

**BODILY TECHNIQUES OF THE DIGITAL:  
REMARKS ON THE SPOOF OF IMMATERIALITY  
AND THE REVOLT OF SOMATIC GESTURES**

**Robert Smid**

MTA - ELTE ÁITK

[rob.smidi@gmail.com](mailto:rob.smidi@gmail.com)

**ABSTRACT:** Regarding current trends in the philosophy of technology, and particularly in the philosophy of media, one can pursue their research in two major directions. It comes down to either focusing on the media-inherent processes of the hardware (e.g., their idiosyncratic temporalities, the relations between digital states and analog continua, etc.),<sup>1</sup> or appropriating technology purely as its effect on society (i.e., as a reception of a new medium at its advent and later on, when it becomes commercial success).<sup>2</sup> The study of cultural techniques, however, for better or for worse conquers the middle-ground between these two approaches. While it tends to retrace popular media (“popular” in this case refers to the most eminent objects we use daily, such as doors, notebooks, lamps, ladders, etc.) from its everyday users to their various rudimental utilizations, it also refutes its hardware-obsessed counterpart with conceptualizing media not in itself, but as an assemblage that is made up from technological devices on the one hand, and those processes, attitudes and practices that are adopted for engaging with them on the other.<sup>3</sup>

In order to evaluate the bodily techniques of the digital as an autonomous branch of cultural techniques, firstly, I provide a summary of studying cultural techniques in general, and bodily techniques in particular – highlighting those points only that are relevant to my task. Secondly, I will argue that if there are so-called elementary cultural techniques, conventionally sorted out as drawing, reading, and

counting,<sup>4</sup> there must exist certain “elementary” bodily techniques then; such as ducking, stroking, and running,<sup>5</sup> which are actually end-products of self-technologizing processes. Yet, this does not mean that the set of bodily techniques could not be extended parallel to the emergence of new technological apparatuses. I will then propose, thirdly, that this set can be refined, and we experience such cultivation day after day (just for the sake of employing a cliché) “in our digital age,” hence in an era whose immaterial nature is generally taken for granted by theoreticians of new media. Therefore, I intend to counter the melancholy over the disappearance of somatic experience and the body in general as a consequence of virtuality triumphing over materiality, which ultimately reveals that bodily techniques are in fact a constant reminder of the failure for excommunicating the soma from interactions with technological media. Fourthly, I explain the concepts of “medial anesthesiology” and “somatic self-conditioning” by pointing out their importance regarding the relation between the body and state-of-the-art technology. Fifthly and finally, I conclude my essay with mapping out the main points of somapolitics for the digital age, while emphasizing the political stakes and interests that lurk behind the maintenance of the anesthesiological discourse concerning the body.<sup>6</sup>

**Keywords:** body and algorithms, cultural techniques, medial anesthesiology, somatic self-conditioning, virtual gestures

(1)

According to Sybille Krämer, “[f]or a long time, perhaps for too long, culture was seen only as text.”<sup>7</sup> This statement could be written as a call to arms on the banner for a group of leading scholars doing research on

<sup>1</sup> This type of investigation is characteristic to the trend called “media archaeology,” whose leading researcher is Wolfgang Ernst at the Humboldt University of Berlin. (However, it was Siegfried Zielinski who came up with the term “media archaeology” at the Berlin University of Arts.) A collection of Ernst’s essays was published a few years back, highlighting the main points of the propaedeutic and aims of such media theoretical disposition: Wolfgang Ernst, *Digital Memory and the Archive* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> This approach is customarily applied by media historiography, whose modern day father figure came to be the Canadian philosopher of media and prominent scholar of the so-called Toronto School of communication theory Marshall McLuhan.

<sup>3</sup> Of course, to a certain degree, this idea has already been present in works like Félix Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm* (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1995), and Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> See Sybille Krämer, “Technik als Kulturtechnik: Kleines Plädoyer für eine kulturanthropologische Erweiterung des Technikkonzeptes,” in *Technik – System – Verantwortung*, ed. Klaus Kornwachs (Münster: Lit, 2004), 160f.

<sup>5</sup> See Marcel Mauss, “Techniques of the Body,” in Id., *Techniques, Technology and Civilisation* (Oxford, New York: Berghahn, Durkheim Press, 2006), 90f.

<sup>6</sup> It seems inevitable to state which topics with an evident connection to my investigation I have not included in my paper. I do not discuss the subject matter of virtual or augmented reality, and the media that provide access to them while raising somatic awareness. For the latter piece, however, see Ted Bratkowski, “Investigating the Relevance of Shusterman’s Somaesthetics to Motion-Controlled Gaming,” *Pragmatism Today* 3, no. 2 (2012), 50-6.

