop taking more of it.” John, a construction worker who maintains a 50-hour habit with the aid of caffeine*

---

8 Young, p. 3-4  
9 Young, Caught in the Net, 54
pills, also describes a druglike experience. "I wish I could just inject more of this stuff right into my veins!" he confesses.\textsuperscript{10}

It would be over-privileging Young’s comical caricatures to say they directly inspired Chinese public health authorities to classify online gaming as “electronic heroin”; rather, these are all symptomatic of the larger issue of metaphysical dualism that prevents an understanding of this phenomena where the Internet is reductively posited as a seductive substance.

While the problem of dualism is pervasive, Young’s definitions are, thankfully, less so. In fact Young’s hypothesis has the greatest traction in Asia, and is contested in the United States, her home country. Thus any answer to the question “what is IAD” will be geographically contingent, highly subjective, and followed by an asterisk denoting the need for more research.

Since Dr. Young’s initial hypothesis in 1996, there has been a dearth of innovation in the field, despite increasing demand and resources, as the Internet becomes exponentially more powerful and integral to our lives. Despite the lack of an empirically viable and globally uniform definition, the idea of IAD has inscribed itself in the medical and popular discourse by dint of the volume (and not quality) of research, and the proliferation of treatment regimes that forwent the need for a rigorous clinical definition in the first place. This discursive environment reflects the biopolitical condition of IAD. As an example of how this interacts with the other pole of development—the anatamo-politics of the human body—Ian Hacking’s explication of suicide is illustrative of the multivariate process by which Foucault’s theory of development takes shape.

Suicide aptly illustrates patterns of connection between both poles. The medical men comment on the bodies and their past, which led to self-destruction; the statisticians count and classify the bodies. Every fact about suicide becomes fascinating. The statisticians compose forms to be completed by doctors and police, recording everything from the time of death to the objects found in the pockets of the corpse. The various ways of killing oneself are abruptly characterized and become symbols of national character. The French favor carbon monoxide and drowning; the English hang or shoot themselves.\textsuperscript{11}

Hacking goes on to note how “the systems of reporting positively created an entire ethos of suicide, right down to the suicide note… Suicide has of course attracted attention in all times…

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid, 54 (emphasis added)
\textsuperscript{11} Hacking, \textit{Making Up People}, 113
But the distinctively European and American pattern of suicide is a historical artifact. Even the unmaking of people has been made up.” The key insight here is that the archetype of the Internet addict has been “made up” (which is not equivalent to saying it is “socially constructed”) through the interplay of many heterogeneous discursive forces. Additionally, he emphasizes the cultural nuances inflected upon a phenomenon carry into its wider, international definition as a concept. As we have already seen in the discourse on IAD, there are strong cultural contingencies that merit careful consideration when considering a globalizing or culturally agnostic understanding of the phenomenon. To this end, the McKenzie Funk’s ethnographic experiment in the Daxing clinic is helpful, when he recounts a conversation with the clinic’s psychologist, one Dr. XU, Ph.D, who assesses the phenomenon in the context of China’s sociopolitical history.

The professor's explanation of Chinese Internet addiction amounted to an indictment of Chinese society. He railed against the one-child policy and the xiao huangdi (little emperors) it had created: children whose every material need was met even as spiritual needs were ignored. Instead of having hopes of their own, spoiled teenagers carried those of six other people—their parents and two sets of grandparents. They were overprotected but underdeveloped, without discipline or a sense of meaning. "They have nothing to hold on to," he said. "They are empty inside." He believed an even bigger problem lay with China's intensely test-based academics: a child's entire scholastic path—in some ways his or her life—could depend on one exam, the gaokao, the sole criterion for college entrance. The pressure was crushing; peers became competitors; teachers became slave drivers. Students had time only for rote memorization—not for singing or volleyball or after-school fun, otherwise defined. Professor Tao noticed that Mir II and World of Warcraft were games not of gore but of wits and teambuilding and winnable battles. He ventured that they gave teenagers something society, and especially schools, did not: freedom. "If they want to fight, they can fight. If they want to curse, they can curse. If they want to marry, they can marry." Back in real life, he said, "every child is like a little donkey. The teacher grabs his two long ears and pulls and pulls. The parents get behind him and push and push." 12

Dr. Xu’s penetrating insights serve as a rejoinder to one of the subjects in the documentary Web Junkie, which interviews three teens, their parents and their doctors. 13 When they asked one of the young boys who was at the Daxing boot camp against his will if he has friends in the real world, he unflinchingly replied “No. In the real world everybody is fake.” With the singular

13 http://webjunkiemovie.com/
importance of academic success straining family bonds and putting young students into fierce competition with one another, it is unsurprising that he might feel this way and gravitate to an environment where he can flourish on his own terms. While other countries may not place the same scholastic demands on their children as in China, the imperative to do well in school, attend prestigious universities, and land high-paying jobs is a fairly pervasive global phenomenon. However this does not flatten the cultural dimensions of pathology and biopolitics. In the following section, we will examine current Western media representations of IAD as a global phenomenon describing a global apparatus, the Internet. However since this work and all of the literature it engages is written in English, it cannot be emphasized enough how many important nuances are silenced, invisible to my American eyes, or lost in translation.

**Contemporary Media Depiction**

In October 2014, prominent news outlets including *Newsweek* and the *Guardian* reported that “doctors have treated the first reported case of ‘Internet addiction disorder’ brought on by excessive use of Google Glass.”

14 This is curious because American and British psychiatric authorities do not recognize IAD as a clinical disorder, so it should be impossible to designate any event as such. Secondly the articles claim that the patient was “treated” for IAD. Although he did submit to an extensive inpatient program, it is nevertheless impossible to treat a disease that does not, scientifically speaking, exist—thus the therapies that the patient was subjected to do not amount to a treatment or cure. But given the governmentally-sanctioned clinical definition and treatment programs in China and South Korea, it can be inferred that journalists decided that to embrace such terminology for brevity and impact, in defiance of the psychiatric doctrine of their own countries. In the context of American biopolitics, it is highly significant that the articles emphasized the ethical stance of Dr. Andrew Doan, the head of addictions and resilience research at the US Navy’s Substance Abuse and Recovery Program. Dr. Doan oversaw the first

case of IAD from Google Glass and told the *Guardian* that “people used to believe alcoholism wasn’t a problem – they blamed the person or the people around them… It’s just going to take a while for us to realize that this [Internet Addiction] is real.” It is important to realize that Dr. Doan clinically diagnosed and treated this patient based on his belief that Internet use is akin to alcohol consumption, based on his knowledge derived from the extant clinical literature. The media coverage of Doan’s assessment is semiotically potent; it combines his medical expertise, his authority as a governmental figure, and the excitement of Google’s latest product. These factors overwhelm the factual content of the article wherein Doan is simply sharing his opinion, and has no idea how to reconcile accelerating technological change and its consequences on the body.

The *Newsweek* and *Guardian* articles conclude with a cautionary comment from Dr. Daria Kuss of Nottingham Trent University, whose research is widely-cited in clinical and popular literature. Kuss benignly notes that “while Internet addiction is on the rise, more research is needed to effectively diagnose and treat suffering patients.” Kuss and her colleagues appeal, in various ways, to the idea that “human nature” is being depleted by Internet usage, when what they are actually concerned with is human productivity. They consistently imply and often explicitly state the need for greater governmental oversight and intervention to prevent kinds of Internet usage that interfere with work or school. Such a rationale hews to extant biopolitical hegemony. As Rosi Braidotti explains in *The Posthuman*, any argument predicated on human nature is inherently political:

> The human is a normative convention, which does not make it inherently negative, just regulatory and hence instrumental to practices of exclusion and discrimination. The human norm stands for normality, normalcy, and normativity. It functions by transposing a specific mode of being human onto a generalized standard, which acquires transcendant values as *the* human… distinct from the sexualized, racialized, and naturalized others and also in opposition to the technological artefact. The human is a social construct that became a social convention about ‘human nature’.

