
Duration and Desire

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ABSTRACT

This essay examines the heterogeneous process of browsing pornography online. It begins with a discussion of the way in which our experiences of leisure and duration occur concomitantly and simultaneously. In these instances, the temporally linear experience of duration becomes disrupted by moments of immersion into a pleasurable activity. A discussion of immersion necessarily addresses the discourse of “disembodiment” among some digital scholars. Through formal analysis guided by existential phenomenology, this conceptual essay offers a new critical vocabulary, specifically, “diffused embodiment,” as a more befitting alternative for describing our temporal and spatial experience of immersion. In the process, this essay examines the ways in which the habits of engaging with the material apparatus of computer technologies and the productively limited narrative framework of online pornography help constitute a heterogeneous and nonlinear temporal experience in the process of browsing online pornography.

INTRODUCTION

While the myth of the internet promises immediate gratification, the interface of online pornography necessitates delays: logging on, finding a site, clicking through, the delay of loading thumbnails, and the delay of waiting for a selected image, series of images, or moving image to appear. High-speed internet access may decrease this delay, but, as Patterson has found, “cyberporn constantly pushes the boundaries of bandwidth; as soon as the technology can immediately deliver full-frame images, streaming video comes on offer, with slower load times. Even with a high-speed connection,

there is still often delay on the side of the site delivering content.” Waiting and looking thus become habit, thereby “inscribing repetition and delay as pleasures of a different order” (Patterson 2004, 109). At some point there is a limit to the amount of waiting a viewer will endure before their browsing experience becomes frustrating, but until that threshold, delay might be said to intensify the pleasure of eventual visibility.¹

This essay examines the heterogeneous process of browsing pornography online. It begins with a discussion of the way in which our experiences of leisure and duration occur concomitantly and simultaneously. In these instances, the temporally linear experience of duration becomes disrupted by moments of immersion into a pleasurable activity. A discussion of immersion necessarily addresses the discourse of “disembodiment” among some digital scholars. Through formal analysis guided by existential phenomenology, this conceptual essay offers a new critical vocabulary, specifically, “diffused embodiment,” as a more befitting alternative for describing our temporal and spatial experience of immersion. In the process, this essay examines the ways in which the habits of engaging with the material apparatus of computer technologies and the productively limited narrative framework of online pornography help constitute a heterogeneous and nonlinear temporal experience in the process of browsing online pornography.

TEMPORAL FACTORS

Research on leisure activities, part of everyday life information-seeking scholarship, has emphasized the conjoined themes of time and pleasure as part of what constitutes leisureliness. A defining feature of leisureliness is the duration of opportunity to participate in a pleasurable activity. In her study of serious leisure activities, Hartel (2007, 236) rejects Bates’s assertion (2005, 4) that the Principle of Least Effort is the most solid result in all of information-seeking research by emphasizing the significant time and effort hobbyists put into their searches. This is especially true of people who derive pleasure from a hard-to-find object, such as the stamp collector, baseball card collector, bibliophile, or genealogist (Case 2002). Similarly, Spink, Ozmutlu, and Lorence found searching for pornography online accounts for more time and effort on the part of users than any other type of search (2004).

Time, as an abstract philosophical construct, has rarely been discussed in information studies. The dearth of analysis about time perhaps owes to the ambiguity of what constitutes time and temporality. Pause for a while, for example, over “abstract temporalities” in Heidegger (2009) and Hegel (1977), and you quickly grasp how fraught philosophical time becomes, often leading to complicated questions of ontology. Yet time has been far from absent within information-seeking scholarship. Savolainen has described it as “one of the main contextual factors of information seeking”

(2006, 110). Savolaninen identifies three ways in which time has been discussed within information-seeking scholarship: as a fundamental attribute of situation and context, as a qualifier of access to information, and as a factor that specifies information seeking as a process (2006, 112).

"First," writes Savolaninen, "time may be conceptualized as a fundamental attribute of situation or context of information seeking" (2006, 112). Scholarship that conceives time in this way has criticized previous assumptions of information seeking as a process characterized by moving and evolving through time and space—from a past to a present, from a present to a future (Kari and Savolainen 2003). Others have criticized an assumption of temporal context as a kind of container, a space where phenomena resides and activity takes place, constrained by certain contextual boundaries (Dervin 1997). Instead, many scholars have argued that information seeking changes over time, depending on an emergent and fluid context of browsing. For example, some scholars have shown the way in which detailed information may be avoided or deferred if there is no immediate need for the information (Chatman 1991). Others have shown that time within everyday life information activities may be a matter of routine or habit, such as reading the newspaper or watching the weather forecast in the morning (Savolainen 1995). Other scholars have shown the ways in which information-seeking environments have been temporarily formed by a particular group of people to perform a particular task (Pettigrew 1999). Still others have shown a managerial imperative that pervades keeping track of time in everyday activities (McKenzie and Davies 2012). All of these, according to Savolainen (1995), are examples of temporal factors as attributes of situation and context.

Information-seeking scholarship has also conceived of temporal factors as qualifiers of access to information. Scholarship of this sort often conceives of time as a scarce resource that constrains access to information. Scholars tend to focus on how quickly people need information (Case 2002, 35), the significance of time affordance (Edmunds and Morris 2000), the way time organizes an activity (Hartel 2010), and the relationship between quality of sources and accessibility (Hardy 1982). The constraint of time, according to Savolainen, "reduces an individual's chances to access and use information" (2006, 116). While these descriptions may assume time always negatively affects information access, Savolainen admits that "in some cases, time pressure may have beneficial consequences because it compels the information seeker to make compromises by concentrating on a few sources that may prove 'good enough' answers to his or her questions" (2006, 116).