<sup>7</sup> Sybille Krämer, Horst Bredekamp, “Culture, Technology, Cultural Techniques: Moving Beyond Text,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 30, no. 6 (2013), 20.

cultural techniques... if they had a banner at all, of course. The consequences of Krämer's observation are far-reaching and should not be underemphasized though, by taking it halfheartedly as another trendy cultural turn in the humanities. All the more so, since it has culminated in the birth of a theoretical disposition that executes the following steps in the study of culture:

- *the dismissal of semiotic models/structures* The study of cultural techniques investigates artifacts, trends, and routines without textualizing these cultural phenomena, which would in this way result in an analysis that purely relies on the toolbox of narratology. From this perspective, and unlike e.g. Roland Barthes's distinctive and dominant conceptualization in this matter, writing is taken as an actual scene of operations made up from eyes, hands, and paper, or other writing tools, rather than a semiotic process from which the narrative/narrated subject comes to life.<sup>8</sup>
- *the discrediting of causal or retrospective narratives* It is quite ironic that while the majority of scholars of cultural techniques accept the arguments by well-established theoreticians like Jean-François Lyotard<sup>9</sup> that question the seemingly self-evident type of relevance of historical experience in everyday life, at the end of the day, essays on cultural techniques almost always end up as historical case studies. A way out of such an inconsistency is, however, found in the application of a demonstrative argumentative technique, which is associated with the method of discourse analysis on the one hand, and also in the incessant and obsessive refusal of following any type of chronological order, when investigating the origin

or prehistory of a particular technique, on the other. Yet, more often than not, a linear time axis can still clearly be reconstructed from culture technical case studies.<sup>10</sup>

- *the justification for acts preceding theory* While the study of cultural techniques has been an eminently German affair for the most part, this theme is not an allusion to Goethe's *Faust*, and its famous Bible-translation scene. It owes more to the general practice of reverse engineering, a process that retraces the chain of operations involved in any implementation of an exercise or routine, which ordinarily aims at the handling of tools, devices, and things. This idea is plainly hinted at in Cornelia Vismann's essay on sovereignty, when she claims that even the most idiosyncratic practice is somehow always already relegated to other practices. She conceives it as the algorithmic or scripted aspect of actions,<sup>11</sup> with which she does not intend to question our belief in free will; rather, she aims to enlighten an operational network that is present in those media assemblages which partake in the act. A certain posthumanist agenda is hard to mistake here: cultural techniques as anthropotechnics does not relate to the techniques man makes use of, but encompass those clusters of techniques that make up what we call the human being.

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<sup>8</sup> See Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998), 54.

<sup>9</sup> See Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1991), 25.

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<sup>10</sup> See for instance Bernhard Siegert, "(Not) in Place: The Grid, or, Cultural Techniques of Ruling Spaces," in Id., *Cultural Techniques: Grids, Filters, Doors, and Other Articulations of the Real* (New York: Fordham UP, 2015), 97-120, which drafts the genealogy of technologies of the grid from parcels to cells, from Roman times through America's Critical Period to the Bauhaus era in Germany.

<sup>11</sup> Cornelia Vismann, "Cultural Techniques and Sovereignty," *Theory, Culture & Society* 30, no. 6 (2013), 87.

- *the promoting of factuality in place of facticity*  
Instead of asking from a standpoint that is given to someone as its present situation, studies of cultural techniques focus on how historical scenes are constructed (like a cross-section or section-plan), and how a two-way connection can be established between the discussed practices and the practices of theoretical reflection. This is the reason why in place of media, Joseph Vogl proposes the concept of “becoming-media:” this umbrella term embodies both the events that make up a case or a situation as well as the processes required for their mediation *in operandi*.<sup>12</sup> It paves the way for an apparent, nevertheless productive ambiguity: Whose agency does the research of cultural techniques truly concern; ours, or the technologies’ we engage with daily?

Overall, due to this new wave of research, culture has been dislocated from its position of being an entity embedded in static monuments (texts and representations) to a network of practices, implementations, rituals, and routines. It is easy to see that when a trend concentrates so much on defining culture as a chain of certain operations, and focuses on man’s interaction with the materiality of things, then the materiality of the primary user of artifacts, namely and prominently, the body cannot be excluded as a result.

## (2)

Having noticed this theoretical market gap, Erhard Schüttpelz has proposed the idea of bodily techniques as an eminent form of cultural techniques. In his formulation, more than self-evidently, bodily techniques are techniques that are executed by the body, and thus handle the body *both* as the primary object and the