---

15 Rosi Braidotti 26
Braidotti’s framing of the human is crucial to elaborating the discursive elements of the Internet usage *dispositif* and its multivariate invocations of the human as something that must be urgently defended. Initiatives to promulgate “healthy” Internet usage are proliferating at a time when climate change—polluted air, dwindling water supplies, and precarious food supply—represents significantly graver threats to the health of a population. Yet the novel phenomenon of Internet addiction, which has claimed relatively few lives, is receiving urgent media and legislative attention. Public Health initiatives such as China’s Internet addiction boot camps that operate through forced induction, military drills, aversion therapy, shaming, and pharmacological regimens—are portrayed as a legitimate response to public anxiety about the effects of technology on physical and mental wellbeing. The disproportionate attentiveness to the wellbeing of subjects with regard to Internet use stands in contrast to the naturalization of appalling labor conditions, polluted air, and toxic food. This disjuncture suggests that behind the veil of public health, the state encourages the furtherance of IAD pathology because the noise it creates is discursively beneficial to the biopolitical order. But there are members of the psychiatric community who acknowledge the folly of an Internet-as-substance conceptualization, one poignant example comes from the accidental progenitor of IAD, Dr. Ivan Goldberg:

“I.A.D. makes it sound as if one were dealing with heroin, a truly addicting substance… To medicalize every behavior by putting it into psychiatric nomenclature is ridiculous. If you expand the concept of addiction to include everything people can overdo, then you must talk about people being addicted to books, [etc.]”\(^{16}\)

Another detractor is Marc Potenza, a psychiatrist at Yale and the director of the school’s Program for Research on Impulse Control Disorders. Potenza is currently treating several patients who are ostensibly addicted to the Internet, but he disputes the goal achieving a static clinical definition. “The truth is, we don’t know what’s normal,” Potenza says. “It’s not like alcohol where we have healthy amounts that we can recommend to people.”\(^{17}\) Unfortunately, doctors Goldberg and Potenza are the minority voice against a global discourse that steadfastly

\(^{16}\) “Just Click No” By David Wallis, *The New Yorker*, January 13, 1997 P.28

\(^{17}\) Is Internet Addiction a Real Thing? By Maria Konnikova, *The New Yorker*, November 26, 2014
adheres to the idea that the Internet is like alcohol or heroin. The following section interrogates salient examples of contemporary clinical research in order to posit that IAD constitutes a complex question fallacy. The complex question fallacy is committed when a question is asked (a) that rests on a questionable assumption, and (b) to which all answers appear to endorse that assumption.18

Clinical Pathology and its Metaphysical Discontents

In March 2014, the first International Congress on Internet Addiction Disorders took place in Milan, Italy.19 The majority of quantitative studies focused on adolescents born in the late 1990’s—a generation colloquially called digital natives. The metrics used to measure the impact of Internet use on their sociality and subjectivity was modeled, of course, on norms defined by digital immigrants, or generations who grew up without ubiquitous Internet connectivity. The level of engagement with certain technologies is generationally nuanced and must be treated on its own terms, otherwise this line of scientific inquiry amounts to little more than a cranky old man wagging his finger and recalling how things were done in his day. But this disjuncture is only one reason why quantitative psychiatric studies are categorically inconclusive. While there is no consensus on the definition of IAD, it is striking that so many studies arrive at the same prognosis, which exhorts people to curtail Internet usage by limiting it to productive tasks; suggesting that the goal is not to prevent Internet addiction for the sake of happiness and wellbeing, but to ensure the productivity of a new generation of citizens.

The global corpus of clinical research that spans the past eighteen years evinces a memetic rhetoric that bypasses the question of “truth” about what the Internet is in order to generate a definition through sheer persistence. The amount of attention being focused on the idea of Internet addition thus casts a shadow over the lack of empirically verifiable evidence, as

18 http://www.logicalfallacies.info/presumption/complex-question/
one can surmise from the amount of self-citations that follow large claims in this study from
Nottingham Trent University that is widely cited in mainstream literature.

The last decade has witnessed a large increase in research on the newly emerging mental health problem of Internet addiction (e.g. Griffiths, 2000; Young, 2010). As a behavioral addiction (Holden, 2001; Kuss, 2012), Internet addiction leads to symptoms traditionally associated with substance-related addictions, namely mood modification, salience, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict, and relapse (Griffiths, 2005). The similarity with other addictions is furthermore substantiated by a multiplicity of neurobiological evidence (Kuss & Griffiths, 2012a). From a clinical perspective, Internet addiction is treated seriously and specific treatment approaches have been adopted in different countries (King, Delfabbro, Griffiths, & Gradisar, 2011), testifying to the need of professional help for those who suffer. Following the advancements in research and the increasing demand for clinical treatment, the American Psychiatric Association has decided to include “Internet use disorder” in the appendix of the upcoming fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders (DSM-V) (2012).20

Neurobiological studies that show how Internet usage activates neural pleasure pathways are being myopically deployed to support the claim that Internet usage should be classified alongside drugs or alcohol, which carries the alarming implication that it ought to be a controlled substance. After establishing this ethical imperative, the authors then shift their gaze to the intended recipients of their concern with an essentializing critique of young people.

In terms of risk populations, students have been identified (Widyanto & Griffiths, 2006) for several reasons. They have a natural affinity towards the Internet (Veen & Vrakking, 2006) and their conspicuous Internet literacy has been linked to Internet addiction (Leung & Lee, 2012). Moreover, they typically have (i) free and unlimited access, (ii) flexible schedules, and (iii) freedom from parental interference. Additionally, their online activities are not externally controlled, university bodies expect that they make use of the technology, and university settings can foster social intimidation and alienation (Moore, 1995; Young, 2004). Moreover, psychological and developmental factors associated with young adulthood may contribute to the allure of the Internet for students. They do not only find themselves in the process of developing their identities, but they also start to establish intimate relationships at that particular stage of their lives. To develop one’s identity means to become detached from one’s parents to a certain extent leading to internal conflicts which are repeatedly resolved by the escape into addictions of all sorts, including Internet addiction (Lanthier & Windham, 2004). Accordingly, the Internet can become a source of self-medication (Castiglione, 2008).

Having a “natural affinity” for the Internet presents a paradox within a project that places the human and the Internet in opposition to one another, the natural versus the unnatural. It would seem that having a natural affinity for something would do just that, naturalize it and obviate the

20 Kuss, Griffiths, Binder p.2
need for concern. Not only does this turn of phrase contradict the premise of their problematic, it also invokes something much more sinister. The notion that some humans are imbued with certain abilities has long and wicked history of inspiring movements like phrenology, eugenics and Nazism. Characterizing young people’s Internet literacy as “conspicuous” also hints at the moralizing ambitions of this research and suggests a Habermasian definition of the human that is static and unmutable, and must be defended from elements that threaten to change it. Contra Habermas, Jairus Grove considers the “possibilities and limits of a moral order grounded in what we now call the human species” by addressing the inherent dangers of ideological speciesism. Internet users who exhibit a set of physical and social traits that deviate from the established norms of a productive capitalist subject form a constituency on the receiving end of what Grove calls the “recurrent hostility towards forms of life that do not narrowly fit the definition of humanity—a kind of somatic fundamentalism which insists that the genetics, phenotype, and manner of expression all conform to a norm of what it is to be human.”

Thus any normative definition of the human is politically motivated and historically contingent. In the context of medicine and the science of pathology, Ian Hacking’s metaphorical theory of an “ecological niche within which mental illnesses thrive” explains the ephemerality of these normative definitions and how their cultural context means that while doctors are right to pursue them, their resulting diagnosis is doomed; the disease, as such, vanishes within a generation. Hacking’s conceptual framework resonates with Foucault’s concept of Episteme in *The Order of Things*, which is fundamental to discerning the dispositif of Internet usage. It is particularly helpful in discerning how the Internet is simultaneously the engine of commerce, communication, innovation, as well as the site of degeneracy and illness. Hacking describes four “vectors” that constitute an ecological niche:

---

21 Grove, 187, *Must we persist to continue: William Connolly’s critical responsiveness beyond the limits of the human species*

22 Hacking, *Mad Travelers*, 1

23 Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p.168: “However, if in any given culture and at any given moment, there is always only one episteme that defines the conditions of possibility of all knowledge, whether expressed in a theory or silently invested in a practice.”
One, inevitably, is medical. The illness should fit into a larger framework of diagnosis, a taxonomy of illness. The most interesting vector is cultural polarity: the illness should be situated between two elements of contemporary culture, one romantic and one virtuous, the other vicious and tending to crime. What counts as a crime or as virtue is itself a characteristic of the larger society, and these virtues are not fixed for all time: prudence, a virtue for the Protestant bourgeoisie of early modern Europe, had been mere weakness in the feudal era. Then we need a vector of observability, that the disorder should be visible as disorder, as suffering, as something to escape. Finally something more familiar: the illness, despite the pain it produces, should also provide some release that is not available elsewhere in the culture in which it thrives.24

IAD fits within the “taxonomy of illness” alongside other behavioral disorders which are characteristic of a hyperconsumptive body politic; overeating, alcoholism, workaholism, hoarding. The material structure of capitalist society encourages all of these addictions through extreme convenience of access to goods. The “cultural polarity” of IAD relates to capital production. In a neoliberal economy the greatest crime is not making money and accumulating wealth. Overindulgence in activities that subvert this ideal are seen as dysfunctional. The “vector of observability” is a question of generational relations, where pre-digital generations of clinicians and scholars are assessing subjects of ubiquitous connectivity against their pre-digital adolescent norms. Finally, the “illness” of IAD provides relief from the tyranny of the useful that pervades our cities, where most humans now reside. These four vectors of Hacking’s “ecological niche” are apparent in the following passages, taken from an exhaustive literature review recently published by scholars at the University of Toulouse and Northeastern University. This review is helpful in demonstrating the methodological homogeneity caused by the strictures of an essentialist theoretical framework. Highlighted passages below lead you through the post hoc fallacy that occurs even in a critical review of clinical pathologies by non-clinician scholars.