Finally, information-seeking scholarship has conceived of temporal factors as qualifiers of the information-seeking process. Typically, this scholarship either expresses information seeking as a chronological process or a nonlinear cycling and recycling. The chronological descriptions of

information seeking analyze those information activities that are problem- and object-oriented. In this understanding, information seeking consumes time until a particular information objective has been met, which may or may not be constrained by a lack of time. Marcia Bates's "berrypicking" model (1989) implies a temporal factor by describing the sequence by which one picks different information sources, suggesting that searching or browsing processes occur a bit-at-a-time. Similar studies conceive of the process of information seeking as a feedback loop, in which seeking follows a linear path that leads from the generation of an information need to an information objective (Feinman et al. 1979). According to these descriptions, the process of information seeking occurs in sequential stages, occurring from past to future, from generation of an information need to an ultimate information objective (Kuhlthau 1993). By contrast, more recent scholarship suggests that the process of information seeking is not bound chronologically. "Instead," writes Salovainen, "information seeking is cumulative, reiterative, holistic and context bound" and characterized as "concurrent, continuous, cumulative, and looped cycles" (2006, 120). Solomon has suggested, for example, that the process of information seeking, particularly in sense-making, does not follow the process of gathering information, processing that information, arranging or rejecting that information, and then applying the information to some task, decision, or question (1997). Salovainen (2006) suggests, via Solomon, that the process is nonlinear, cyclical, recycling, and prone to false starts. In this way, the process of information seeking is not a sequence of events but a heterogeneous process of various temporal dimensions, a concept to which I will return in my analysis of online pornography.

Following McLuhan's discussion of the clock, as soon as it became possible to fix time as something that happens between two points, time became divided into uniform, visualizable units, thus accounting for our sense of duration and impatience with the delay between events. According to McLuhan, "duration begins with the division of time" (2009, 157–58). Bergson and Deleuze have critiqued this linear homogenous understanding of time as a cultural value system that neglects our understanding of the conjoined relationship between past and future. For Bergson,

Duration is not merely one instant replacing another; if it were, there would never be anything but the present—no prolonging of the past into the actual, no evolution, no concrete duration. Duration is the continuous progress of the past which gnaws into the future and which swells as it advances. And as the past grows without ceasing, so also there is no limit to its preservation. (2002, 173)

Drawing on Bergson, Deleuze critiques our culture's emphasis on the present:

We believe that a present is only past when it is replaced by another present. Nevertheless, let us stop and reflect for a moment: How would

a new present come about if the old present did not pass at the same time that it is present? How would any present whatsoever pass, if it were not past at the same time as present? The past would never be constituted if it had not been constituted first of all, at the same time that it was present. There is here, as it were, a fundamental position of time and also the most profound paradox of memory: The past is “contemporaneous” with the present that is has been. (1990, 58)

For Bergson and Deleuze, past and present are not discrete moments on a linear scale but are conjoined and synthesized experiences of *temporality*.

Many of the above studies of information seeking treat time linearly, as a kind of external entity that has the potential to limit access to information, characterize the process of searching, or influence how and what one searches. Time is, thus, always perceived as an objective entity with its own internal rules, affecting and qualifying the search process itself. What these studies miss is the profoundly subjective nature of time, sometimes known as temporality. Whereas time is a condition through which the seeking process takes place, temporality is concerned with the quality or condition of *being* temporal. Temporality is an ontological and phenomenological question of one's relation to time and how one experiences time. Sobchack best discusses the difference between subjective and objective time:

We visibly perceive time as structured differently in its subjective and objective modes, and we understand that these two structures exist simultaneously in a demonstrable state of discontinuity as they are, nonetheless, actively and constantly synthesized in a specific lived-body experience (that is, a particular, concrete, and spatialized history and a particularly temporalized narrative. (2004, 150–51)

Unlike Newtonian time, which primarily concerns itself with time as an entity or event that “flows,” I am concerned here with a transcendental understanding of time as an intellectual structure, in the tradition of Kant (2007) and Heidegger (2009).

FROM ABSORPTION TO “DISEMBODIMENT”

Many pornography websites provide an overflow of images and textual fragments, seemingly arranged in a rambling and chaotic fashion, opposed to concepts of ordering and system. Alongside the myriad of pornographic images on display, the sites also sometimes feature pop-ups, advertisements, flash and animated GIFs, accompanied by background music. Many pornography websites provide an enormous range of selection that seems to promise satisfaction. This concept of design participates in an aegis of “getting what you want” but in excess of it (Patterson, 2004, 109). In this way, pornography websites promise the accessible and visible while delivering the curious and obscure. Such a method of display is an

aesthetic contrivance that draws the wonder, curiosity, surprise, and frustration from the viewer (part of a baroque genealogy of display), creating differential relations between embodiment and technics by placing body and machine, sensation and concept, nature and artifice in ongoing relations of discordance and concordance with each other.

Following Barthes's understanding of sexual cruising (1992), the goal of getting what you want in part allows the viewer to rationalize the pleasure of browsing pornography. To imagine the goal is to project into a moment of perfect satisfaction—obtaining the perfect image, one completely adequate to the viewer's desire. Yet nothing can compare to an imagined perfect image, leaving every image inadequate. The nearly perfect image still only provides momentary satisfaction. Even if the viewer knows they are unlikely to find a better image, they continue to browse, forgoing the pleasures of the known for the pleasures of the unknown. The search continues. Satisfaction is illusive. In deferring satisfaction, desire reproduces itself as desire (Lacan 1992, 2007). Viewers constantly shift to new images, creating a process of browsing in which pleasure derives from the habitual and repetitious delay and deferral of satisfaction. As I say in my introduction, while the myth of the internet promises immediate gratification, the interface of online pornography necessitates delays, inscribing repetition and delays as pleasures of a different order.

The mechanisms through which one views online pornography insist on certain movements of the body, which become habit through repetition: pointing and clicking, pushing the refresh button, scrolling up and down, left and right, opening and closing windows, clicking back and forward, right clicking, fast forwarding through scenes, slowing scenes down, and pausing a moving image, all of which requires moving the mouse to a precise point on a surface. Performing these gestures represents the pre-existing relation between body and machine. While these gestures might be seen as highly interactive, enabling control and manipulation of images, Mitzuko Ito (2005) has shown in her studies of interactional game design that, counterintuitively, the effect is to bring about states of absorptive automaticity, rather than reflective decision-making, blurring the boundaries between viewer and machine, viewer and image.

