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Thesis Abstract

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## Reconstructing Virtual Identities: Investigating Techno Spiritualism, Sexuality, and Sensuality in the Post-Digital Era

Bodies are similar to machines in numerous ways: they require energy to function, interact, and manipulate our environment, rely on intense and intricate networks of information exchange, can be damaged, altered, or upgraded, reveal the extensive depths of our identity, and they are the physical extensions of our consciousness, sending vast wealths of input between the systems that work cooperatively to form a unit and the exterior systems that comprise our universe. Utilizing technology, our bodies even form endless expanses of networks that extend our consciousness beyond physical spaces and into relatively uncharted virtual territories. In the virtual, our spirit can reimagine the depth of formerly restricted physical and social identities in more innovative and provocative contexts. In these brave, new spaces, the body is our only anchor to the monotony and futility of the physical realm. Reveling in the luxurious ethereal harbor of the virtual, how do we define our identity? The former spiritual, sexual, and sensual notations that formed our individual physical relationship to the environment are refreshed and rebuilt, new imaginative roles are invented and appropriated, normativity is reflexively extinguished, intimacy is retrofitted, and fetishes undergo a renaissance of creativity. My work is an investigation of these reimagined techno-spiritualities and the relationship of the virtual insubstantial to the physical body and identity.

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