

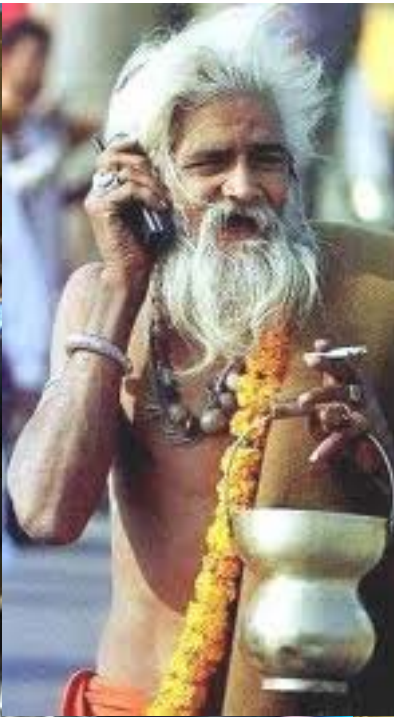
Digital Discipline: The Active Complicity of Modern Subjects

Hamid Ekbia

Indiana University

hekbia@indiana.edu

LSE, Dec. 6, 2011





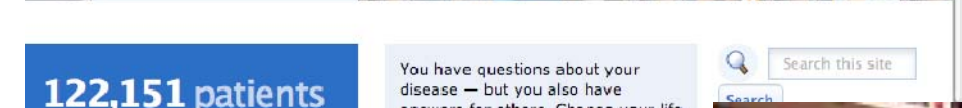
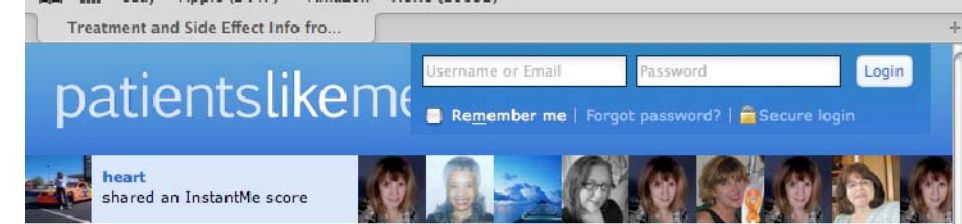
Addiction Theory

- Internet Addiction Disorder (IAD)
 - excessive computer use that interferes with daily life
 - Pathological Internet Use (PIU)
- People “enamored” by the Internet
 - e.g., retirees spending their savings on purchases they don’t need (Aboujaoude 2010)



Addiction Theory: Limitations

- Inadequate account of users
 - How to explain the non-problematic, reluctant, resistant user?
- Inadequate account of technology
 - How do computer technologies afford addiction?
- Inadequate account of socio-economic drivers
 - Business practices, government policies, social issues (mobility, unemployment, etc.)
- No solution
 - e.g., we cannot simply discard the Internet
- And...



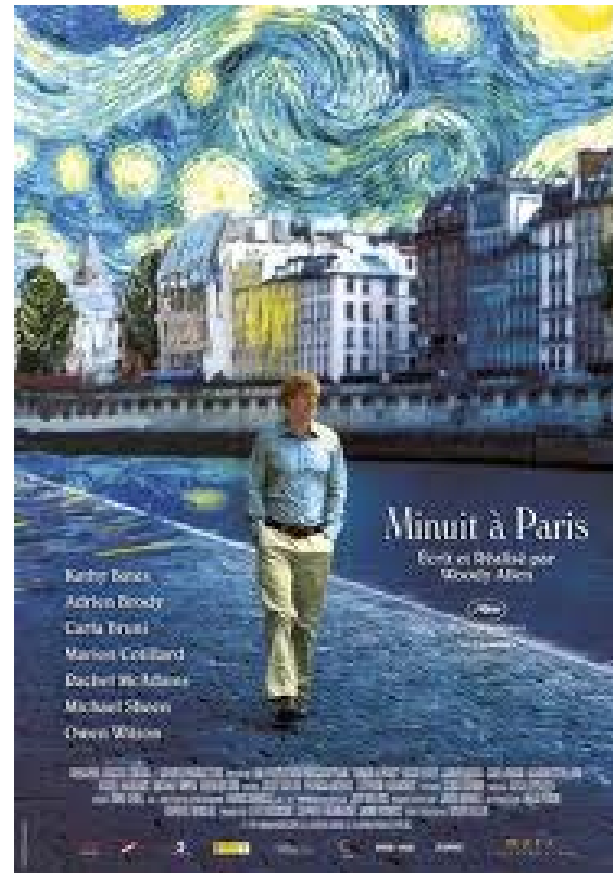
A Psychoanalytic Perspective

- “The robotic moment”
 - We expect more from technology than from each other
- A diminished humanity
 - Seeking friendship without its demands
- Solitude not loneliness
 - Our vulnerability
 - We should “be,” and not perform