Concerns regarding the solidity of the theoretical bases of the different measures can be added to those regarding the general lack of rigorous evaluation of psychometric properties (Wartberg et al., 2013). Indeed, more than 26 scales have only one study supporting their psychometric properties. In order to move forward in the field, efforts should be made to curb the development of new scales and to validate existing scales identified as useful in diverse populations so as to move towards the development of a

24 Hacking, 2
gold standard assessment method (Beard, 2005; Huang, Wang, Qian, Zhong, & Tao, 2007; Jia & Jia, 2009; Wallace & Masiak, 2011).^{25} …

The Internet Addiction Test (Young, 1998) emerged as the most frequently used scale for Internet Addiction (Bowen & Firestone, 2011; Frangos, Frangos, & Sotiropoulos, 2012; Lee et al., 2013; Pezoa-Jares et al., 2012; Warberg et al., 2013; Özcan & Gokearslan, 2013). It also appears to be the most validated assessment (28 studies in 17 different languages). However, even if the IAT is commonly used as a multidimensional tool, and seems well adapted to evaluate the concept of Internet addiction (Huang et al., 2007; Khazaal et al., 2012; Lai et al., 2013), it lacks of ‘‘rigorous and systematic psychometric investigations’’ (Faraci et al., 2013). The IAT has been the object of criticisms (Demetrovics et al., 2008; Ko et al., 2005b). First, as the majority of Internet addiction assessment tools, it was built according to an ‘‘atheoretical perspective’’ (Gamez-Guadix et al., 2012, p. 1582). The results of factor analyses revealed significant differences between studies suggested a potential lack of construct validity of the IAT, in addition to somewhat low reliability, which was highest among Asian and high-school student groups (Frangos et al., 2012). …

In conclusion, forty-five tools exist for the assessment of Internet addiction but many of them have been sparsely used and are not well-validated. This study highlights the growing interest in Internet addiction and related assessment tools. Consistent with previous findings about a decade ago (Beard, 2005), our findings highlight the lack of consensus in the field in terms of assessment and the pressing need for a well-established and validated tool to unite the field. Further research should be focused on evaluating psychometric properties of existing scales in different cultural settings age groups, and large samples. …

Nevertheless, our findings also highlight a number of strengths in the field of Internet addiction. Few areas of research have accumulated such a rich and varied body of assessment tools in such a short time-period, illustrating the vibrancy and creativeness of the field. Many original papers on Internet addiction assessments have been widely cited. While the number of citations not does strictly speak to the scales’ use, it does provide an index of the reach of the scale and its conceptual foundations.^{26}

The following excerpt comes from a collaborative study by the American eSTART Internet Addiction Recovery Program and the Department for Clinical Psychology and Psychotherapy at the University of Marburg in Germany. It differs slightly from the literature reviews above but

^{25} Laconi, Rodgers, Chabrol. p. 198
^{26} Laconi, Rodgers, Chabrol p.199
illustrates how some clinicians are navigating the issue of quantity and quality with regards to Internet usage; this signals an attempt to rework the conceptualization of Internet as alcohol without having to abandon it entirely.

CLASSIFICATION: There is ongoing debate about how best to classify the behavior which is characterized by many hours spent in non-work technology-related computer/Internet/video game activities [15]. It is accompanied by changes in mood, preoccupation with the Internet and digital media, the inability to control the amount of time spent interfacing with digital technology, the need for more time or a new game to achieve a desired mood, withdrawal symptoms when not engaged, and a continuation of the behavior despite family conflict, a diminishing social life and adverse work or academic consequences [2, 16, 17]. Some researchers and mental health practitioners see excessive Internet use as a symptom of another disorder such as anxiety or depression rather than a separate entity [e.g. 18]. Internet addiction could be considered an Impulse control disorder (not otherwise specified). Yet there is a growing consensus that this constellation of symptoms is an addiction [e.g. 19]. The American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM) recently released a new definition of addiction as a chronic brain disorder, officially proposing for the first time that addiction is not limited to substance use [20]. All addictions, whether chemical or behavioral, share certain characteristics including salience, compulsive use (loss of control), mood modification and the alleviation of distress, tolerance and withdrawal, and the continuation despite negative consequences. 

The excerpt outlines the normative framework for diagnostic studies which emphasizes the concepts of productivity and control. Limiting the scope of addiction to online time that is not capitalistically productive reinforces the tyranny of success and stigmatizes leisure time. It also occludes the physical harm incurred by individuals such as equities day traders, who spend an extraordinary amount of time online buying and selling stocks, suffering from hypertension and strokes, but exempted from pathologization due to their productivity. Globally, most of the Internet’s bandwidth is dedicated to streaming pornography, social media, and games, which are all highly profitable and undergird the Chinese and Korean economies. If this usage pattern is “correct” at the economic level in that it is profitable, why does this usage pattern become incorrect at the level of the individual? Secondly, the deployment of control is carelessly applied. Are any of us materially in control of how much time we spend interfacing with digital technology? This guideline imposes an antiquated conception of screentime that doesn’t account

[27] http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3480687/
for an ambient environment that is pulsating with digital connectivity, on street corners, billboards, subways, and elevators. By this metric, every residents of New York or Hong Kong would be a screen addicts by this metric. The suburbs are likewise becoming pervasively digital with devices such as Amazon’s “Echo” that is always on and reacts to voice commands, wakes you in the morning, recording shopping lists, and organizing ones calendar. If we follow the dualistic logic of the clinical literature we have just reviewed, all of this digital immersion would be equivalent to the world drowning itself in a barrel of scotch. While such attempts to beat back the influence of the digital on the “human” (per Braidotti’s political definition of the term) are clearly futile, they persist because of their significant discursive value to the neoliberal biopolitical order. Against this discouraging state of affairs, scholars like William Connolly, Bruno Latour, Jane Bennett, and their many interlocutors throughout speculative realism, are establishing alternatives to the essentialized humanist discourse currently guiding clinical IAD pathology. Instead of frantically policing the boundaries of the human, Jane Bennett proposes a different approach that would make “the proliferation of entanglements between human and nonhuman materialities” a much less terrifying and politically divisive event.

Another response is to accept the mingling and to seek to bring the conceptual vocabulary more in line with this condition: ecological thinking should become more dialectical, or dialogical, or phenomenological, or we should no longer speak of “nature” but only of “second nature.” The idea of “second nature” emphasizes that what we used to call natural is actually the cultural determination of nature.28

Such a metaphysical reorientation will not happen overnight, but since it provides refuge from the squall of duplicitous humanist moralizing, I am hopeful that this kind of thinking will saturate far beyond academia and ultimately enable the doctors working in the space of IAD to refocus their energies in a way that doesn’t betray their initial concern for humanity and reduce them to pawns in a biopolitical game of chess. The following section provides a glimpse of recent clinical research from Iran, Germany, and India, in order to emphasize how dualism acts as a metaphysical straightjacket in praxis.

---

28 Vibrant Matter 115
**Prognosis without Diagnosis**

In spite of their inability to diagnose IAD, authors of clinical studies seem compelled to offer a prognosis. In 2014, a team of Iranian psychiatrists scrutinized the moods of 1,020 high school students and their use habits of computer, video games, and DVD technology. The conclusion of their study states:

*Internet addiction may cause depression and anxiety in high school students. It seems necessary to develop an Internet addiction prevention program for adolescents taking into account the psychological factors such as depression and Internet use habits.*

A German study, also from 2014, “surveyed a representative German quota sample of 1,723 adolescents (aged 14-17 years) and 1 caregiver each.” The study found that overall, 3.2% of the sample formed a profile group with pathological Internet use, which led to the following conclusion:

*The results showed a considerable prevalence of pathological Internet use in adolescents and emphasized the need for preventive and therapeutic approaches.*

Researchers at India’s National Institute of Mental Health and Sciences (NIMHANS) have arrived at similar conclusions that prompted the opening of a “de-addiction center” in Bangalore. A recent NIMHANS study claims that “73% of teenagers have psychiatric distress and excessive usage of technology was being used to manage the stress.” Dr. Manoj Kumar Sharma, a principal author of this study, reported to the *Times of India*:

*We found children in the age group of 13-15 years were hooked on to video games while those in the age-group of 15-17 years were addicted to Facebook. They showed dysfunction in academics and social life, suffered from physical problems like eye strain and were losing out on recreational activities…Internet addiction is no different from alcohol addiction. Both have cravings, can go out of control and have consequences. When treated, patients show withdrawal symptoms like restlessness and irritability,” Dr Manoj explained. Those with net addiction are measured on four parameters: craving (desire to engage in these behaviours), control (experiencing inability to control these

---

behaviours), compulsion (engagement in behaviour despite no need) and consequences (experienced effects due to engagement in these behaviours)…

The corpus of failed attempts to pathologize IAD suggests that the clinical approach is suffering from a category error. Failure as such may be inevitable within the metaphysical constraints of subject/object dualism, which has led so many studies to equate the Internet with alcohol, a substance that can be atomically diagrammed and is scientifically legible. Unfortunately for these scientists, the Internet is not a thing, but a process of perpetual becoming that is intertwined with humanity. Rather, the Internet is more akin to what William Connolly calls a force-field, which he defines as “any energized pattern in slow or rapid motion periodically displaying a capacity to morph, such as a climate system, biological evolution, political economy, or human thinking.”