Masturbation is a good example (though certainly not the only one) of absorptive automaticity that collapses distinctions between subject and object. Unlike Schüll's analysis of machine gambling—in which “the most extreme of machine gamblers speak of bodily *exit*, suggesting that ‘disembodied’ is a more apt descriptor for their relationship with technology than ‘embodied’” (2012, 174)—the pornographic experience is meaningful to viewers precisely because of their bodies. To the extent that it attempts to arouse sexual feelings, pornography functions in and through a direct visceral appeal to the body. Touching in pornography (the smooch of a kiss, the touch of a shoulder) becomes actualized as the touch of one's self,

the autoaffective touch, much in the way Alfonso Lingis describes sensing one's own sensuality (1993, 162), or Merleau-Ponty describes the sense of touch as diffused into the body (1964, 166). This form of self-touching is consciously other-directed, and as such, some might argue, it maintains the subject/object distinction because it is different from forms of self-touching in which one's body and one's consciousness is self-directed. However, one's consciousness is never entirely self-directed, for masturbation demands special focus on an external, if also imaginary, figure of desire. It is precisely because one's consciousness is not directed toward one's own body but toward the figure onscreen that the subject and object remain interlaced rather than distinct. In such a moment, consciousness is diffuse, embodiment disbursed. The viewer is, according to Sobchack, "caught up without a thought (because [my] thoughts are 'elsewhere') in this vacillating and reversible structure that *both* differentiates *and* connects the sense of my literal body to the sense of the figurative bodies and objects I see on the screen" (2004, 77)—a special formation to which I will return later in this essay.

Solicited by figural objects onscreen, viewers are not focused on the particularities of their own literal bodies either. A diffusion of the figural and literal reflects a diffusion of presence. In this context, the viewer's perception of the figure on screen and their sense of self are vague, even as the interaction heightens and intensifies their senses. At the moment one's lived body, in rebound, senses itself in the online pornographic experience, the particular objects that sensually provoke the viewer are perceived in diffuse ways. One's body is the site where the sensual event of representation occurs, where the sexual solicitation by the figure onscreen and one's own self-touching becomes diffused into one's body. Thus, the literal body and the figural bodies onscreen are both differentiated and connected, a dialectic of sexual engagement, and a hyperawareness of one's own body and an absorption by the figural body onscreen. For Schüll, this is the moment at which "players do not act on the game, but become the game" by entering what she calls "the machine zone": "a state in which alterity and agency recede" (2012, 175).

A form of autoeroticism in which one's body and one's consciousness are totally self-directed requires such cognitive reflection and attention toward oneself—what Sobchack calls a kind of "double reflexivity"—that it can and often does undo carnal pleasure. Sobchack points out how it is nearly impossible to tickle oneself, for self-consciousness of our laughing results in it becoming forced. The process of browsing pornography online collapses the distinction between object and subject insofar as browsing for sexual representation participates in perceptual "rebound." At that moment, the search reflects sexual desire itself as necessarily other-directed and requires an object other than oneself "so as to avoid a reflexivity that is so doubled as to cause conscious reflection on sexual desire

itself" (Sobchack 2004, 78). Browsing pornography fails to be pleasurable at the moment it becomes consciously reflective; compulsive desire depends on absorptive automaticity. In these moments, one does not *think* about one's own body, thrust outside of the onscreen image. Instead, viewers are consumed by the image; they feel their bodies as only one side of "an irreducible and dynamic relational structure of reversibility and reciprocity" that has as its other side the figural body onscreen (Sobchack 2004, 79). It is an immersive exchange that allows viewers actually to feel the warmth, moisture, and smoothness of a body.

Such an absorptive experience, as I will show throughout this essay, indicate a new form of temporal and spatial relation. To have lost track of time is to have lost awareness of the uniform units of time, to no longer fix time as something that happens between two points. Such is the power of absorption in the process of pleasurable searching: our subjective sense of time loses linearity. It is only when absorption has been interrupted, when one's body is thrust out of the screen and back into one's chair, that time comes into consciousness again. In these moments of absorption, one is abstracted from the objective and subjective discontinuity that gives meaning to the temporal system past/ present/ future. Sobchack also calls this the "electronic instant" (2004, 158).

Given Schüll's invocation of bodily exit, one might wonder if the body is lost in these moments of time-consuming absorptive activity. Can we describe this absorption of the body in the process of browsing pornographic images as disembodiment? For Vivian Sobchack, electronic culture has occasioned, if not caused, a "crisis of the flesh" that de-centers the body's material gravity. Sobchack fears that the body disappears into the technological apparatus as we increasingly live electronic lives (2004, 161). By contrast, Mark B. N. Hansen characterizes out-of-body experience of absorption as disembodiment (2006). Yet Sobchack and Hansen, each in their own way, misrecognize *diffused embodiment* as *disembodiment*. I will introduce the concept of diffused embodiment shortly. But first, it's productive to unpack how such prominent phenomenologists have come to believe that electronic technologies have left us without a body.

For her part, Sobchack begins with an understanding of how these transformations of temporality change the nature and quality of the space that we occupy as bodies. She describes electronic space, as distinct from cinematic and photographic space, as abstract and ungrounded, and laments that such space can "no longer hold the interest of the spectator/user but has to constantly simulate it" (2004, 158). She moves, curiously, toward an understanding of digital culture as marginalizing or trivializing the body. Sobchack writes:

Its flatness—a function of its lack of temporal thickness and bodily investment—has to attract spectator interest at the surface. To achieve this, electronic space has to construct objective and superficial equiva-

lents to depth, texture, and invested bodily movements. Saturation of color and hyperbolic attention to detail replace depth and texture at the surface of the image, and constant action and the simultaneous and busy multiplicity of screens and images replace the gravity that ground and orients the movement of the lived body with a purely spectacular, kinetically, exciting, often dizzying sense of bodily freedom (and freedom from the body). (2004, 158)

For Sobchack, electronic presence has neither a point of view nor a visual situation, "such as we experience, respectively, with the photograph and the cinema" (2004, 159). Yet online pornography, as we have seen, is part of a larger network of communication that includes the televisual, audiovisual, cinematic, and photographic. Because online pornography is a media convergence, it is difficult for Sobchack to make clear distinctions between the visual situations of electronic images, cinema, and the photograph.