primary tool of executing operations.<sup>13</sup> Reading the anthropologist Marcel Mauss’s essay *Techniques of the Body*, from which he borrowed the very term *Körpertechniken* (in French, « techniques du corps »), Schüttpelz points out a certain quirkiness in Mauss. He never once mentioned the works of his French contemporaries, Étienne-Jules Marey and Henri Regnault, the two pioneers of cinematography with a heavy ethnographical bias. As a matter of fact, Mauss turned to the example of a military marching band instead. He tells the story of an outlandish event that one of the Anglo-Franco regiments encountered during the First World War; six months after their victory at the battle of Aisne, the Worcester regiment made a formal request to the king so they could march to French rhythm. The result was – as one could expect it – disastrous: when the soldiers tried to keep up with the music, they had to give up their English marching style, and when the regiment submitted to the movements they had been conditioned to follow as part of their military training, the soldiers failed to adapt to the somatically unfamiliar rhythm.<sup>14</sup> A similar story occurred to Mauss’s contemporary, however, the poet Paul Valéry, who recounts it in his essay *Poetry and Abstract Thought*: while trying to get away from his overwhelming duties, Valéry went for a walk, but his body was suddenly taken over by two confronting tunes, neither of which he could make anything out in his mind.<sup>15</sup> Valéry writes that he is no musician to interpret them, so he had somehow acted out the melody with his limbs instead, which resulted in bizarre and preposterous motion. Valéry describes this experience as a transfer from muscular stimulation to the stimulation of aesthetic judgement as an aftereffect.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Joseph Vogl, “Becoming-Media: Galileo’s Telescope,” *Grey Room*, no. 29 (2007), 16.

<sup>13</sup> Erhard Schüttpelz, “Körpertechniken,” *Zeitschrift für Medien- und Kulturforschung*, no. 1 (2010), 108.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Mauss, “Techniques of the Body,” 79.

<sup>15</sup> Paul Valéry, “Poetry and Abstract Thought,” *The American Poetry Review* 36, no. 2 (2007), 62.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

I suggest that these two seemingly accidental anecdotes can be treated as being interrelated, and thus might just answer Schüttpelz's question: why did Mauss as an anthropologist ignore the idea of ethnology working with recorded human motion (viz., rudimentary ethno-cinema)?<sup>17</sup> Supposing that there is no way Mauss could have overlooked the ties between body and technology, I suggest that he actually amplified their relations by omitting the dichotomies of the natural and the artificial, and consequently of 'the savage' and 'the civilized,' which were so typical of ethnographers of his era – and characteristic to Marey and Regnault too. On the one hand, there is the mentioned cooperation of the latter, recording movements of tribal people, which was actually driven by the desire to economize the stamina of European armies: soldiers had to readjust their style of walking artificially in order to be in synch with the so-called natural movements of African peoples – Regnault argued that they practiced a less exhausting way of moving forward.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, there is Mauss, who suggests that what may strike us as something natural in bodily motion, has in fact nothing to do with biology or race, but has always already been the byproduct of self-technologizing, routines for creating bodily consciousness, which at some degree can be intensified into a cultural trait. In other words, the natural is not only mediated by technological means (the 'natural' way of walking is to be learned with the help of the new technology, which is film according to Marey's and Regnault's project), but has already been created artificially – through self-conditioning which only later becomes institutionalized, and it makes no difference if it happens in a tribe or in a regiment.

The importance of this historic clash cannot be overemphasized: it clearly yields to the fact that certain movements, instead of being one-sidedly physical or cultural traits, are in fact inherently technical and learned through self-technologizing instances. Schüttpelz

argues that there is nevertheless a cinematic undercurrent to Mauss's conception, consisting of classic vaudeville, slapstick, and circus, genres in which the interconnection of mediation, physiological processes, and social imperatives might as well be divergent to the same degree as they can be convergent.<sup>19</sup> The process of self-conditioning in order to achieve the capability to execute certain chains of motions is, however, neither development, nor evolution, not even progressive accumulation to be precise. Schüttpelz states that "[t]here is no evolutionary increase in the skills of bodily techniques,"<sup>20</sup> and supposing he is correct, elementary bodily techniques can thus be combined synchronically to produce chains never before exercised. So how come we can still examine the advent of new techniques against all odds, and adapt to cutting-edge apparatuses at the same time? This is where my investigation actually takes off.

### (3)

Many of the key texts of media cultural studies reach a consensus regarding the relationship between somatic experience and the current state of digital technology. In a parallel fashion, their vectors tend to point towards the same direction without any dissent or second-guessing about the body being immaterialized or virtualized by the gadgets that surround us while we go about our everyday lives.

For instance, N. Katherine Hayles in her *How We Became Posthuman*, which is considered to be one of the cornerstones of contemporary philosophical discourse on technological media, makes an upfront identification between what it means to be posthuman and how somatic experience is irreversibly lost in bits and pixels: according to her, an inevitable and distinctive

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. Schüttpelz, "Körpertechniken," 103.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 107. Also see Thomas Macho, "Zoologiken: Tierpark, Zirkus und Freakshow," in *Anthropometrie: Zur Vorgeschichte des Menschen nach Maß*, ed. Gert Theile (München: Fink, 2005), 155-77.