Now that we have reviewed the metaphysical discontents of the researchers and scholars and their vain quest to arrive at a static definition of IAD, we will review the consequences of their ill-gotten prognosis.

“Treatment” Programs

Approaches to treatment vary geographically but are generally combination therapies of pharmacological, behavioral, and physical therapies. China leads the world in the breadth and intensity of its treatment programs. Japan, South Korea, Vietnam and Australia all have nationally funded programs that operate clinics offering aversion therapy and cognitive behavioral therapy, but are for the most part voluntary, unlike China’s where adolescents are coerced into attending the camps and forced to stay. China, Japan, and South Korea have the world’s largest populations of online gamers so it may not come as a surprise that their governments have reacted on such a scale, as in the case of Korea’s “shutdown law” making it illegal for any Korean under the age of 16 to play video games between the hours of midnight

---

32 Connolly, A World of Becoming, 5
and 6am. Italy has inpatient centers in Milan and Rome, but on the whole Europe is less focused on prevention than treatment, which nonetheless advocates interventionist policies. In the U.S. and U.K there are no governmental treatment programs, but expensive private clinics abound. It is striking however that a handful of American news outlets have run stories about the benefits of the Chinese approach. One such story from Boston.com, a regional news site with six million unique visitors per month, enumerates eleven sure signs of IAD, and heedlessly offers the following advice:

Are you spending more and more time on the Internet? It might be time to enter Internet rehab. [pic. adjacent: two Chinese teenagers at a clinic] Two patients were checked in to an Internet addiction clinic in Daxing, China. The clinic uses a tough-love approach that includes counseling, military discipline, drugs, hypnosis, and mild electric shocks.

By one estimate, China has twenty-four million Internet addicts, mostly under the age of twenty. In response to a phenomenon that state media calls “electronic heroin”, Chinese public health authorities classified Internet addiction as a clinical disorder in 2008, declaring it one of the top threats to the health of its teenagers. In response, military style boot camps have been established throughout the country and Chinese state media have emphasized dangers of the disorder. The Washington Post profiled the camps were featured in the following special report on China’s first such camp, established in 2005 and the operational model for other camps:

The clinic in Daxing, a suburb of Beijing, the capital, is the oldest and largest, with 60 patients on a normal day and as many as 280 during peak periods. Few of the patients, who range in age from 12 to 24, are here willingly. Most have been forced to come by their parents, who are paying upward of $1,300 a month — about 10 times the average salary in China — for the treatment. Led by Tao Ran, a military researcher who built his career by treating heroin addicts, the clinic uses a tough-love approach that includes counseling, military discipline, drugs, hypnosis and mild electric shocks.

---

33 www.netaddiction.com
34 The other signs of addiction include “heightened euphoria while on the Internet; Failure to control behavior; Neglecting family and friends; Withdrawal from other activities; Lying about your usage; Internet usage is interfering with your job or school responsibilities; If you crave more online time and are restless when away from your computer. (via Boston.com)
35 http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/epaper/2013-12/13/content_17173126.htm
36 The Washington Post online, “In China, Stern Treatment for Young Internet Addicts by Ariana Eun jung Cha, February 22, 2007
The government has subsequently established approximately three of these camps throughout the country. Chinese teenagers are usually tricked into going to the camps or in some cases drugged by their parents, who have been exhorted by state media to view heavy Internet usage as a serious disease that without treatment can lead to failing grades, homicidal behavior, and suicide. The mandate of the camps is to remove the desire to use the Internet. To this end, camps employ a combination of aversion therapy, physical exercise, and heavy pharmacological regimens for depression. There is also an informal regimen of physical brutalization and shaming which has led several deaths, most recently in June 2014, when a nineteen year-old girl was beaten to death after failing to ask permission to use the bathroom at an addiction camp in China's Henan province. Other reported deaths at Internet addiction camps include a fourteen year-old boy who was struck with a baton and pipe for being unable to do push-ups, and a fifteen year-old girl who was beaten less than a day after arriving at camp. This brutality takes place in a prison-like environment which suggests that treatment and punishment have been conflated altogether:

The Internet-addiction clinic is distinct from the other buildings on campus because of the metal grates and padlocks on every door and the bars on every window. On the first level are 10 locked treatment rooms geared toward treating teen patients suffering from disturbed sleep, lack of motivation, aggression, depression and other problems. Unlike the rest of the building, which is painted in blues and grays and kept cold to keep the teens alert, these rooms are sunny and warm.

This grim environment provides the backdrop for a series of neurological and physical therapies, which are pictured below. There appears to be a fascination with technological therapies to cure an addiction to technology which raises fundamental questions about the efficacy of this approach.

38 Washington post, ibid.
41 Washington Post, ibid.
Students during a military-style drill at the Qide Education center in Beijing

A young Chinese internet addict receives an electroencephalogram check at the Beijing Military Region Central Hospital

Nanometer wave machines in Guangzhou, China
In 2007 when the Daxing camp was still a novelty and before public health authorities made IAD an officially recognized disorder, American journalist McKenzie Funk checked himself into the facility to investigate China’s response to this emergent epidemic. Published in Harpers magazine, his account contrasts sharply with that of the Post and offers some compelling insights:

Barely eight months old, the clinic was already famous—the subject of glowing coverage by CCTV, the China Daily, and the state-run Xinhua News Agency. Since it opened in March 2005 on the grounds of the military hospital, its all-army staff had helped hundreds of patients. It claimed a cure rate of 80 percent, a phenomenal degree of success that was attributed to the expertise of the clinic's founder, Tao Ran, who'd been treating various addictions for twenty years. The clinic was often full, and plans were under way to expand it from 20 beds to 150.

In contrast to China’s authoritarian strategy, South Korea’s government subsidizes treatment at over two-hundred counseling centers and hospitals, and has trained more than 1,000 Internet addiction counselors. They believe that over thirty percent of people under eighteen years of age, or 2.4 million Koreans, are at risk for Internet addiction.\(^{42}\) The government has also taken legislative action by implementing the “shutdown law” which makes it illegal for any South Korean sixteen or younger to play online video games between midnight and six a.m., and much more stringent legal codes are currently being debated. Whereas government propaganda is used to substantiate governmental interventions, the discourse in South Korea revolves around isolated but disturbing cases of infant deaths caused by parental neglect.

The first tragic case of an infant death inspired the 2014 documentary Love Child, which tells the story of a young Korean couple who met through a MMORPG called Prius—the goal of the game is to raise a child with strong magical abilities. They got married, and had a daughter who they named Sarang, which means “love” in Korean. The couple was so enthralled with raising their digital daughter in Prius that they neglected to care for their newborn human daughter, and they left Sarang alone at home for long periods of time, fed her badly, and lacked

any discernable trace of parental instincts, according to Korean police reports. Sarang died of starvation and neglect when she was only three months old, weighing one pound less than when she was born. The tragedy sparked a nationwide outcry and the trial marked a pivotal moment for Korea, which is the largest global exporter of video games. Again in April 2014, a man was charged with infanticide after letting his two-year-old son die of starvation because spent several consecutive days playing online games at a PC bang.43

Statistically, Koreans are in danger of going extinct by 2750 because of plummeting fertility rates and an alarming rise in suicides— in 2008, 12,858 Koreans took their own lives, the equivalent of one death every 40 minutes.44 Like citizens of other highly developed nations, Koreans have access to birth control, they prioritize their careers over family, and— more than most other populations—they have bifurcated their lives between the digital and non-digital worlds. Many people experience this bifurcation via extensive social media and entertainment consumption, but this bifurcation takes its most dramatic form in immersive online video games, specifically Role Playing Games (RPG) where the human player designs an avatar with unique abilities, appearance, name, and experience in the game. The RPG provides an expansive digital habitus that is tailored to the desires of the player. The game designers occupy a powerful position, owing to their economic and psychical-cultural influence through the way they design products, because they literally build worlds for people to inhabit online. As these programs and the technologies that support them become more immersive, they attract increasing numbers of online “immigrants” to their digital worlds. This digital migration is having an enormous effect on South Korea’s population of fifty million, as two million are clinically diagnosed with online gaming addiction, but treatments that seek to remove the desire to use the Internet would seem to be doomed in a neoliberal context where video games account for more than half of South

43 http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/world/asia/article4063826.ece
Korea’s cultural exports, netting $2.6 billion in 2012. Writing on how populations expand and contract in accordance with their economy, Foucault cites an essay from 1753 that saliently expresses the situation in South Korea:

“States are not populated in accordance with the natural progression of propagation, but by virtue of their industry, their products, and their different institutions. . . . Men multiply like the yields from the ground and in proportion to the advantages and resources they find in their labors.” (Foucault citing Claude-Jacques Herbert, HoS 25)