Issues

- Human-centric
 - It is not technology's "fault"
 - The situation can be "reframed"
- Technologically thin
 - Does not account for the "generativity" of these technologies
- Golden-Age Fantasy
 - Woody Allen has captured this



A Different Theory?

- To avoid the narrow rhetoric of “addiction,” “distraction,” and even “use”
 - Lamb & Kling 2002, Oudshoorn & Pinch 2003, Day 2010
- To account for the reconfiguration of individuals as a subject-object totality
 - Foucault 1982, Serres 1982
- To explain the power of technological systems to regulate, but also to objectify
 - Kallinikos 2010

Claims

1. Digital Discipline

- Along with the paradigm shift in technology, there is a shift in social power, as it is implemented and applied to individual minds and bodies

2. The Rise of the *homo effectus*

- There is a close affiliation between neoliberalism and computing technologies of today in the way they shape contemporary subjectivity
- Each creates the conditions for the possibility of the other
 - Neoliberalism as a social philosophy not a theory of governance

3. Socio-technical Engineering

- Computing technology is part of the *social solution* of neoliberalism to the economic problems of contemporary capitalism, in general, and the American anarho-capitalism, in particular

Inverse Instrumentality

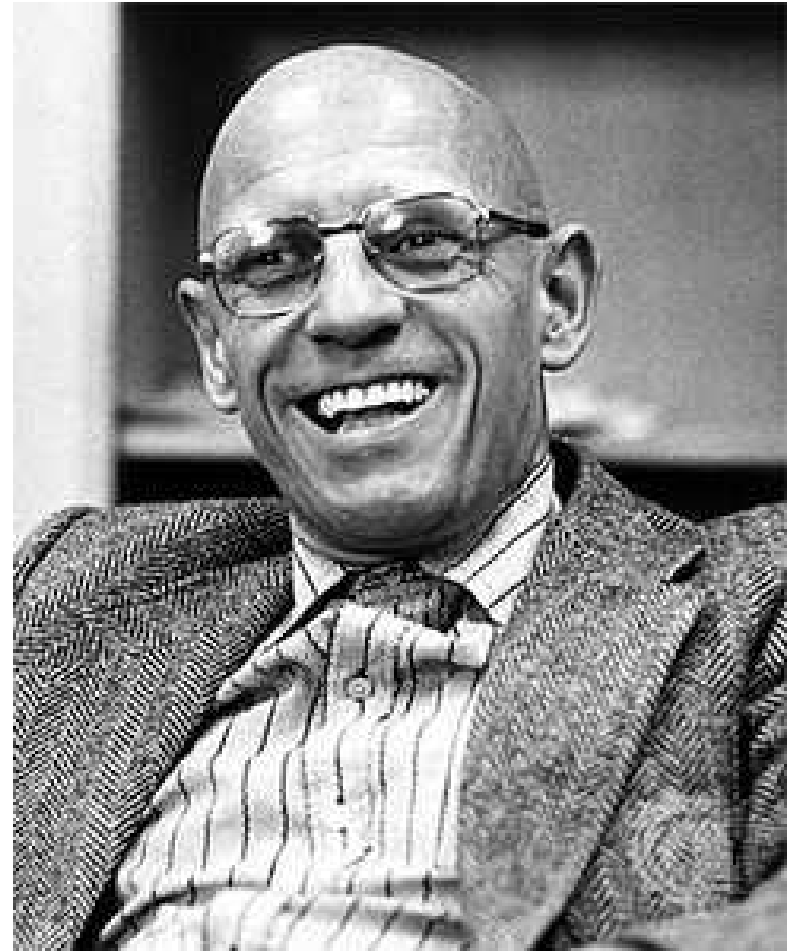
- Technologies of automation
 - Designed to disallow human intervention at nearly all points within the system
 - e.g., banking and financial systems
- Technologies of objectification
 - Designed to push critical tasks to *end users* as indispensable mediators in the system

Ekbia and Nardi (2012)