<sup>20</sup> Schüttpelz, "Körpertechniken," 115.

form of disembodiment is brought along by state of the art technology.<sup>21</sup> Likewise, leading researcher of cultural techniques Krämer proposes the question of the body's disappearance from technology, and traces its origins back to the father of cybernetics, Norbert Wiener. Wiener made an eloquent distinction between material energy and immaterial, transmissible information,<sup>22</sup> and while Krämer identifies the skyrocketing interest in the soma as a counter-intuition to the dematerialization of culture due to new media, she still follows in the footsteps of Wiener when making an effort to resolve the problem of corporeality contra digital technology. Krämer argues that instead of the disappearance of the body, one should consider its reduplication, cleavage or splitting into a physical and a semiotic one.<sup>23</sup> According to her essay *Does the Body Disappear?*, the sublime transformation of the body results in a flesh body and a sign body. Consequently, she defines virtuality – being a preeminent aspect of the digital – on the basis of an illusory placing of real entities, which means the displacement of the flesh body into the symbolic world of signs.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, corporeality via virtualization undoubtedly gains the possibility of interaction with symbolic structures, yet it also becomes evident where Krämer's idea still falls short. Due to her strict insistence on the very dichotomy, which considers the interaction of the somatic and the virtual only as an additive aspect, the interaction between the flesh body and the sign body comes only after they have been successfully separated from each other.

Regarding the Krämeresque idea of reduplication, my suggestion would be in synch with the arguments

<sup>21</sup> Cf. N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 192-222.

<sup>22</sup> Sybille Krämer, "Does the Body Disappear? A Comment on Computer Generated Spaces," in *Paradoxes of Interactivity: Perspectives for Media Theory, Human-Computer Interaction, and Artistic Investigations*, eds. Uwe Seifert, Jin Hyun Kim, Anthony Moore (Transcript: Bielefeld, 2008), 26.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

made by Richard Shusterman in his essay that does not shy away from investigating the cyberpunk genre that is well known for thematizing virtual bodies. His compelling examples against the immateriality of the digital include William Gibson's *Neuromancer* and the Wachowskis' *Matrix*, both of which portray the suffering body upon leaving cyberspace: having endured the effects of virtual reality, the physically drained soma is the actual trace of the material reality of media effects.<sup>25</sup> Shusterman, however, starts his genealogy on the ties between body and media with *Phaedo*, stating that Plato's critique is the ur-formula of today's media theoretical dispositions which either mourn the loss of somatic presence, or intend to do away with the body as a whole; at the end of the day, they both view the body as an obstacle, when deriding it as a productive medium.<sup>26</sup> In other words, the body is either an entity that needs to be reclaimed vis-à-vis technological media, or the very barrier which despite (or, in fact, all the more because of its) being a "multimedia conglomerate" stands in the way of "the indivisible soul which seeks truth,"<sup>27</sup> in this case: the hegemony of subtle digitalization. Shusterman also sheds light on the fact that the body can never be expelled from interactions with new technologies even if the result is exactly the body's immaterialization (e.g., holograms, voice control instead of typing, etc.).<sup>28</sup>

Besides Hayles, another example concerning the almost apocalyptic tone that longs for more corporeality in technology, can be associated with Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht's ideas. The way Gumbrecht looks at political protests is exceptionally relevant today considering recent events in Brazil, Romania or even Hungary. He argues that waves of protest sweeping through first-

<sup>25</sup> Richard Shusterman, "Somaesthetics and the Body/Media Issue," in *Id.*, *Performing Live: Aesthetic Alternatives for the End of Art* (London: Cornell UP, 2000), 152.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 152. Also see Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, 13.

world countries have one particular thing in common: to some extent, they are intensified by the urge of getting together instead of spending any more time in the digital world.<sup>29</sup> Of course, this has become almost too evident to us, Hungarians during the past year due to the ongoing protests for preserving the Central European University in its present form. Whichever reports you read, every one of them can confirm that these protests were different from any political gatherings that had happened since 1989. When watching the interviews with the protesters, it suddenly struck me that none of them had failed to mention that one of the reasons why they would go to every protest was the great feeling of being together with their peers. Certainly for Gumbrecht, such an occurrence is the true form of Foucauldian “power,” which is characterized by bodies piling upon each other, in this fashion, constructing a monolith that blocks the way.<sup>30</sup> A monolith which someone bumps into, either metaphorically or literally – a protest simply means bodies to reckon with. (It was precisely Professor Shusterman’s point when referring to the movement ‘Occupy Wall Street’ in his keynote lecture). Gumbrecht regards such material presence as a preeminent and exclusively authentic form of somatic experience. (This type of lived experience predominantly appears in sports according to Gumbrecht’s theory, an issue that I addressed three years ago [in an essay](#) that was also kindly published by the journal *Pragmatism Today*). He nevertheless acts as if the operations leading up to any protest nowadays were not executed through bodily techniques, as if the event of immediacy was not dependent on medial interactions at all.<sup>31</sup>

After all, creating, promoting, and circulating an event, and the sending out of virtual invitations all come

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<sup>29</sup> Conversation with Gumbrecht on 12<sup>th</sup> September 2013.

<sup>30</sup> Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *The Powers of Philology* (Urbana, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 5.