The United States has so far only pathologized online video game addiction, and has not expanded the diagnosis to include other kinds of Internet usage. Whereas China, South Korea, Japan, Italy, Australia, and others have funded national anti-addiction campaigns the US is for the time being letting the free market sort things out. However for $14,500, you can spend forty-five days at an IAD rehab clinic in Washington State called reSTART, that provides a conventional kind of detox program where you write journals, take long walks, and abstain from any digital interfacing. Lacking the cash or time to spare, budget friendly options abound, where else, but in online app stores. One app called “Pause” invites users to “Pause the digital. Start the real.” Pause competes in a crowded marketplace of anti-addiction wares such as TimeOut, StayFocused, Anti-Social, FocusWriter, FocusBooster, Concentrate, Self-Control, Think, and many others. These programs offer to combat various kinds of Internet dependency—un-ironically—by creating a new dependence, on an app that reminds you when to get up and walk around, and gives you Internet freedom at certain intervals. These programs relate to Lauren Berlant’s concept of cruel optimism, because these applications form a “habit that promises to induce in you an improved way of being. These kinds of optimistic relation are not inherently cruel. They become cruel only when the object that draws your attachment actively

45 http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/business/2014/04/14/8/0501000000AEN20140414001600320F.html
impedes the aim that brought you to it initially.”47 The apps constitute a cruel relation because when they fail to help an individual cope with their usage, it presents yet another instance of failure and judgement. For people who feel terrorized by the demands of the workplace, oppressed by compliance to social normativity, and exasperated by the paucity of happiness achieved from conspicuous consumption; it is not a question of finding ways to impede their time online. It is a question of making the offline world a more appealing option. To insist that offline life is categorically the better place to spend one’s time is a privileged and moralizing judgment of the situation and presumes that everyone can have a nice life offline. But this delusion pervades all of the advertisements and articles describing American treatment programs for IAD.

The American site videogameaddiction.org laments that “…although the U.S. is lagging behind countries like South Korea, which boasts more than one hundred clinics to treat video game addiction, there are a growing number of treatment options available to American youth.” This competitive rhetoric where countries boast about their capacity to “fix” citizens dovetails with camps that are marketing the contemporary equivalent of a bourgeois rest cure, offering “wilderness therapy programs and therapeutic boarding schools” which have “proved effective in helping teens with video game addiction find joy and excitement in healthier ways.”48 Of course, the healthier ways are not specified, and a “satisfaction guarantee” is suspiciously absent.
Throughout these websites, it becomes clear that help, as it were, is only an option for teenagers from well-capitalized families.

The American and Chinese, and South Korean biopolitical approaches to IAD pathology and treatment differ in a variety of ways. To begin with, high speed Internet infrastructure in the US lags significantly behind Korea, Japan, and China’s first tier cities.49 Furthermore American companies like Apple, Google, and Microsoft are likely to object to a government initiative

47 Berlant, 1
designed to alienate their best customers. Or the situation is roughly equal to Lauren Berlant’s observation of how the Obama administration’s obesity initiative “has outraged conservative pundits and groups, which recognize accurately that the centrality of a non-sovereignty based notion of personal agency in the explicit state and state-related discourse of crisis and cure.”

Perhaps because the headline cases of online gaming related deaths have occurred in Asia, the rhetoric surrounding technology addiction in the United States is more focused on social media usage and “nomophobia”—the fear of being out of mobile phone contact. The United Kingdom is very similar to the US in their approach, albeit with much less panache and an unabashedly Victorian prescription for IAD sufferers. From The Priory Group, a leading mental health group in England:

Once internet overuse reaches the point where it causes major problems, abstinence is the only solution. There are fellowships similar to Alcoholics Anonymous for those whose internet compulsion takes the form of gambling or pornography, which include Gamblers Anonymous and Sex Addicts Anonymous. There are also self-help groups that deal with the more notoriously addictive role-play games, but no groups presently exist for internet addiction help.

Ultimately IAD is a global phenomenon, but the public health crises in China and South Korea offer the most salient examples of how national governments are using Internet addiction as “an alibi for hygienic governmentality and justified moralizing against inconvenient human activity.” This is Foucault’s concept of biopower at work, elaborated by Lauren Berlant:

…the power to make something live or let it die, the power to regularize life, the authority to force living not just to happen but to endure and appear in particular ways. The difference between sovereign agency under a regime of sovereignty and under a regime of biopower, then, can be thought of as a distinction between individual life and collective living on, where living increasingly becomes a scene of the administration, discipline, and recalibration of what constitutes health.

50 Berlant 109
52 http://www.priorygroup.com/addictions/internet
53 Berlant, Cruel Optimism, 97
54 Berlant, Cruel Optimism, 97
Following Berlant, it becomes a bit clearer why government would be so focused on the Internet habits of their populations while abrogating their responsibility to ensure healthy physical living conditions. In this section I have tried to show how anthropocentrism and essentialism are a metaphysical impediment to creating programs that would actually help people who are feeling alienated or impaired by online activity. Instead, the clinical discourse is proliferating an idea of difference, of degeneracy, and dysfunction. I sought to emphasize the instances where the Internet is described as a consumer item, so that we have a point of departure for the next section, where vital materialism provides an opportunity to disrupt this convention and the anxiety-inducing aporias that it generates. Finally, while much time was spent interrogating the semantics of clinical studies in order to make their metaphysics legible, this is only one part of the investigation and does not constitute a constructivist approach, or in Hacking’s words, I do not propose a singularly doxogenic causality to the emergence of the IAD dispositif.

Theoretical Approach for a Critique of IAD Pathology

Historicizing Clinical Pathology

In describing the emergent phenomenon of IAD, I do not seek to obscure the alienation, sensory impoverishment, obesity, and rare cases of death that can result from excessive screen time. These are real causes for concern and it would be foolish to dispute that the human body requires a certain amount of movement and fresh air to flourish. Likewise, the goal is not to demonize quantitative researchers, therapists, concerned parents, or even public health in general; but illuminate the unseen violence inflicted upon certain populations as a result of materially arbitrary demarcations between proper and improper Internet usage. In other words, I am trying to show how the possibility of these ill-effects—the specter of Internet addiction—has a strong discursive impact with biopolitical consequences. One of these biopolitical consequences is that IAD pathology and treatment regimes could be useful to the state in
consolidating control over citizen subjects, as it has done in the past. There are compelling resonances between the experience of the contemporary Internet addict and Foucault’s description of the queer European experience in *The History of Sexuality*:

“From the end of the eighteenth century to our own, they circulated through the pores of society; they were always hounded, but not always by laws, were often locked up, but not always in prisons; were sick perhaps, but scandalous, dangerous victims, prey to a strange evil that also bore the name of vice and sometimes crime.”

Teenagers who use the Internet heavily are *always hounded* by parents, teachers, doctors, and increasingly *locked up* in digital detox camps and forced to participate in aversion therapy. They are *sick perhaps*—there is still uncertainty, because it is unnerving to think that we might all be sick if we use the Internet. This anxiety is fuelling an explosion of denunciations, pathologies, and strategies that promise to smash it, cure it, and defend the status quo, where the Internet is used productively and thus “healthily.”

In their respective eras, the pathologies of Internet addiction and homosexuality each resulted from, and contributed to, a discursive proliferation of scholarly, medical, juridical, literary discourse focused on a specific population grouped by behavior. Both groups, in their respective historical moments, threaten the hegemonic capitalist order with their non-productivity and noncompliance with normative behaviors by not having children and by not sufficiently engaging in offline conspicuous consumption, respectively. This comparison is pursued in the hope of better understanding the power relations that the “Internet addict” impacts and is impacted by. The multitudes of adolescent boot camps, aversion-therapies, juridical interventions in teenagers Internet access, media coverage, and social stigma all would indicate a familiar kind of bourgeois fixation on children; now on their productivity more that their sexuality, thought the two can obviously overlap or mean the same thing. The often violent interventions in the name of preventing a vaguely defined “greater harm” posed by Internet use

---

55 HoSv1, Foucault, 40
56 As David Harvey notes in Spaces of Hope, under capitalism sickness is defined as the inability to work. (Berlant)
or “overuse” of the Internet cannot be prescribed or remedied in a tidy fashion. Just as Foucault urges to “abandon the hypothesis that modern industrial societies ushered in an age of increased sexual repression,”\textsuperscript{57} so too in the digital age it is plausible that our Internet and gaming technologies have not unilaterally made us lonely and technologically codependent; rather, they have brought extant conditions of alienation and depression into focus. To distinguish how this conflation is occurring, philosopher Ian Hacking investigates the science of pathology and the emergence of new diseases that is helpful in discerning whether or not IAD is “real.”