Sobchack's understanding of electronic presence assumes a complete break from the procedures of cinema and photography, one that creeps teleologically forward toward, not the promise of a new utopia, as some hyperbolic accounts of new media claim, but toward a kind of dystopia. Sobchack describes these "disembodying effects of electronic representation" as a "technological crisis of the flesh" (2004, 161). In this new technological culture, she argues for the lived body's "existence and against its simulation or erasure. For, within the dominant cultural and techno-logic of the electronic there are those out there who prefer the simulated body and a virtual world" (2004, 161).

Sobchack's argument about the loss of the body to electronic technology echoes the panic about the prevalence and dangers of online pornography from the time the World Wide Web became publically available, as prominently depicted in *Time* magazine's cover story from July 3, 1995, in which the magazine shocked its readers with one of the first mass-media exposés on the dangers of online pornography (Elmer-Dewitt 1995). The cover features the face of a blond child with vacant eyes staring into the glow of a computer screen that lights his pale face.² Patterson focuses on the illustrations that accompany the article, arguing that they reveal the visual tropes that, in succeeding decades, would become mobilized around the issue of internet pornography. One illustration depicts a naked man, his arms and legs wrapped around a keyboard and computer monitor, seeming to dissolve into the screen.

It is a visual rhetoric of anxiety specifically located at the rapidly evolving interface between corporeal body and computer screen. It is an anxiety concerning the possible lack of control and autonomy of that body when confronted with this technology. On the level of sexuality, it figures the relationship between the body and networked computer as peculiarly and unwholesomely dissolute. (Patterson 2004, 104)

Sobchak's fear of electronic technology dovetails with early fears about the internet as a vehicle for pornography. The similarity perhaps speaks to the long and complex relationship between new technologies and the pornography industry, which has been responsible for the development of a wide variety of media, including the Panoram, cable television, VCR, broadband, 3G mobile services, web hosting services, secure credit card processing, live chat, and banner advertisements, to name only a few (Alilunas 2016).

Partly what makes Sobchack's take on electronic culture so surprising is the way in which electronic images, for Sobchack, are somehow flatter and more superficial than cinematic or photographic images, constituting a complete break between old media and new. In her understanding, electronic images have a harder time holding the interest of the spectator, lacking what she calls "temporal thickness" and "bodily investment" (2004, 158). As a result, for Sobchack, these images have to "simulate" depth, texture, and invested bodily movements. It is certainly true that the projection of the image is decentralized. Whereas the traditional cinematic experience positions the projector centrally at the back of the theatre, and whereas the camera itself, aside from split screens, offers a single point of view, electronic images are less grounded and less hierarchical. They are part of a broad network of communication technologies, which, particularly with pornography, includes a dizzying array of images that bombard the spectator, as I described in the introduction. Yet it is difficult to see how, especially in light of online pornography, the flatness of electronic screens cannot hold the interest of the spectator. If anything, the pornographic experience, as I have shown, is meaningful to viewers precisely because of their bodies (Keilty 2016).

Mark B. N. Hansen, too, has considered "disembodiment" (what he sometimes also called the "tele-absent body" in relation to electronic culture. Hansen is concerned with the way relational architecture installations deploy interventions into existing architectural space precisely as a means of triggering embodied reactions. He writes,

When these reactions subsequently enter into resonance with the media transformations triggering them, they establish feedback loops in which embodiment and information mutually catalyze one another's ongoing evolution, rendering it a coevolution that perfectly expresses the contemporary state of the technogenesis of the human. (2006, 95)

For Hansen, these transformations of built urban space, which are collective individuations of embodied human actors, demonstrate that

embodiment today can only be conceived as *collective individuation*, as an individuation that requires a certain disembodiment of embodied individuals. The reason for this is simple: Because human embodiment no longer coincides with the boundaries of the human body, a disemb-

bodiment of the body forms the condition of possibility for a collective (re)embodiment through technics. (2006, 95)

Hansen paradoxically calls these “indivisions” “embodied disembodiments (or disembodied embodiment),” that is, “material extensions of the viewer’s embodied agency that, while remaining correlated with the latter, nonetheless function autonomously from it” (2006, 92). Hansen asks us to consider the interactive three-dimensional artwork *Worskieng* (Benayoun, n.d.). Wearing three-dimensional glasses, viewers enter a CAVE³ in which the virtual landscape, projected onto the CAVE through cameras, changes as the viewer walks through the space and takes photographs. *Worskieng* situates the viewer in a warzone, surrounded by sounds of war. Each time the viewer snaps a photograph, the viewer causes a disturbance of the landscape, sometimes destructive, sometimes erasing the landscape. In this way, one’s presence disturbs chaotic equilibrium and uses photography as a weapon of destruction and erasure.

The CAVE is a reference to Plato’s allegory of the cave, which contemplates perception, reality, and illusion. But it also attempts to give viewers what simulation demands—immersion. Hansen is interested in the ways in which digital landscapes, particularly those used by architects to model built urban environments, transform “correlatively but autonomously” to one’s body. In these environments, simulation absorbs viewers, and the environment changes according to signals sent by my body through feedback loops. For Hansen, such a moment is a form of “embodied disembodiment” because while we are always embodied, we see the space transforming correlatively with my body and yet autonomously from my body, which Hansen describes as a kind out-of-body experience, disembodiment or dematerialization of the body. To be sure, it is a disorienting, destabilizing, absorbing experience, made more dizzying when a group of individuals participate in such a simulation. Designers and artists of the CAVE have designed their environments with the body’s participation in mind, as seen in the design of *Worskieng*, which uses feedback loops from the body to alter a virtual environment, serving to further disorient, immerse, and absorb the viewer into the virtual landscape. I am, however never disembodied in this electronic presence. Indeed, it is precisely because of my body that I feel disorientation, absorption, and immersion (Richmond 2016). Perhaps Hansen’s only fault is a semantic one; he has misidentified feelings of immersion as disembodiment.⁴

DIFFUSED EMBODIMENT

I want to suggest, instead, that what Sobchack and Hansen attempt to describe is not disembodiment but what I am calling *diffusion*—a temporally and spatially inflected embodied experience. First, I want to make clear that not all feelings of disorientation, immersion, or absorption are

diffusion. I am not attempting to describe dizziness, a state of bewilderment, or faintness, a state of exhaustion or a condition of being without strength. Nor am I attempting to describe the feeling of losing control of one's body, swallowed up or engulfed by a computer à la *Time* magazine circa 1995. Instead, by *diffusion*, I am referring to the sensation of dispersion or distribution through space—that is, a decentering, destabilizing, ungrounding of the body's material gravity, an experience that also characterizes disorientation, immersion, and absorption, concepts that have been repeatedly used by Sobchack or Hansen to characterize the so-called “disembodied” experiences of electronic presence.