<sup>31</sup> Also see Id., “Infinite Availability: About Hypercommunication (and Old Age),” in Id., *Our Broad Present: Time and Contemporary Culture* (New York: Columbia UP, 2014), 61-71.

together to constitute a chain of operations, which rehabilitates the sense of *techné* as understood in Antiquity. Hence, *techné* is considered here as the useful execution of following and practicing protocols, which, on the one hand, dismisses both the idea of technology being an extension of man (as Ernst Kapp<sup>32</sup> or Marshall McLuhan<sup>33</sup> put it), and the concept that technological processes are carried out inherently on their own (i.e., in the machine) without any need for somatic interference from the users’ part. Such a definition of *techné*, on the other hand, emphasizes the importance of interaction between motions like swiping, tapping, and clicking and the device on which these operations are executed. Together they make up what can be called a medium. Therefore, bodily techniques now more than ever, in the age of touchscreens and touchpads can be situated as *transductive constituents*. This term had been introduced by French philosopher of technology Gilbert Simondon – and was later made popular by another, Bernard Stiegler<sup>34</sup> –, and it refers to those practices that bind together the differences of the agent, the act, and its tool (i.e., body, motion, and gadgets), which disrupts the linear vectors of intentionality, and triggers an osmosis or a ricochet, instead. In other words, the act that is executed *on the device with the body* can at one and the same time has the repercussion of executing an act *on the body with the device*. For instance, while our techniques of archiving events<sup>35</sup> still follow patterns of

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<sup>32</sup> See Ernst Kapp, *Grundlinien einer Philosophie der Technik* (Braunschweig: George Westermann, 1877), 29-39.

<sup>33</sup> See Marshall McLuhan, Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects* (Berkeley: Gingko Press, 2001), 26-41.

<sup>34</sup> Bernard Stiegler, “Temps et individuations technique, psychique et collective dans l’œuvre de Simondon,” *Intellectica*, no. 26-27 (1998), 247.

<sup>35</sup> I use these two terms, “archiving” and “event”, which carry the immersive weight of philosophical and media theoretical conceptual history, in a deliberately broad sense here. The former also includes stages of archiving, like museums, archives, databases, etc., as well as the theoretical discourse on archiving, while by the latter I refer to – so as to stick with my example – both the

cataloguing and segregating the mentioned factors, labelling one the subject, another the object, and the third one the act of archiving, each operation of mediatization, material technicization, and ritual preparation for the body – as Schüttpelz rightly puts it – in fact coincides with another in most cases, whenever a chain of operations is carried out.<sup>36</sup> This means that agents and actions only become separated on an already institutionalized level – which nevertheless originates from exactly the same dynamic –, once they have been processed (examined), stored (analyzed), and transmitted (published).

This has at least two disciplinary consequences, and two partial conclusions for my investigation:

1. If instead of 'Bildung' (educating), *conditioning* takes the place value of a buzzword as far as bodily techniques are conceived as processes that stem from self-technologizing to the level that they become a cultural phenomenon, then whenever the study of cultural techniques do try to stick with the proposed rudimentary meaning of *techné* – that is following a script/protocol and acting it out in return –, it becomes all the more obvious that bodily techniques actually make up the larger set, and cultural techniques constitute their subset.
2. If anything, bodily techniques can call for an anesthetic, rather than an aesthetic; the reason why we are so good at overlooking them, and even excluding them in our medial events *en total*, is that each successful mediation executed through them liquidates the indispensable ordeal that is strung out between institutionalization, technology, and the body.

## (4)

I discuss my second point in detail now. While we tend to pay attention solely to the results (e.g., a device, an event, etc.), or to separate agents partaking in an act, the chain of operations is initially composed from acts and agencies linked together, and as such, they can demonstrate the *techné* of the body as a form of expertise or practical skill. Schüttpelz argues that media and medialization are no way arbitrary or complementary to bodily techniques, but they are originated from interactions with other techniques and symbolic acts.<sup>37</sup> If such processes of formation and effect are so obviously disguised, or hidden from their recipients, it is high time the anesthesiological potential in bodily techniques was pursued further. For this end, I refer to Vogl's comments on the nature of interacting with optical media.

Investigating the not so self-evident effects of microscopes and telescopes on human sight in an historical manner, Vogl regards the technological relationship and its development as a *par excellence* execution of denaturalization and anesthesiology.<sup>38</sup> What could Vogl mean by that? As for denaturalization; even basic operations executed with the body are already results of self-technologization, and their mediated nature resurfaces whenever they are brought into interaction with devices. Not only does denaturalization deconstruct the supposed viscerality of motions while at the same time demonstrate their inherently technical aspects, but it also opens up a field for generating new bodily techniques, accordingly. As for medial anesthesiology; what the body truly achieves in its interaction with technology is constructing the mentioned field as an anesthesiological one. In this case, what could be called mediation, does not primarily encompass the event when things are made sensible, audible, visible, etc., by technology. Rather, the very

taking place of a protest and the operations that are necessary to make it happen.