If it is not obvious already, the short answer to this question is “no.” Following Hacking, it is fruitless to define a new disease as being either “real” or “socially constructed” for this kind of inquiry because it distracts from the complex discursive relations that constitute an emergent disorder. In the book Mad Travelers, Hacking outlines a four part conceptual framework “in which to understand the very possibility of transient mental illnesses,” and how novel diseases arise only at certain times and places.\textsuperscript{58} Hacking examines the fugue epidemic of compulsive walking that struck France in 1887 during which people would leave their homes and wander for many miles until they collapsed or were arrested for vagrancy, not knowing where they were or how they got there. The story of the first recorded fugueur, and the subsequent media depiction and medical records are meticulously contextualized within the French cultural mores of the industrial revolution. Hacking’s analysis demonstrates how the fugue pathology emerged from a culture that celebrated rail travel and grand voyages abroad, while at the same time criminalizing vagrancy. He notes how this “virtue/vice pair” expresses physical mobility as an area of ethical concern.” Hacking poses five questions and answers which help clarify my investigation into the still unfolding phenomenon of IAD. Importantly, I draw on Hacking’s framework in an effort to historicize the present conditions of possibility that ground concerns towards Internet usage.

1. What made fugue possible, as a medical diagnosis?

   An ecological niche, with four principal vectors to be named medical taxonomy, cultural polarity, observability, and release.

\textsuperscript{57} Foucault, HoSv1 p.40

\textsuperscript{58} Hacking, Mad Travelers, 1
2. What did those old fugueurs suffer from?
   By 1990s criteria, some suffered from head injuries, some from temporal lobe
   epilepsy, and some from dissociative fugue.
3. Were doctors of the day warranted in holding hysterical fugue to be a real mental
   illness?
   Yes.
4. Was hysterical fugue a real mental illness?
   No.
5. Are analogous conclusions to be drawn about transient mental illnesses today?
   Yes.59

Hackings fifth point serves as an invitation for this investigation of IAD, and his other four
points demonstrate that asking anyone of these questions alone is insufficient, and must be taken
together. To accomplish this methodologically, a constructivist examination of the dispositif of
Internet usage would be insufficient because it could not engage all four areas of Hacking’s
“ecological niche” and would over-privilege what Hacking calls a “doxogenic” causality;
assigning IAD to an intensification of shared ideas in the medical community and black-boxing
the spatio-temporal infinity of the Internet, online affect, and the click of the keys and glow of
the screen. The phenomenon of IAD is likewise irreducible to governmental policy, psychiatric
treatment, or digital subjectivity. All of these things must be taken together which demands a
more responsive, eclectic conceptual framework.

From Essentialism to Vital Materialism

In Power of the Hoard: Further Notes on Material Agency, Jane Bennett deploys
Hacking’s vice/virtue treatment to characterize pathological hoarding as being “symptomatic of a
hyperconsumptive body politic.” In this project however, the phenomenon of Internet addiction
points to connectivity as the source of ethical concern. Bennett notes that hoarders have a special
attunement to the call of things, and perhaps in a similar way Internet addicts have a predilection
for constant connection, or to the alternate spatio-temporal environment of the Internet. It is my
hope that Bennett’s ontology of vital materialism can serve as a kind of antidote to the

59 Hacking, 80
moralizing regime epitomized by Kimberly Young. The epigraph for the first chapter of Young’s *Caught in the Net* is the testimony of a thirty-eight year-old woman from Chicago who is “addicted to chat rooms” and explains her predicament cogently: “I get tongue-tied in real life, but I don’t get finger tied on the Net.”

Instead of recognizing that this individual may have suffered from severe social anxiety in any era, and is fortunate enough to live in a time where she can flourish online, Young excoriates online sociality as a cheap imitation, and a distraction from “real” life. She sees direct human-to-human contact as the only kind of healthful social interaction, and vilifies digitally mediated communication and relationships. This action serves to uphold the subject/object dualism and antagonistic relationality between the normative human and the passive, consumable Internet.

This essentializing tendency unites the downtrodden experience of Hacking’s wanderers, Bennett’s hoarders, and the growing population of diagnosed Internet addicts. In all three cases (*fuguers*, hoarders, Internet addicts), the pathology is socioeconomically contingent and moralizing. Travelling in a train and staying in a hotel is exemplary, but spontaneous wandering is a danger to society. Filling mansions with gawdy designer furniture is desirable, but cramming a small house full of ordinary objects and trash is abhorrent. Hence the utility of Bennett’s approach to her subject of inquiry “not as bearers of mental illness but as differently-abled bodies that might have special sensory access to the call of things. In examining hoarders’ self-reports of their relationship to their stuff, resist the frame of psychopathology, in order to better hear what the hoarder might have discerned about her objects’ thing-powers.”

This approach enables an analysis of the phenomenon of Internet addiction that resists the extant politics of the Internet usage *dispositif*, which is to say, the stakes, interests, and relations of power inflected upon any study of this phenomena by the material conditions, media bias, and what kind of information is silenced or foregrounded to serve an interest. Furthermore, one of the goals of this work is to show how Internet addicts do not exist, per se, but are made by a discursive regime. If

---

60 Young, 12

61 Bennett, “Powers of the Hoard” 244, from Animal, Vegetable Mineral
this can be compellingly demonstrated, it offers a countervailing rhetoric to the paranoid notion of an IAD “epidemic.” Lauren Berlant highlights the violent potential attached to this word by recalling how “we learned most recently from AIDS, after all, that it’s inevitably part of an argument about classification, causality, responsibility, degeneracy, and the imaginable and pragmatic logics of cure.”

By proceeding with a vital materialist analysis of this phenomenon, the impossibility of reaching a static pathology for IAD should become blatantly clear. When public health authorities classify the Internet as a substance that we consume, their inquiries are framed within a Kantian subject/object relation where the object only exists through its interaction with the subject. Within the constraints of this anachronistic problematic, it becomes impossible to understand what humans do to the Internet and what the Internet does to us. In Vibrant Matter, Bennett articulates the insufficiency of such an approach and posits a way forward:

If human culture is inextricably enmeshed with vibrant, nonhuman agencies, and if human intentionality can be agentic only if accompanied by a vast entourage of nonhumans, then it seems that the appropriate unit of analysis for democratic theory is neither the individual human nor an exclusively human collective but the (ontologically heterogenous) “public” coalescing around a problem. Following Bennett, if we seek to comprehend how the Internet is impacting the human process of becoming, the relation ought to be conceptualized as a social/material/medical/political/energetic assemblage that exceeds any static idea of the Internet or the human, and strives to not privilege any one component of the assemblage, as doing so would suggest a specious locus of control.

**Tyranny of the useful: Critical Scholarship and Gamification**

Just as the discourse on sexuality intensified during the Industrial Revolution, the scholarly, medical, and corporate discourses on Internet addiction are proliferating amid the social

---

62 Lauren Berlant Cruel Optimism 103
63 Vibrant Matter 108
bifurcation and economic disruption that characterizes the digital age. Scholarship addressing the “online exodus” is polemical, offering two broad visions for the future: techno-optimists believe that it will unlock our fullest potential and lead to the next step in our evolution. Skeptics assert that we risk becoming uncreative, disenabled automatons, passive consumers of homogenized media. Both camps are ideologically anthropocentric by seeing the Internet as either a habitus for uploaded human consciousness, or as a corrosive substance that is shredding the fibers of humanity. Neither side views the Internet as an agentic assemblage that humans are enmeshed in and affected by, in both cases the Internet is more or less an object, a means to human ends.

**Illusions of Control**

As a psychologist specializing in digital culture at the vaunted Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Dr. Sherry Turkle’s ideas about the human/digital relation would garner a fair amount of attention based on her credentials alone, but her popularity in the Ted Talk circuit and social media interviews makes her ideas a significant discursive force in the Internet usage dispositif. Turkle’s research is focused on the notions of control and privacy as they relate to digital prostheses. After rhapsodizing about the euphoric jolt that a text message provides, Turkle posits that our rapid turn to technology has occurred because it feels like no one is listening to us:

“And I believe it's because technology appeals to us most where we are most vulnerable. And we are vulnerable. We're lonely, but we're afraid of intimacy. And so from social networks to sociable robots, we're designing technologies that will give us the illusion of companionship without the demands of friendship. We turn to technology to help us feel connected in ways we can comfortably control. But we're not so comfortable. We are not so much in control.”

Turkle’s rhetoric taps directly into the vein of anxiety concerning Internet usage, but fails to address how a digital relationship is an “illusion”—if one feels happier and fulfilled by an online rapport, or part of a community that recognizes them, how could this not constitute a legitimate form of companionship? Her invocation of “control” is similarly contrived. The feeling of

---

64 http://www.ted.com/talks/sherry_turkle_alone_together/transcript?language=en#t-376000
control afforded by gaming or social media is just that—a feeling—so implying the possibility actual digital or non-digital control is a fantasy; she seems to be inviting people to return to a controllable world that has never existed. Her argument implies that disengagement from the digital world affords us greater control over our lives and happiness, which conveniently omits the very real possibility of being hit by a bus or poisoned by a taco in the non-digital world. After proclaiming the existential regime of “I share therefore I am,” which only considers social media and ignores other digital platforms that constitute digital life, Turkle concludes with a paradoxical exhortation to find ways to use digital technology to foster more human to human interaction, to preserve the “raw, human part” of being with each other.\textsuperscript{65} By failing to elaborate on the concept of “rawness”, however, one is left wondering more about Turkle’s moral stance on prophylactic technologies than having a clear understanding of how technology intercedes with our definition of humanity.