In the case of pornography, diffusion is the body's capacity to sense itself, to feel its heat, to feel adrenaline, the moment when subject and object conjoin and one is sensually provoked by the body on screen to feel one's own body, collapsing the spatial distinctions of “here” and “there,” which I describe above in my analysis of masturbation. Indeed, Sobchack has commented on the way in which temporality extends our presence spatially and displaces us both here and there (2004, 151). It is in these moments one's body is both correlative with the body on screen and yet autonomous to it, as Hansen describes, a sensual feedback loop.

Distinctions can be made, of course, between the concepts of disorientation, absorption, and immersion. Applying even the slightest phenomenological pressure to these concepts, however, reveals that the distinctions are not as clear as we might presume. We colloquially use the words interchangeably to describe similar sensations. One can be immersed, absorbed, consumed, engrossed, preoccupied in an activity—different ways of describing disorientation. My understanding of disorientation takes from Sara Ahmed: “If we know where we are when we turn this way or that, then we are oriented. We have our bearings” (2006, 1). Paradoxically, however, if one is immersed in an activity, then one is oriented toward a certain object, a cognitive process of concentration and focus. What makes the sensation of diffusion somewhat paradoxical, then, is its dual oriented/ disoriented nature. When we are immersed in an activity, we lose a conscious sense of our larger environment, our “thoughts are elsewhere.” Our lived body's material gravity becomes decentralized and destabilized. Space and time come to have no cognitively real or assignable boundaries. Diffused into the image onscreen, the viewer is both here and there, a common trope of classic cinematic spectatorship. It is a sensation of space and time in *suspension*, until we are thrust out of the desiring scene, back into our chairs. At that point of intrusion, we become conscious once again of both time and space. Diffusion, then, is the sensation of *elsewhere-ness* or *lost-ness* when seeking pornography online. It is the body's immersion into the desiring scene and the momentary suspension of time and space. The body is primary in this experience. Therefore, it is

not an experience of disembodiment. Instead, it is a sensation of diffused embodiment.

THE TEMPORALITY OF COMPUTER HABITS

Diffused embodiment—in disrupting both uniform units of time and the body's material gravity—is one example of a nonlinear, heterogeneous temporality in the process of seeking and browsing online. Massumi (2002) has shown that habits and skills of the body also disrupt a linear concept of embodiment. In the case of seeking pornography online, these habits and skills, include pointing and clicking, pushing the refresh button, scrolling up and down, left and right, opening and closing windows, clicking back, typing on the keyboard, waiting for pages to open, waiting for videos to buffer, waiting for images to download, waiting for websites to prompt my action, clicking forward, right clicking, or moving the mouse to such-and-such a point on a surface. For Massumi, habits are evidence that the body is not simply in a present that moves from the past to the future. Instead, the body is part of a past-future that continually moves through the present. Massumi writes:

The problem is that if the body were all and only in the present, it would be all and only what it is. Nothing is all and only what it is. A body present is in dissolve: out of what it is just ceasing to be, into what it will already have become by the time it registers that something has happened. The present smudges the past and the future. (200)

In this way, following Henri Bergson, Massumi shows that the past and future are not just strung-out punctual presents. "They are continuous dimensions contemporaneous to every present—which is by nature a smudged becoming, not a point state," Massumi writes (200). If the body were only here and now, then it could not have developed habits and skills, for it would be cut off from its past experiences. A body could not remember and, thus, could not apply these habits and skills to a future or potential. Indeed, these habits and skills represent a pastness primed in the present for a future. "Most of all," writes Massumi, "how could a body change? Where would it find change if it did not have the resources for it already within itself? A body does not coincide with its present. It coincides with its potential. The potential is the future-past potential with every body's change" (200).

The habits and skills of browsing pornography online are part of a muscular memory learned through previous repetition that continuously repeats in a present online browsing process motivated by the potential of an imagined perfect image that will satisfy one's desire. In these moments, my body does not coincide with a cognizable point of here and now. A Euclidean space and linear time excludes both muscular memory

and potentiality in the passing present. It also denies that the computer technologies with which we interact also change. Computer technologies carry their continuities and their potentials when we engage with them, while simultaneously grounding and structuring our temporal and spatial experience.

Indeed, the habits and skills we use to browse the internet develop according to the computer's spatial, temporal, bodily, and technical coordinates. The material demands of computers form what Sobchack calls "existential habits" (2004, 120). Sobchack cites Daniel Chandler to show the ways in which the relationship between ourselves and writing tools structure our experience of time and space. "Since, as phenomenologists have argued," Chandler writes, "such relationships are fundamental to our structuring of experience, it is hardly surprising that they may be experienced as transforming influences" (1992, 92). Sobchack explains the different spatial formations she experiences while using different technologies for writing: "Even in school, under the monitoring eyes of others, writing by hand with pencil or pen was a private, enclosed, and intimate experience of material and social emergence—one that encompassed and protected a world from intrusion as it simultaneously extruded and expressed it" (2004, 115). Sobchack contrasts her experience of writing with a pen and pencil to writing with a typewriter: "Writing at the typewriter felt a less private experience; sitting at the machine somehow demanded a correspondent spatial accommodation of the concrete and artificial quality of the room itself: the sheets of paper next to me, the furniture and books surrounding me" (115). In each of these experiences, Sobchack reveals the ways in which writing technologies differently ground and structure her spatial experience, from privacy and enclosure toward an awareness of the room in which she writes.