<sup>36</sup> Schüttpelz, "Körpertechniken," 116.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Vogl, "Becoming-Media," 17f. and 20f.

difference or niche is mediated between what is made sensible and what is disguised as common or “natural” to/in mediation. This latter component is also brought to light as a specific form of practical knowledge and exercised routine when we focus on bodily techniques. Consequently, it is not the effect of technology that comes under consideration but the lack or omission of an effect that is nevertheless constitutive to medial experience: in other words, the somatic factor here is technological expertise and not the experience of technology. I suggest that bodily techniques resulting in tactile and tangible experience in fact promote the very aspect of experience that is out of reach, yet no less tactile in itself. This is where, why, and how their anesthesiological potential is exploited.

A telling example of how being regulated by apparatuses requires prior adaptation from our part is inherent to the concept of today’s navigation systems. We are no longer the ones who are given instructions in the traditional way of being pointed to a direction; instead, we are the ones waving our hands to the apparatus. While we are performing the very movements that were directed at us for ages, our bodies are, nonetheless, governed by motion sensors and algorithms in following the machine’s protocol for issuing orders in order to reach our destination with the help of navigation systems. An eminent, yet in a way still self-concealing coupling of rhythm and algorithm pops up here, whose sonic aspect has already been investigated by the media archeologist Shintaro Miyazaki: “Algorhythms’ let us hear that our digital culture is not immaterial, but lively, rhythmical, performative, tactile and physical, and, most importantly, that ‘algorhythms’ are not just normal rhythms. Their transmissions and storages can nowadays be quick enough to deceive our senses, and also their manipulative power—namely their speed and quality of calculations—became in the last decades faster than our human senses.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Shintaro Miyazaki, “AlgoRHYTHMS Everywhere: A

Such an anesthesiology becomes conspicuously intense in tactile interactions, however: Jean-Luc Nancy to whom Jacques Derrida dedicated his work *On Touching*, identifies somatic interventions at the very moment when language fails to incorporate a proper and intact narrative. Whether it is searching for words or the lack of knowledge of an object, deixis suddenly and seemingly unintentionally comes to the person’s help: we point at something, when for various reasons we cannot say its name.<sup>40</sup> (A chain remains notwithstanding; instead of words, it is composed of gestures.) Likewise, philosopher of media Vilém Flusser in his posthumous collection of essays entitled *Gestures* aims for a definition that also does away with the concept of motions expressing intention. In Flusser’s view, gestures are movements of the body for which no satisfactory causal explanation exists. They are intermediaries in a way that they come at an interval, just as Nancy suggests when there is a pause or a lack; nonetheless, gestures are institutionalized and practiced acts. Flusser’s definition, however, also implies that not only do gestures come to the fore when language breaks down, but they cannot be integrated into a narrative either; it is only aspectual why someone did something, the important thing is the chain that is induced or indicated by gestures. “We ‘read’ gesture, from the slightest movement of facial muscles to the most powerful movements of masses of bodies called ‘revolutions,’”<sup>41</sup> comments Flusser, and while he stresses the interactive nature of gestures, he still resorts to the symbolic dimension (e.g. gently pushing someone to make way for oneself). Consequently, reading in his theory is not the deciphering of a cause, but of whatever the gesture represents or expresses.

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Heuristic Approach to Everyday Technologies,” *Thamyris/Intersecting*, no. 26 (2013), 135.

<sup>40</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Birth to Presence* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1993), 175.

<sup>41</sup> Vilém Flusser, *Gestures* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 2.

As far as bodily techniques are concerned however, even Flusser, an eminent thinker of the digital failed to notice that we might already have implemented and operationalized the deixis in our interactions with touchpads and touchscreens. Do we not start most of our conversations with a touch nowadays, tapping on an app, be it Viber, Hangouts or WhatsApp? Or, take the case of swiping left or right as a means of voting in reality or talent shows, or of finding the love of our lives on Tinder: it induced a modification to practices, such as the European index finger's support in reading, which now goes both ways. Furthermore, there is also the remediation of the role of the emperor's thumb in a battle of life and death by icons and avatars of a hand with thumbs pointing up or down; we have come a long way to rediscover our thumb thanks to technological apparatuses, and we are somatically reminded of it each time we take a selfie and use our thumb for pressing the button.<sup>42</sup> We also experience daily that verbal communication has become the matter of bodily techniques.<sup>43</sup> Yet the mutual exclusiveness between linguistic utterances and gestures, which was pointed out by Nancy, is clear to see even today whenever we walk past hip cafés with signs like "No Wi-Fi, talk to each other" – which could be translated as: instead of bodily expertise, resort to verbal acts. But are the scripts, cookies or chains of codes we generate via motions like

tapping and swiping not the actual language that most precisely describes us today?