In Leonardi, Nardi, and Kallinikos

Three Modes of Objectification

1. The modes of inquiry that try to give themselves the status of science
 - e.g., objectification of the speaking subject in linguistics and philology
2. Dividing practices that divide the subject inside themselves or from others
 - e.g., the mad and the sane, the sick and the healthy, criminals and the “good boys.”
3. The way a human being turns him/herself into a subject
 - e.g., how people have learned to recognize themselves as subjects of “sexuality.”
(Foucault 1982)



Objectifying Technologies

1. Colonizing Technologies

- e.g., modern communication systems
- “Software that listens for lies” (NYT, Dec. 4, 2011)

2. Fragmenting Technologies

- e.g., Personal Health Records?

3. Totalizing Technologies

- e.g., massively multiplayer online video games

Games and Health IT

- Distinctive modes of objectification
 - of using objects to construct subjects
- Distinctive ways of organizing technologies and people
 - players in one case; patients, health providers, administrators, technologists, etc. in the other
- Body and materiality
 - Modern ways of uninterrupted, constant, subtle coercion of the human body
 - “that is manipulated, shaped, trained, which obeys, responds, becomes skilful and increases its forces” (Foucault 1978)
- Power and materiality
 - The active complicity of social actors in current technological systems

The Project of Liberalism

- Economic freedom
 - Limit the power of the state and the sovereign
- Decouple the economic and the social
 - A “level” playing field
 - [Parallel with syntax-semantics independence in Fodor 1988]
- Don’t guarantee, but reproduce freedom through:
 - “the establishment of limitations, controls, forms of coercion, and obligations relying on threat, etc.” (Foucault 2008)
- The formula: “Live Dangerously!”
 - not “Be Free!” (ibid)

A Historical Shift

	Traditional Power	Disciplinary Power
Process	Coercion	Compulsory objectification
Techniques	Physical	Spatio-temporal Anatomochronological
Instruments	Punishment	Examination (Hierarchical observation + normalizing judgment)

From Exclusion to Separation





Ward at the Hotel-Dieu, Paris, 16th century

Examination

1. Compare
2. Differentiate
3. Hierarchize
4. Homogenize
5. Exclude (?)



The Rise of the *homo legalis*

	Traditional Power	Disciplinary Power
Economic Subject	Survival	Production
Cultural Subject	Historico-ritual: Ascending	Scientific-disciplinary: Descending
Governed Subject	Repressed	Calculable
Moral Subject	Loyalty, allegiance	A double system: Gratification and punishment (a penal accountancy)

The Paradox of Liberalism

- Asymmetry between:
 - the light, positive, productive side
 - and*
 - the dark, negative, and constraining side
- Critiques:
 - Administrative control (Sombart 1932)
 - Abstract authority and the 1-D man (Marcuse 1955, 1964)
 - Society of Spectacle (Debord 1967)

The Neoliberal Response

- A reversal: let the market supervise the state rather than the opposite
- A shift in the principle of the market from exchange to *competition*
- An active, vigilant, and omnipresent social policy

The Rise of the *homo œconomicus*

- An economic subject who produces, not (just) consumes — an entrepreneur
 - Produces what? Personal happiness and satisfaction

- Gary Becker 1965
- A political subject who is calculable and predictable
- A moral subject who is driven by self-interest and competition

Another Shift

- The completion and global expansion of the neoliberal project
- The penetration of ICT in daily life

disciplinary power → digital discipline

the *homo œconomicus* → *homo effectus*

Digital Discipline

	Traditional Power	Disciplinary Power	Digital Power
Process	Coercion	Compulsory objectification	Complicit objectification
Techniques	Physical	Spatio-temporal Anatomo- chronological	Temporal Cognitive- [a]chronological
Instruments	Punishment	Examination (Hierarchical observation + normalizing judgment)	Performance (Collective Evaluation + Participation)

DD Processes: Complicit Objectification

- Video gaming
 - Instruction falls to players
 - Self-instruction or player-teachers (Nardi 2010)

- Open Source
 - Linux, Wikipedia, etc.
 - “Given enough eyeballs, all bugs are shallow!” (Raymond 2001)
 - Seeking freedom in openness (Ekbia & Gasser 2007)