Yet it is Sobchack's experience of writing at a computer that I wish to use as a springboard for my own spatial analysis of browsing pornography online. Sobchack writes,

My experience at the computer is more tunnel-like than shell-like, more blindered, occluded, and abstract than expansively material and physical. Its intimate space is less one of intrusion and extrusion than of exclusion, its physical sense is less that of impression and expression than of nearly effortless and immaterial exchange in which my body seems more diffuse—my head and the screen vaguely if intensely conjoined, my hands and fingers and the keyboard and the mouse lightly felt peripherals to a less than solidly felt core. (2004, 115)

Sobchack describes how electronic technology gives rise to particular spatial forms (albeit, for her, in always decorporialized ways). To the extent that diffused embodiment in the process of browsing pornography online carries with it the paradox of both being oriented toward the object of my desire and being disoriented (or unaware of) my surroundings, the

experience is tunnel-like. In this sense, embodied diffusion can be described as an experience of tunnel vision. However, Sobchack's simile of the tunnel suggests as well that the spatial formation takes the shape of a cylinder, one in which I can move only linearly. Instead, the process of seeking pornography online gives rise to a nonlinear, nongeometric, non-Euclidean spatial formation, one that cannot be described in rigidly three-dimensional terms. I experience a shapeless spatial formation during moments of diffused embodiment. That my body's material gravity has become decentralized and destabilized, that time and space have no real or assignable boundaries suggests that diffused embodiment is an experience of space and time as spread out infinitely, not only in a unidirectional way, but in all directions.

This can be seen through existential habits like clicking through content online *ad infinitum*. This movement through digital space is nonlinear because, following Timothy Murray, the visual overflow of images decenters viewers as visual centers for perspective. For Murray, viewers are the "relayer, transmitter, and receiver of imagistic flow rather than the ultimate soul of perspective or the figural center and source of visual illumination" (2008, 46). Pornographic images have often been arranged in a rambling and chaotic fashion, in which we experience an information overflow—inundated with images, pop-ups, flash animation, and animated GIFs, what Deleuze calls the "incessant stream of images" (1989, 267). Murray continues, "Just as digital information systems enhance the intensity of this flow, their displacement of thinking subjectivity by the wonder of data accumulation evoked the very ideal of information that Walter Benjamin argued to be fundamental to the Baroque: the process of storing and schemata to which the emergent libraries of the seventeenth century were a monument" (2008, 46). Our vision and subjective experience is split among a variety of information overflows as we sort through the arrangement, databases, and seeming infinitude of pornography images online.

We move backwards, forwards and diagonally in all directions when browsing online. In moments of diffused embodiment, we *jump* from one screen to another, from one image to another, nonlinearly and multidirectionally. To jump between screens evinces the ungrounded experience of viewing pornography online. Our movement through digital space is imbued with multiple moments of temporal and spatial suspension.

While Sobchack is right that we do not leave an impression within digital space the same as we might while writing or printing on a piece of paper, it would be inaccurate to say that our experience within digital space does not involve expression or that it involves exclusion. To say that digital spatial formations exclude expression neglects new media art, web design, and the very act of writing in which I am engaged on my word processor at this very moment. To say that digital spatial formations involve exclusion

neglects the vast network of sexual sociability of online pornography, in which viewers are invited to participate in a community of masturbators—or the countless other ways in which the internet has been made a profoundly social experience (e.g., social networking sites). It also neglects the exposure of the computer screen in a public place. While much of pornography is probably viewed in private (albeit publicly broadcast), computer screens in public spaces, particularly on mobile devices, often invite glances and glares that constitute, neither direct involvement nor exclusion, but a form of passive or bystander involvement, a spatial formation that is both public and private but also both here and there, part of the space but not actively involved in it.

NARRATIVE TEMPORALITY

The narrative arc of pornographic movies online creates a sense of expectation and duration that also disrupts temporal linearity and teleology. Viewing and browsing, like reading, as Serantes (2016) has shown, has temporal and spatial dimensions. The experience of browsing and watching pornographic movies online is perpetual and recursive. This partly owes to the fact that viewers don't seek out and watch pornography online for a specific "ending." Following Lacan (1992), viewers rationalize the pleasure of seeking by imagining the goal of perfect satisfaction—obtaining the perfect image, one completely adequate to the viewer's desire. Viewers constantly jump to new images, creating a process of seeking in which pleasure derives from the habitual and repetitious delay and deferral of satisfaction. In this way, browsing pornography online constitutes a recursive and perpetual temporal experience, in which an "ending," like satisfaction, is an illusive temporal category as well as an illusive figural place in which to stop browsing.

In addition, many pornographic videos have a limited narrative framework, thereby extending the imaginative possibilities (of fantasy narratives) that viewers might project onto the video. This is especially true in online pornography, where the narrative form of pornographic videos is made even less continuous by only giving viewers access to short clips of longer pornographic movies. The existence of short clips partly owes to the material limits of computer memory/ space in streaming videos online. The limited size of most random-access memory (RAM), or computer storage space, on home computers does not "buffer" longer videos as quickly as shorter videos, which require less random-access memory. "Buffering" occurs when the computer is unable to process the flow of digital data that carries the video at the same rate of occurrence that the events of the video should transpire to us in "real time." "Real time" is a narrative technique in which the events depicted within the video take place entirely within the span of the depiction and at the same rate. When the computer cannot buffer data as fast as the flow of data, the narrative is

often disrupted, creating a stagnated sequence of events, a discontinuous narrative of stops and starts.

Buffering is a defeat of expectations that disrupts temporal linearity and intensifies eventual visibility. Intensity increases through the potentiality of disruption and discontinuity as viewers are held in suspense and anticipation (even expectation) of disruption, discontinuity, and sexual climax. Massumi writes:

Intensity would seem to be associated with non-linear processes: resonance and feedback that momentarily suspend the linear progress of the narrative present from past to future. Intensity is qualifiable as an emotional state, and that state is static—temporal and narrative noise. It is a state of suspense, potentiality of disruption. . . . It is not exactly passivity because it is filled with motion, resonance. And yet it is not activity, because the motion is not the kind that can be directed (if only symbolically) toward practical ends in a world of constituted aims and objectives (if only on screen). (2002, 25)

It is important to remember that while the nonlinear processes associated with intensity are not teleological object-oriented forms of browsing online, they are also motivated by the viewer's desire for sexual satisfaction. Such intensity, according to Massumi, enhances an image's effect on the viewer. Thus, narration, duration, and expectation combine in browsing online pornography to create a nonlinear, nonteleological, discontinuous temporal formation that intensifies the pleasure (and frustration) of the seeking and viewing experience.