## (5)

Schüttpelz concludes his essay on bodily techniques with issuing two warnings. Firstly, bodily techniques are simultaneously connected to life-cycles as well as daily routines.<sup>44</sup> It yields to the intermingling of time's cycle, so actions that are practiced once or twice a day, a week or a month, and time's arrow, so rituals that one overtakes in a lifetime from the cradle to the grave while passing them on to their children. Consequently, not only do bodily techniques come together to give out a person's rhythm of life with respect to social and institutional scansion, but they make up his or her individuality by doing so in the first place.<sup>45</sup> Secondly, reducing bodily techniques to the body can be alien to different eras or cultures.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, the idea of bodily techniques cannot be confined to exercises, but in fact refers to ways and means that are characteristic to the body when it interacts with media – language included. Even if theoretical trends try to somatize a certain discourse,<sup>47</sup> which simultaneously yields to purifying the body and reducing every components of the discourse to it, there still remains the bottleneck between the techniques that carry out such somatizing and their relationship to the body.

<sup>42</sup> I owe an extensive thanks to Thomas Telios for drawing my attention to this subject. Also, the thrill of taking selfies as made possible by the evolutionary trait of the opposable thumb is just another stage in our practices for exciting the body. André Leroi-Gourhan, a disciple of Mauss pointed out that the anthropological difference of the thumb had already brought along a series of bodily techniques in this regard. See Anrdé Leroi-Gourhan, *Gesture and Speech* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), 287.

<sup>43</sup> The prediction of the medievalist Paul Zumthor seems to have been fulfilled: the return of the Middle Ages is caught red handed in the body's performative aspects complementing the voice, which makes every act of communication more than sheer verbal utterance. Cf. Paul Zumthor, "Body and Performance," in *Materialities of Communication*, eds. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, K. Ludwig Pfeiffer (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1994), 224f.

<sup>44</sup> Schüttpelz, "Körpertechniken," 112.

<sup>45</sup> This equals no less than stating that bodily techniques are the primary guarantee of our social being, and thus stabilize our status in institutional contexts. Whenever we want to develop or reinvent ourselves, the first thing we change is our routines, and as Professor Shusterman remarked in the discussion of my paper, our smart apparatuses can become eminent partners in this enterprise, with soma maps and breathing lamps providing new possibilities of body-media interactions.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>47</sup> This obstacle of reductionism becomes especially evident in the works of the early and late Michel Foucault, in his *The Birth of the Clinic* and *The History of Sexuality* – I am not completely sure that my essay has successfully dodged this bullet either.

This bottleneck is remarkably demonstrated in cases of exciting the body. Paradoxically, seeking somatic excitement is a perfect example for constructing an anesthesiological field in which self-conditioning is executed via technological means. A late essay by the father of structuralist anthropology Claude Lévi-Strauss argues that bodily excitement serves as a middle-ground for primitive and civilized peoples; in the former, it is institutionalized as a (hunting) ritual, while in the latter, it is reserved mainly for (extreme) sports.<sup>48</sup> In the essay entitled *Le 'Sentiment de la nature': un besoin fondamental* ("The sense of nature: a fundamental need"), Lévi-Strauss observes the common practices that can be associated with one another respectively. For example, preparation for either a hunt or parachuting consists of taking tokens (a favorite pair of socks, a pendant, etc.), using self-suggestion (listening to music), etc.<sup>49</sup> This makes Lévi-Strauss question the fundamental difference between cultures as far as bodily practices go. Another example of bodily excitement can be proposed on the basis of algorithmic manipulation that was discussed earlier. While there is a palpable "temptation to claim that human rhythms are more lively, groovy, and emotional, but ultra-fast computers and digital technology in general are nowadays able to simulate up to a certain extent human errors: artifacts and processes, which are generally perceived as being human or being analog in contrast to the monotonous

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<sup>48</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, "Le « sentiment de la nature » : un besoin fondamental," *Ethnies*, no. 17 (2003), 89.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 91. This short essay's importance could also manifest in today's culture theoretical debates, since it considers the act of exciting another's body in the same context. In an episode of the sadly unappreciated TV series *Scream Queens*, one of the protagonists (all of them are deliberately high school stereotypes) breaks the fourth wall by making a self-reflexive statement: he says that he is an upper-middle class straight white male who can only perform techniques that may reflect homosexual urges during football practices. This enlightens the fact that rituals, whether in a tribe or in college, simultaneously allow and prohibit certain bodily techniques, which concerns almost all parts of our identity that are at the crosshair of heated debates between scholars of cultural studies.

and cold logic of digital machines."<sup>50</sup> As a matter of fact, musical genres like techno can decenter the hearing and dancing subject with computerized microrhythms and the iteration of samples. For instance, in hip-hop a sample can always be recognized in its source, whereas techno neutralizes the sound bit or dissimulates its source. This lack calls for a gesture, which is no other than dancing.