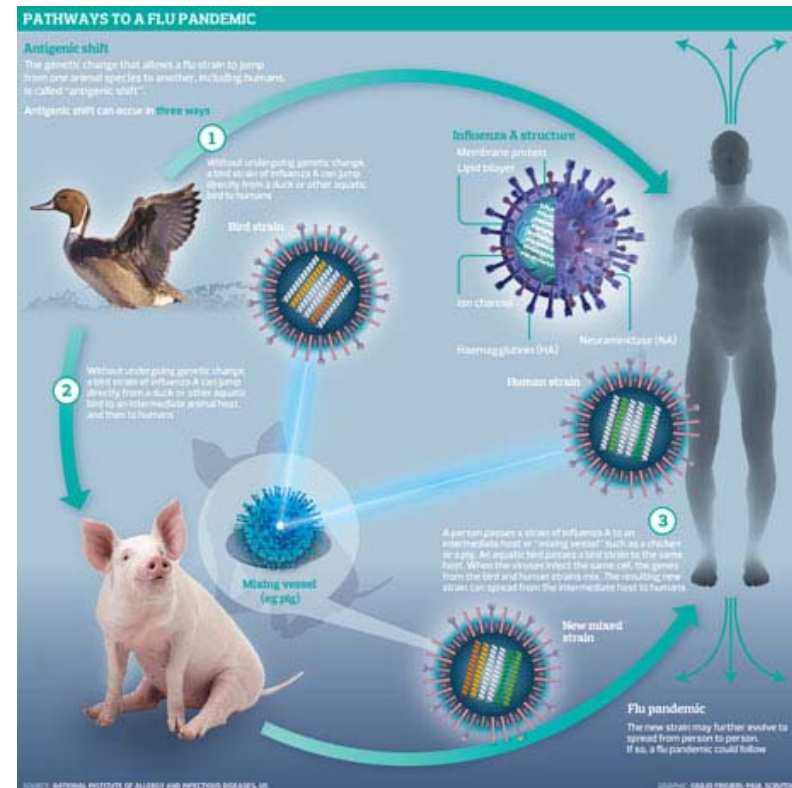


DD Techniques: Cognitive

- “[Computation] addresses primarily perception and cognition...[such that] user understanding of the functionality of software...is *sine qua non*, the gate, as it were to the software” (Kallinikos 2011)
- Digital discipline operates more cognitively than anatomically

DD Techniques: Simulation

- Swine flu
 - Compare to leprosy and plague
- Simulation
 - Compare to exclusion and confinement



DD Techniques: Personalization

- People who did X also do Y
 - Filter Bubble (Pariser 2010)
 - Google's personalized search results
 - Facebook's personalized news stream
- People who have X also have Y
 - Patient-centered health care
 - The extension of the Foucaultian Gaze to all, including the healthy

DD Instruments: Performance

- “all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants”

- Goffman 1959

- But performance is also mastery, grace, response to contingency; not merely repetition;
 - mastery tied to peer evaluation

- Nardi 2010

DD Instruments: Performance

- Information *through* action & communication
 - Unlike “the modern individual [who was] an object of information, never a subject in communication” (Foucault 1982), the contemporary individual more information, and provide more information, by acting and communicating
- A different arrangement from the panopticon

Examination vs. Performance

1. Compare
2. Differentiate
3. Hierarchize
4. Homogenize
5. Exclude

- Engage
- Differentiate
- Associate
- Homogenize
- Include



Examination



Performance



The Rise of the *homo effectus*

	Traditional Power	Disciplinary Power	Digital Power
Economic Subject	Survive	Exchange, Produce	Generate
Cultural Subject	Historico-ritual: Ascending	Scientific-disciplinary: Descending	Evocative-Voluntary: Flattened
Governed Subject	Repressed	Calculable	Computable
Moral Subject	Loyalty, allegiance	A double system: Gratification and punishment (a penal accountancy)	A double system: Gratification and obligation

In Retrospect

- A new paradigm of power
 - More temporal than spatial
 - More cognitive than anatomical
 - More performative than observational
- A new subjectivity
 - more generative, engaged, and gratified
 - But also more complicit, flattened, and obliged

In Prospect

- The Economic Mandate: Subjectify but not objectify
 - Encourage personalization and customization, not isolation and alienation
- The Cultural Mandate: Engage but not entrap
 - Provide options, not bindings
- The Political Mandate: Invite but not incite
 - Support participation and transparency, not complicity and secrecy
- The Moral Mandate: Totalize but not fragment
 - Nurture engagement, not competition
- The Technical Mandate: Compound but not confound
 - Hide complexity, not functionality