Turkle’s book, Alone Together, draws some interesting connection between the clinical literature discussed earlier. Where the grammar and vocabulary of the clinical pathologists demonstrated an antipathy towards the Internet for its potential to upset the unmutable definition of the human, Turkle’s prose draws an explicit line between “us” and “them”.

Given my training as a clinician, I tend to object to the relevance of a robot’s “numbers” for thinking about emotion because of something humans have that robots don’t: a human body and a human life. Living in our bodies sets our human “numbers.” Our emotions are tied to a developmental path— from childhood dependence to greater independence—and we experience the traces of our earlier dependencies in later fantasies, wishes, and fears. Brooks speaks of giving the robot the emotion of “sadness.” In a few months, I will send my daughter off to college. I’m both sad and thrilled. How would a robot “feel” such things? Why would its “numbers” even “want” to?\textsuperscript{66}

After many pages of anti-robot invective that would reduce Data the android to synthetic tears, Turkle concludes by pedantically trilling out a wish list of behaviors that she hopes will lead to a happier society.

\textsuperscript{65} http://www.theguardian.com/science/2013/may/05/rational-heroes-sherry-turkle-mit
\textsuperscript{66} Turkle 287
Rather, I believe we have reached a point of inflection, where we can see the costs and start to take action. We will begin with very simple things. Some will seem like just reclaiming good manners. Talk to colleagues down the hall, no cell phones at dinner, on the playground, in the car, or in company. There will be more complicated things: to name only one, nascent efforts to reclaim privacy would be supported across the generations. And compassion is due to those of us— and there are many of us— who are so dependent on our devices that we cannot sit still for a funeral service or a lecture or a play. We now know that our brains are rewired every time we use a phone to search or surf or multitask. As we try to reclaim our concentration, we are literally at war with ourselves. Yet, no matter how difficult, it is time to look again toward the virtues of solitude, deliberateness, and living fully in the moment. We have agreed to an experiment in which we are the human subjects. Actually, we have agreed to a series of experiments: robots for children and the elderly, technologies that denigrate and deny privacy, seductive simulations that propose themselves as places to live. We deserve better. When we remind ourselves that it is we who decide how to keep technology busy, we shall have better.67

Turkle’s quest to reclaim a distinctly bourgeois kind of privacy is almost as quaint as the notion that humans have ever excelled at concentrating or living in the moment. The Bible’s ten commandments make it pretty obvious that it doesn’t take an iPhone to lose your concentration and covet your neighbors stuff. The important point here is that Turkle’s approach is exactly consonant with the neoliberal concept of productivity. The space that her critique creates is predicated on a Heideggerian notion of essence, and the point I have tried to make is that there is no essential human that is being undone by the Internet, nor is there an essential Internet that is being singularly made or brought into existence by the human. Turkle’s ontological claims espouse a very simplistic notion of agency where she implies that we chose whether or not to have control over our lives, and this forces her to constantly disagree with her own argument— iPhones are a source of joy when we feel in control of them, but a source of agony when they seem to control us. If we banish the idea of control altogether, it is plain to see that technology is being scapegoated for extant and contiguous aspects of the human condition. It is always a question of relationality, and the shifting intensifications of power in any particular encounter, not an ongoing war between the essence of technology and the essence of the human. The Internet is simultaneously a platform for individual agency and subversive governmentality, it ebbs and flows and any claim to a static locus of power is specious. In Control and Freedom:

67 Turkle 294
Power and Paranoia in the Age of Fiber Optics, Wendy Hui Kyong Chun advances a compelling thesis that provides context as to why Turkle’s banal theory has so much traction in discourses of digital freedom and control:

“These questions are not only misguided but also symptomatic of the increasingly normal paranoid response to and of power. This paranoia stems from the reduction of political problems to technological ones—a reduction that blinds us to the ways in which those very technologies operate and fail to operate. The forms of control the Internet enables are not complete, and the freedom we experience stems from these controls; the forms of freedom the Internet enables stem from our vulnerabilities, from the fact that we do not entirely control our own actions.” 68

Chun’s emphasis on the contradictory logics of the mutative Internet is exemplary and speaks to the symbiotic relation of the irrational human subject and the Internet as an intertwined process of becoming. In so doing, Chun highlights how the dualistic subject/object theorization of normative Man and passive machine contributes to a rhetorical aporia that incubates paranoia in the public sphere. Chun’s assertion that the “forms of control the Internet enables are not complete” implies that the affective and coercive properties of the Internet are constantly mutative and thus resistant to rhetorical description, which stands in opposition to Jonathan Crary’s thesis in 24/7 Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep, wherein he enumerates several ways that the Internet is controlling and constricting human subjectivity. Crary’s book is beautifully written and abstains from the dogmatic prescriptions offered by Turkle’s, however it advances a similarly anthropocentric thesis that contradicts his critique of neoliberalism.

With an infinite cafeteria of solicitation and attraction perpetually available, 24/7 disables vision through processes of homogenization, redundancy, and acceleration. Contrary to many claims, there is an ongoing diminution of mental and perceptual capabilities rather than their expansion or modulation. Current arrangements are comparable to the glare of high-intensity illumination or of white-out conditions, in which there is a paucity of tonal differentiation out of which one can make perceptual distinctions and orient oneself to shared temporalities. Glare here is not a phenomenon of literal brightness, but rather of the uninterrupted harshness of monotonous stimulation in which a larger range of responsive capacities are frozen or neutralized. 69

68 Chun, 3
69 Crary, 24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep, 33
Crary has the rare ability to use lyrical and sumptuous prose in order to sketch a bleak and culturally apocalyptic digital present. Like Turkle, he privileges the human as the Alpha of the digital assemblage, which perpetuates the miscategorization of the Internet as a commodity for human consumption and fans the flames of anxiety over our present condition. Ultimately, his critique of the digital strengthens the argument for government intervention, making his book a discursive arrow in the biopolitical quill of the neoliberal order that he consistently derides. Through the concept of slow death, Lauren Berlant offers a brilliant explication of why scholars like Crary and Turkle have a propensity to indulge in hyperbolic and moralizing rhetoric:

Often when scholars and activists apprehend the phenomenon of slow death in long-term conditions of privation, they choose to misrepresent the duration and scale of the situation by calling a crisis that which is a fact of life and has been a defining fact of life for a given population that lives that crisis in ordinary time. Of course this deployment of crisis is often explicitly and intentionally a redefinitional tactic, an inflationary, distancing, or misdirecting gesture that aspires to make an environmental phenomenon appear suddenly as an event, because as a structural or predictable condition it has not engendered the kinds of historic action we associate with the heroic agency a crisis implicitly calls for.  

This is precisely what Turkle and Crary are doing with regards to digitality: singling out young introverts, cataloging their deficits, and asserting that the novel ways of subject formation in the digital age are illusory or dangerous. Berlant’s concept applies equally to the other pole of this debate, a group of techno-optimist Futurists that Crary scathingly indicts. Unfortunately, his critique of the futurists is just as essentializing as the fanatical futurist Ray Kurzweil, whose mission is to immortalize his consciousness by uploading it to the Internet. From 24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep:

This pseudo-historical formulation of the present as a digital age, supposedly homologous with a "bronze age" or "steam age," perpetuates the illusion of a unifying and durable coherence to the many incommensurable constituents of contemporary experience. Of the numerous presentations of this delusion, the promotional and intellectually spurious works of futurists such as Nicholas Negroponte, Esther Dyson, Kevin Kelly, and Raymond Kurzweil can stand as flagrant examples. One of the underpinnings of this assumption is the popular truism that today's teenagers and younger children are all now harmoniously inhabiting the inclusive and seamless intelligibility of their technological worlds. This generational characterization supposedly confirms that, within another few decades or less, a transitional phase will have ended and there will be billions of

---

70 Berlant, Cruel Optimism, 101
individuals with a similar level of technological competence and basic intellectual assumptions. With a new paradigm fully in place, there will be innovation, but in this scenario it will occur within the stable and enduring conceptual and functional parameters of this "digital" epoch. However, the very different actuality of our time is the calculated maintenance of an ongoing state of transition. There never will be a "catching up" on either a social or individual basis in relation to continually changing technological requirements. For the vast majority of people, our perceptual and cognitive relationship to communication and information technology will continue to be estranged and disempowered because of the velocity at which new products emerge and at which arbitrary reconfigurations of entire systems take place. This intensified rhythm precludes the possibility of becoming familiar with any given arrangement. Certain cultural theorists insist that such conditions can easily be the basis for neutralizing institutional power, but actual evidence supporting this view is non-existent.\(^1\)

By omitting how technology alters normative conceptions of the human in every epoch, Crary hews to the anachronistic subject/object division, which makes the power of computing into a formidable and terrifying enemy. I am not exempt from the concern that our technological evolution could run afoul, and I reiterate that I am not critiquing the concern for human lives that animates Crary, Turkle, and the clinicians pathologizing IAD. Rather I am critiquing the anthropocentric and essentializing metaphysical position of their efforts; and trying to demonstrate how their “real” concern is turned back against those who they claim to be serving; when their collective discursive contributions coalesce in the *dispositif*.