Intensity is indeed associated with nonlinear processes, even as it is associated with linear temporal experiences, such as expectation. To the extent that expectation anticipates what comes next in a progression, to the extent that expectation projects into the future an anticipated occurrence or goal, expectation is a linear process and experience. In such an experience, viewers have not lost track of time. Indeed, viewers track time linearly toward a future occurrence. One is waiting for something or forecasting something to happen. Doing so requires an awareness of past and present in a linear way: something has happened and one is at present waiting for something to happen.

Insofar as intensity and suspense constitute an affective overflow of the linear processes of expectation, they can be distinguished from and interlinked with expectation. Massumi has described such an experience as both superlinear and linear (2002, 26). According to Massumi, it is the suspension of invariance that distinguishes the affective overflows of suspense and intensity with the invariance of expectation. He describes the phenomenon of affective overflow simultaneous with linear flow this way: "As if an echo of irreducible excess, of gratuitous amplification, piggybacked on the reconnection to progression, bringing a tinge of the unexpected, the lateral, the unmotivated, to lines of action and reaction. A change in

the rules" (27). When moments of excessive affect, such as intensity and suspension, accompany linear expectation, one experiences time in the process of anticipation as both linear *and* above, beyond, or besides linearity. Thus, the process of anticipating the imagined perfect image is both linear and superlinear. Browsing for an imagined perfect image intensifies and becomes increasingly suspenseful the greater we expect (or the closer we believe we are coming) to find that image and experience pure sexual satisfaction. Yet, as we have seen, the process is always left unfulfilled, and we are forever approaching, forever coming closer but never arriving at an end. I am in a state of *arrivant*: awaiting with suspense, expectant intensity, or intense expectation. I experience suspense above, beyond, or beside expectation. Indeed, it is the linearity of expectation upon which suspense intensifies. In other words, it is the increased expectation of something happening that affectively overflows into suspense.

The distinction between expectation and the sensations of suspense and intensity turns on reflection and cognition. For Massumi, sensation involves a "backward referral of time"—in other words . . . sensation is organized recursively before being linearized, before it is redirected outwardly to take its part in a conscious chain of actions and reactions" (2002, 28). Accordingly, suspense and intense expectation turn inward and are folded into the body,

except that there is no inside for it to be in, because the body is radically open, absorbing impulses quicker than they can be perceived, and because the entire vibratory event is unconscious, out of mind. Its anomaly is smoothed over retrospectively to fit conscious requirements of continuity and linear causality. (Massumi 2002, 29)

Intense expectation and suspense become linearized and reduced to rational expectation when they are consciously reflected upon. The process of writing about such sensation, in which I am engaged, is a process of linearization because retrospection requires a linear causality of events. Part of what makes suspense and intensity superlinear is the extent to which they are processes that suspend time through absorption into anticipation, even as they participate in and rely on linear expectation. It is the seeming permanence of *arrivant* (always expecting, always arriving, always coming) that intensifies suspense and frustrates the browsing process. Indeed, Sobchack claims that electronic presence is bound up in "impatient desire," and, of course, impatience is the frustration of relentless desire or expectation (2004, 153). Such permanence, such a lasting continuance of time is the definition of *duration*.⁵ In the case of online pornography, it is the time during which browsing continues and the time during which we anticipate eventual visibility of an imagined perfect image. Thus, one continually dwells in duration and experiences a temporally interlinking linearity and superlinearity in browsing for pornography online.

Finally, it is noteworthy, too, that these clips frequently, though not always, depict the movie's sexual climax, cutting much of the narrative from the scene. This serves to further extend the imaginative possibilities of narrative that surround the sexual climax by providing an even more limited narrative framework upon which a viewer might project a fantasy narrative. It is rarely the case that the sexual climax is also the narrative climax. In most pornographic movies, the narrative content continues for at least a short time after the scene of orgasm. Part of what makes the sexual climax desirable is the ability for viewers to project a narrative *through* the moment of sexual climax, rather than having sexual climax mark a complete break with a projected fantasy narrative. Moreover, the narrative arch of online pornographic videos is made less continuous and temporally linear by the fact that viewers control the pace and direction of the movie. Viewers can start, stop, replay, fast-forward, or rewind the video through the perpetual habits of engaging with the computer.

These short clips digitally manifest nonlinearity through the editing of time-based footage nonsequentially. In this way, according to Munster, "multiple versions of the past can co-exist with the present and be accessible from any given moment" (2006, 100). These clips frequently chop-up the linear sequence of events of a larger pornographic movie, and viewers do not always find the clips in sequential order when browsing an adult video hosting service (e.g., PornHub). Indeed, Munster has characterized digital time as sequential and nonsequential variation (173). Time is sensed in the browsing of these videos as "not primarily successive instants but is composed of non-linear periods and cycles" (100). This is especially true when viewers find video clips that overlap and repeat the narrative sequence of the larger narrative, or when the sequence of events have been rearranged even with a single short clip. Taken as a whole, the clips of a larger pornographic video represent different edits of past and present together and unfold different moments. Munster refers to such a phenomenon as "multiple co-existing sequences of time" (100). Viewers can also reaccess and repeat these clips, reordering them to affect the outcome of the longer video's narrative. In this way, temporality has become dispersed through the lack of narrative coherence.