So what if, as I suggested earlier (esp. see fn. 41), the thrill has already been integrated in the act of preparation for an event, as it is all the more conspicuous now, when instead of living in a McLuhanian global village,<sup>51</sup> we have a campfire made up from several individual torches of flickering bright screens, each with its respective agencies and actions. The discourse of addiction regarding smartphones is dull and repetitive after a certain point, but it does shed light on at least one important phenomenon: the thrill or hunger for excitement may be motivated by being up to date with the latest news and memes as soon as they come out, but its satisfaction – now more than ever – is in turn dependent on techniques that the body executes. Additionally, more and more digital processes manipulated and controlled by algorithms happen in real time nowadays. And in the age of fake news, clickbaits, cookies, trackers, and WannaCry viruses, these virtual entities can take a smart apparatus hostage (i.e., deprive one of the satisfaction that somatic acts carry in themselves) exactly because the user clicks or taps on them.

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<sup>50</sup> Miyazaki, "AlgoRHYTHMS Everywhere," 137.

<sup>51</sup> McLuhan's conception – which emanates optimism and pessimism at the same time – refers to the abolition of spatial isolation with the help of new communication technologies, which culminates in an electronic telepresence regardless of one's location and bodily functions. His idea of a new tribal society (see Marshall McLuhan, Quentin Fiore, *War and Peace in the Global Village* [Berkeley: Gingko Press, 2001], 46., and Marshall McLuhan, "Playboy Interview," in *Essential McLuhan*, eds. Eric McLuhan, Frank Zingrone [London: Routledge, 2005], 253.), however, falls short from the perspective of bodily techniques, especially when brought into dialogue with Mauss's and Lévi-Strauss's quoted works.

The common association of a bunch of zombies staring at their phones in the subway has inherently been hypostasized in zombie networks or botnets, of which we can easily become another node through executing operations with our bodies (i.e., clicking on the wrong link). This whole situation reappropriates those operations for epidemic treatment in societies which Michel Foucault already investigated in his lecture series *Security, Territory, Population* at the College de France as early as 1977. According to him, three main models shaped epidemic management throughout history. Firstly, the leprosy model's main feature is the act of exclusion, which via rituals and juridical combinations of laws and regulations brought along the technique of binary division between "us and them," between healthy citizens and lepers in this case. Secondly, the plague model no longer divided people, but partitioned time and space, imposing regulations that closed off areas and rescheduled the daily routines of people with curfew intervals. Thirdly, in case of the smallpox model discipline is not a fundamental factor anymore, and thus segregation and quarantine become obsolete techniques to stop the epidemic: campaigns are launched instead, in order to halt endemic phenomena.<sup>52</sup> Instead of leprosy, pestilence, and smallpox however, we have digital contagions in which case physical confinement is a futile effort to put an end to their spread through direct contact, by touch. Disciplining can no longer make use of the same practices as did in the Classical Age that Foucault was so keen on examining. Foucault's idea of governmentality (i.e., techniques of governing and ruling) notwithstanding, when epidemic management takes an eminent digital twist, two aspects of power with regard to the relationship between body and digital technology become plain to see.

Actually, being governed by apparatuses (even if they are simple everyday objects like a navigation system), induces new exercises for self-technologizing in

the form of self-imposed adaptation of man to new ways of interaction. Putting it bluntly, in order to make use of innovations of the digital, we have to be able to communicate with them, and so far it seems that this type of communication goes against the grain of all immaterializing claims of virtuality, and still relies heavily on somatic performance. Codes as language is produced by gestures that come together into chains of operations that iterate those of the very machine (i.e., its algorithms) to which we intend to issue orders. Contrary to Gumbrecht, power's authentic manifestation does no longer happen exclusively in bodies piling up, and the power of the digital is not of confining nature either, but rather a productive one that forces us to act rhythmically in linking one motion to another – nevertheless, in synch with machinistic algorithms. This may enlighten with a theoretical feedback to Foucault's conjectures on power that with every ruling and conditioning act executed in the way I suggested earlier, such that acts and agents remain intertwined, mediation by digital means in fact helps us rediscover parts and exercises of the body that have been obliterated from our daily routines before.

Moreover, besides power being productive, it is not innovative in itself. To say the least, it is practiced via iterations after conditioning has been incorporated by its subjects. If *par excellence* power is still articulated or demonstrated via practices of handling bodies, then each and every act of opposition to this power is turned back onto itself. The now institutionalized self-conditioning which is required to organize a protest with the help of digital apparatuses is exploited through repeating it on the very side against which it intends to go. Take the example of hacking; it was originally directed against the ruling restriction, and thus transgressed limitations and boundaries, but with hackers employed by the state, it now contributes to the aims of the very power that has brought it to life in the first place as a countermovement; state hackers secretly spy on our personal information parallel with the confinements of confidentiality. With every move,

<sup>52</sup> Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 24f.

people generate hordes of information about themselves, while they are led to believe that no footprint, silhouettes of their bodies or material traces of their actions are left to be found after them in the immaterial digital world made up from zeros and ones. Yet, the one who rules the techniques of the digital can institutionalize (in every aspect of the word) the body exactly by maintaining the self-concealing discourse of immateriality (another purification practice, one which expels the body *en masse*): nowadays, power no longer manifests exemplarily in bodies piling up, but in knowing the techniques that make them tap and click – tick.