If the goal is to create a model of Internet usage that fosters empathy, kindness, creativity (the qualities that are allegedly eroded by IAD), then we must reject the anthropocentric understanding of the Internet where it is an object that we consume, and humbly orient ourselves as actants within the agentic assemblage of the Internet. This is a provocative suggestion, because it would invariably offend proponents of extant care regimes, who see themselves as embattled David vs. Goliath figures in a hopeless battle against the harms of a sedentary lifestyle caused by too much Internet time. Many doctors and therapists who are treating patients who spend their whole lives on the Internet would respond to this paper with righteous indignation, thinking it callous and unhelpful. In *Vibrant Matter*, Jane Bennett’s brilliant problematization of environmentalism provides a means of advancing this discourse without getting mired in factionalism:

\(^1\) Crary, 24/7 p.32
… I do wonder whether environmentalism remains the best way to frame the problems, whether it is the most persuasive rubric for challenging the American equation of prosperity with wanton consumption, or for inducing, more generally, the political will to create more sustainable political economies in or adjacent to global capitalism. Would a discursive shift from environmentalism to vital materialism enhance the prospects for a more sustainability-oriented public? … A more materialist public would need to include more earthlings in the swarm of actants. If environmentalists are selves who live on earth, vital materialists are selves who live as earth, who are more alert to the capacities and limitations—the “jizz”—of the various materials that they are. If environmentalism leads to the call for the protection and wise management of an ecosystem that surrounds us, a vital materialism suggests that the task is to engage more strategically with a trenchant materiality that is us as it vies with us in agentic assemblages.”

Gamification

While the technophobic discourse propagated by Crary and Turkle stokes public anxiety about smartphones, Internet usage and online gaming, there are voices on the other side of this debate who defend digital life, but in a rhetoric that is equally neoliberal, and views the Internet only as a thing to be consumed, albeit in exciting, and productive ways. The concept of gamification is defined as “the use of game thinking and game mechanics in non-game contexts to engage users in solving problems” and is the subject of a heated debate along a spectrum of game designers, corporate interests, and scholars of digital culture. Proponents of gamification like Jane McGonigal, a game designer and futurist, assert that it can be leveraged to solve global problems such as global warming and poverty. McGonigal’s book Reality is Broken begins by asking “why should games be used for escapist entertainment alone?” The premise of this question demonstrates that McGonigal believes that unless we explicitly design games to do something productive, nothing significant occurs during gameplay, it is just a means of escape. Her ideology is neoliberal in its desire to render everything productive. The jacket of her book ominously declares that “the future will belong to those who can understand, design, and play games.” This territorialization of the future is quasi-fascistic in the way it conceives of the future

72 Bennett, Vibrant Matter, 111
“belonging” to a certain group of people. Ironically, the book has humanitarian aims, describing how gamification can “leverage the power of games to fix what is wrong with the real world—from social problems like depression and obesity to global issues like poverty and climate change.”

Corporate leaders unsurprisingly enthralled by the business potential of gamification, amid the constant drone of news media about how addictive online gaming is, the promise of employees who are addicted to work is downright tantalizing to a CEO. Two recent titles on the subject speak volumes: *The Gamification Revolution: How Leaders Leverage Game Mechanics to Crush the Competition*—and— *Gamify: How Gamification Motivates People to Do Extraordinary Things*. There is a clear appetite for stratagems to retrofit online games to be productive. stems from its promise to erase the Not only does gamification promise to erase the boundary between work and play, thus squeezing more productivity out of the human workforce, but it can also operate as a logic of individuation, or in corporate terminology serves to “engage the employee base.”

The debate and applications of gamification, whatever they may be, have important political dimensions. Policy makers increasingly seek digital solutions to physical problems. This paradigm shift in the way people interact, form relations, and do business is occurring concomitantly with the militaristic shift towards drone warfare where the drone pilots engage living targets, so the ethical question of turning “tasks” into a game is highly significant. If we recognize online relations as “real” then it forces us to understand online violence, and by extension digital politics, as a world-shaping phenomenon. In *How to do Things with Videogames*, Ian Bogost concludes by sharing his desire for a society where the term “gamers” will be an anachronism. “If we're very fortunate, they'll disappear altogether. Instead we'll just

---

73 *The Gamification Revolution: How Leaders Leverage Game Mechanics to Crush the Competition* April 16, 2013 by Gabe Zichermann (Author), Joselin Linder (Author)
find people, ordinary people of all sorts. And sometimes those people will play videogames. And it won't be a big deal, at all.”

CONCLUSION

Temporally and pragmatically, Kantian dualism is a theoretical fossil, but alas it endures. Through the example of IAD, this project has suggested why dualism is not only still relevant, but useful to the global order. By making the Internet usage dispositif legible through an interrogation of its clinical and scholarly components, I have tried to show how their relationality upholds the dualistic thinking that, individually, undermines their respective projects and hinders their flourishing; which in turn prevents society at large from appreciating humanity as a process of becoming that includes the Internet, and the other material and immaterial components of existence. I believe that Crary, McGonigal, Turkle, and the ranks of medical researchers working in this space are guided by a genuine concern for the wellbeing of their fellow humans, but their ostensibly good intentions are insufficient to addressing the greater task of coming to terms with our contemporary condition. As the modern self becomes increasingly entangled with nonhuman nature through pharmacology, digitality, and robotics; the aporias created by the normative concept of the human pose an ever-greater threat. Technological novelty is valorized for enabling faster and better consumption, and denounced for the harm it causes to the anachronistic concept of the Human. This disenabling discursive environment impedes individual flourishing and individuates more compliant biopolitical subjects.

By delving into the silos of medical research, public health agendas, and media perception of this Internet usage dispositif, the goal of this project was to show the metaphysical

74 Bogost, How to do things with videogames, 154
constraints of dualism in praxis, wherein scientists, doctors, and scholars are not adopting new theoretical approaches after so much failure, not because they are serving a specific nefarious agenda, but because their discursive relationality hews to a capitalistic logic that has no use for truth. Furthermore the act of obscuring their failures and repeating the process reflects the reality of the neoliberal context—there is no other way—and failure is not an option for career advancement. The Internet-as-alcohol analogy must be proven at any cost! Collectively, this dysfunction is biopolitically useful; it keeps people shopping to alleviate their anxiety; it keeps them anxious because their employment is precarious; it keeps their employment precarious because capital is imperceptibly skimmed and consolidated among elites.

While I am obviously disenchanted by this state of affairs, I am not a Marxist, and believe that Bataille was right in his assertion that any alternative to capitalism conceived within capitalism is doomed to fail. Thus I am not drawn to vital materialism for its potential to overthrow the neoliberal world order. This is the beauty of Bennett’s vital materialism, which does not purport to replace anything, it announces no grand systemic ambitions, but offers a way of walking through life in a more critically-attuned way, where the swirling elements of existence feel like jazz, where the aleatory evokes curiosity instead of fear, and the compulsion to impose order on things fades away. This feels like a fertile environment where a new politics could emerge without design, after the human has ceased to be a precious ideal and we are enabled to flourish through a realization of our shared space in the cosmos with the fish, trees, clouds, and also algorithms, nanobots and digital avatars.

This project began an effort to understand how digitality and the Internet have inflected my own formation as a political subject. It quickly scaled up when I realized that any problematic of the Internet should have an awareness of the interlinking threats posed by climate change, the war on terror, consumerism, structural inequality and injustice; all of which exceed their physical apparatuses and are enacted, recorded, and impacted online. Thus a closer examination of these interlinkages in future research will enable more compelling insights about
the interaction between medicine, digitality, and Biopolitics. Additionally a more thorough treatment of the digital logic of individuation is absolutely necessary, which would elaborate Foucault and Hacking’s concepts of subjectivity and would benefit from the addition of Gilbert Simondon’s theories of individuation. At the onset of the project I wanted to demonstrate that governments are *actively* supportive of the erroneous pathology of IAD because it generates anxiety, confusion, and fear that is useful to governmentality; and furthermore in to regain control over the individuation of their citizens who are in the process of becoming digital subjects. This is a much larger claim which I will be happy to work towards in the future, but was unable to argue without having first established the dimension of an Internet usage *dispositif*. After grappling with the dimensions and consequences of the Internet usage *dispositif* in this project, future works will explore how it actually operates, and will return to the questions of digital subjectivity and its implications for the state.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Hacking, Ian. *Mad Travelers Reflections on the Reality of Transient Mental Illnesses*. 


Shaviro, Steven. The Universe of Things: On Speculative Realism. Minneapolis [u.a.: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2014.


**CLINICAL BIBLIOGRAPHY**


**ONLINE WORKS CITED**


http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3480687/.


"China Now Has Up to 250 Boot Camps to Cure Teens of Internet Addiction Read More:


Wartberg, L. "Prevalence of Pathological Internet Use in a Representative German Sample of Adolescents: Results of a Latent Profile Analysis." National Center for Biotechnology

http://webjunkiemovie.com/.