For Munster, these nonlinear sequences of time affect the existential habits and skills of engaging with the computer and internet, involving "a new habituation for the body and contributes to the formation of new kinds of motor-sensory memories. The digital production of virtual time can therefore be said to operate multimodally. Temporality is sequentially compressed and yet new types of rhythms become part of the virtual experience" (2006, 100). Often, the intentional narrative of the longer video is unknown to viewers while they design their own discontinuous narrative through a simple click of the mouse, jumping from one clip to another, starting and stopping the sequence of events at one's desire. In this way,

viewers' existential habits create new rhythms and flows in the browsing experience. Jumping from one clip to another, piecing together a narrative, viewers are not stretching out a flattened instant or creating a inconsistent sequence of events but extending a moment of one's projected narrative. Viewers therefore move sideways through narrative, rather than backwards or forwards. "It is perhaps this lateral rearrangement," writes Munster, "that accounts for the extended present moment as the frequently experienced duration of digital time." In this way, time is "compacted into stacked and varying rhythms" (101). Indeed, the process of jumping from clip to clip underscores an existence of multiple durations that become compacted and form the rhythm of and within the extended moment of one's projected narrative. This kind of time—an extended moment of multiple durations and a disorganization of the sequencing of events and repeating of events to create an inconsistent narrative—is radically different from the teleological linearity of objective time. Sobchack best describes the discontinuity and multiplicity of electronic time this way: "The regulative strictures and linear teleology of objective time now seem to turn back in on themselves recursively in a nonlinear structure of equivalence and reversibility" (2004, 156–57).

The ability of viewers to manipulate the narrative and temporal sequence of events of pornographic clips online reveals the way viewers as participants actively engage in playing with time in browsing for pornography online. Murray has described the ways in which viewer-participants activate time in his analysis of new media CD-ROMs: "Time is not so much experienced cinematically as a passing of time or recollection of memory," writes Murray, "but is *activated*, as Deleuze might say, as the play or thought of temporality" (2008, 202). Distinct from classic accounts of cinematic time, which involves a present informed by a narrative of collective past events and an expansive future, electronic time involves a present informed by the passing present of existential habits and skills.⁶ In browsing pornography online, viewers can play with time through these existential habits and skills. For example, the ability to pause or freeze the pornographic moving image with a click of a mouse allows viewers to manipulate the time and narrative of the image and the temporal experience of browsing online. We can therefore select any moment from the moving image and manipulate its temporal structure and, in turn, our own relation to that image, from a relation grounded in the value of streaming forward to a relation grounded in the value of possession and "presentness" (Sobchack 2004, 157).⁷ In this way, viewers experience time as something malleable, although not necessarily something viewers can completely control. Indeed, however much viewers might play with time, time in the browsing process is always already structured and grounded through passing present, anticipation, expectation, diffused embodiment, duration, delay, and sensations.

CONCLUSION

This essay has expanded our understanding of time within information studies to include temporality, that is, the quality or condition of *being* temporal. The experience of subjective time does not adhere easily to behaviorist, positivist, or quantitative modes of description that are prevalent among scholars of information-seeking scholarship. As a result, this essay has relied upon formal analysis guided by existential phenomenology to treat time as a profoundly and fundamentally subjective experience, grounded in our embodied encounters with pornography and the technological apparatus of the computer. The process of browsing pornography online has the capacity to transform our temporal existence and alter our subjectivity.

Temporality, in the process of seeking pornography online, is a multivariant experience. It consists of multimodal, superlinear, linear, nonlinear, backward, compressed, discontinuous, unstable, diffused, and disbursed subjective experiences of time in our encounters with computer technologies. These different forms of time can be experienced sometimes together, sometimes separately, but always cohering in the body and constituting embodied existence. In this context, time has not been treated as an entity or event external to ourselves, as an object, with its own internal rules of flow, affecting an external browsing process. Leisure activities, of which browsing pornography is a part, partly grounds and structures time in the browsing process as the duration of opportunity to participate in a pleasurable activity. Its close association with duration can also be seen in the delay and deferral of satisfaction that rationalizes the process of browsing pornography online. Duration also characterizes moments of diffused embodiment, when we are lost in thought, without the cognitive reflection on discernable boundaries of time and space. These moments reveal the body's capacity to sense itself in a process that conjoins subject and object, disrupting linear time and Euclidean space by being lost in thought and by being diffused with the image on screen.

The skills and habits of engaging with computer technologies also reflect the ways in which the material demands that technology ground our experience of time and space in browsing for pornography online, decentering the body's material gravity and imbuing movement through digital space with multiple durations. The narrative arc of pornographic moving images and their distribution online through short clips serve to disrupt linear temporality by multiplying moments of climax and allowing viewers actively to engage in playing with time in browsing pornography online.

NOTES

1. This close association between frustration and pleasure echoes Freud's concept of cathexis. For Freud (1927), the psychic energy found in the id, which is responsible for satisfying basic needs and desires, invests itself in an object, idea, or person in order to satisfy that desire. Freud represented frustration in libidinal desires as a blockage of psychic energies

- that have, or would eventually have, built up and require release in alternative ways, usually through fixation and the enjoyment of sexual objects ("object-cathexes"). Pornography is an object-cathexis, intensified by the delay of the technological apparatus.
2. This iconography seems inspired from John Carpenter's *Village of the Damned* (1995), which premiered only a few months earlier. It brings together the promises of the internet as global village with the iconography of a cyber-village of the damned. The following year, then-first lady Hillary Clinton would publish *It takes a Village* (1996), which focuses on the impact individuals and groups outside the family have on children. These cultural artifacts speak to a panic around the prevalence of pornography online as part of the broader American "Culture Wars" in the 1990s, and specifically what impact it has on bodies and children. For more on this particular cultural moment, see Wendy Chun (2006).
 3. Cave Automatic Virtual Environment
 4. Hansen's CAFE example does not demonstrate his point, since the experience remains centered in a single subject's experience. A constructivist perspective undercuts the foundations upon which he makes his supposed distinction.
 5. See *Old English Dictionary*, s.v. "duration," accessed June 17, 2017, http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50071018?single=1&query_type=word&queryword=duration&first=1&max_to_show=10.
 6. Sobchack (2004) characterizes cinematic time as something that exists simultaneously with objective time, demonstrating a state of discontinuity that is nevertheless coherent.
 7. In comparing the temporal experience of the cinema with that of the photograph, Sobchack writes, "The significant value of the streaming forward that informs the cinematic with its specific form of temporality (and differentiates it from the atemporality of the photographic) is intimately bound to a structure not of possession, loss, pastness, and nostalgia but of accumulation, ephemerality, presentness, and anticipation—to a presence in the present informed by its connection to a collective past and an expansive future" (2004, 151). I would add, however, that futurity and anticipation also structure the temporal experience of searching pornography online.

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