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Digital Suicide and the Biopolitics of Leaving *Facebook*
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"Everyone now wants to know how to remove themselves from social networks. It has become absolutely clear that our relationships to others are mere points in the aggregation of marketing data. Political campaigns, the sale of commodities, the promotion of entertainment – this is the outcome of our expression of likes and affinities." These are the opening words for the *Facebook Suicide Bomb Manifesto* written by Sean Dockray and first published in the iDC mailing list May 28, 2010. Dockray urges *Facebook* users to reclaim their lives and leave social networks by committing a digital suicide attack. *Facebook Suicide Bomb Manifesto* is exemplary of the emergence of slow media, which in the context of this paper is analysed as a form of politicised asceticism against the surrounding and all-consuming network culture permeated by different forms of capitalism.

This article approaches the problem of leaving *Facebook* focusing especially on two art projects *Seppukoo.com* and *Web 2.0 Suicidemachine,* both established in 2009 and both offering digital suicide from *Facebook* as an outcome.[1] These artworks are understood not as representational identities, but rather as nonhuman actors with both incorporeal and material capabilities to affect and be affected, create sensations and be sensed, to set into different kinds of relations with other forces and their capabilities (Parikka, "Ethologies" 116). This approach is used to trace a complex chain of political, economical and even legal questions digital suicide gives birth to. Concurrently, the research stance is media critical by nature. This, however, does not mean judging or valuating the research material from the basis of good and evil. On the contrary, critical media studies imply here strategies of thinking with the material and penetrating the predominant discourses of social media hype in order to understand the deep structures of our contemporary digital culture.

Our life from social relations, economy to interests is extensively tied into different kinds of social networks. The ubiquitous web produces what Félix Guattari calls "machinic subjectivities" ("Machinic" 158): it provides a sensation of "belonging to something," of "being somewhere" along with the "sensation of forgetting oneself." It is in these networks where we individuate ourselves according to pre-established categories such as age, profession or sex, for instance. At the same time these networks work on a level prior to any readymade categories and identities giving us sensations, affects and relations that are not yet individuated (cf. Lazzarato "Machine"). In the following, I will argue how *Facebook*'s production of machinic subjectivities is tied to the political economy of owning and using the data provided by the users of the service. This question is approached via techniques of disconnection.

Ulises A. Meijas has aptly noted that in academic studies of social media the question of democracy and civic participation often neglects the fact that most of the popular social media

sites are privately owned businesses, which aim to maximise profit (604). The ubiquitous web is not neutral but brings along ideologies, desires and behaviour models. It is this over-commercial culture against which digital suicide as an anomaly seems to attack. Quite paradoxically it tries not to end "life" but separate it from "economics" and "politics" through suicide.

The theoretical basis for analysing digital suicide is found in Michel Foucault's concept of biopolitics developed in his lectures at the Collège de France 1975-76. While there have been various interpretations of biopolitics, I will follow Alexander Galloway and Eugene Thacker's suggestion to use the concept in a very specific manner: as biopolitics of the network culture. Within the limits of this article two different emphases follow this positioning. Firstly, *Facebook* is considered as a technological environment. This means the life of the users is regulated and moulded via different kinds of practices designed inside the environment. Secondly, an interest is given to the politics of data mining and turning people into informatics.

Framing Digital Suicide

While *Seppukoo.com* and *Web 2.0 Sucidemachine* along with the *Facebook Suicide Bomb Manifesto* have gained a lot of attention in the media, this is not the first time avant-garde art has adopted suicide to reveal the underlying mechanisms of current society. Following the media archaeological traces of suicide machines we can point out a few illustrative examples. The idea of a suicide machine was already present in the *(Unspeakable) Ultimate Machine* built by Claude Shannon in the 1950's. The Ultimate Machine was a simple wooden box with a switch on the side. When the switch was turned on, the lid of the box opened and a mechanical hand reached from the box to turn off the switch. Subsequently the hand retracted back inside the box leaving the box in its initial state. As one would expect from the "father of the information theory" The Ultimate Machine worked with Boolean logic having only two possible values "on" and "off."

A more recent example is the case of the Luther Blissett Project, one of the most famous cases of committing a virtual suicide. In 1994, Luther Blissett became a multiple-use name (nom de plume) for a number of artists and activists around Europe. It was an open network but its core was in Bologna where a group of people had based the project. Numerous pranks were conducted under the name of Luther Blissett some trying to show the problems prevailing in the cultural ambience and others just for the sake of exploiting the gullibility of the press and people.[2] The project was planned to have a five year cycle and in 1999 it had reached the end. It was, however, not taken down quietly. In a letter dated September 6, 1999 the Luther Blissett Project announced that they would commit a seppuku, a formal Japanese ritual suicide, which often was performed in front of spectators. Did the people behind Luther Bissett kill themselves? Most certainly not, but they made a ritual performance out of the abandonment of their multi-use name identity. The pseudonym Luther Blissett was not to be used by the project anymore. The seppuku of Luther Blissett was in essence a virtual suicide. But as the Project members state, it was not an act of relinquishment or nihilism, instead they were choosing life. It was said to be a birth of something new (Luther Blissett Project).

One of the first actual digital suicide attempts was by Cory Arcangel, when in December 2005 he decided to delete his Friendster account as a part of the launch of the Dec/Jan issue of *The Believer* magazine. He called it a "Friendster Suicide." Arcangel explained his urge for digital suicide with both personal reasons saying that he "just can't take it [Friendster] anymore" and performative reasons inviting people to watch him do it online (Arcangel). Almost simultaneously a more political digital suicide emerged. It was targeted against social networks making profit with their users and shared content and exploiting real friend networks for commercial means. For example, MyOwnspace.fr published an Anti-MySpace Banner Wizard for users of *MySpace*. It declared "Good Karma: suicide yourself… from MySpace." The idea was that the users would leave a site like MySpace, which aimed to make profit from the users, and join profit-free sites such as *MyOwnspace* (cf. Borelli).

These previous cases of suicide technology contribute directly or indirectly to the emergence of *Seppukoo.com* and *Web 2.0 Suicidemachine* in 2009. [3] It is remarkable how simultaneously both of these art works appeared. *Seppukoo.com* by Les Liens Invisibles was presented in November during the Turin Share festival and *Web 2.0 Suicidemachine* by moddr_ in December in Rotterdam's Worm exhibition (Borelli). In fact, the similarities between these art works extend from their release dates to the ideology and background of both of the groups or collectives.

By way of illustration let us start with the Les Liens Invisibles, which is an Italy-based artist duo comprised of Clemente Pestelli and Gionatan Quintini whose work is openly political and controversial. Paraphrasing their own description Les Liens Invisibles has been infiltrating the global communication networks in order to join and expand the invisible connections between art and real life since 2007 (Les Liens Invisibles). Their main target has been both the hype of social media and the blind trust in online services. Moddr_ on the other hand was run by a group of alumni from the Media Design MA course, based at the Piet Zwart Institute in Rotterdam. The idea was to form a place for young artists and hackers where they could create projects without restrictive and time consuming bureaucracy. Their practices involve modification (modding) and re-creation of already existing technology. They state that their mission is to display a critical perspective on contemporary media that is labeled "new" through artistic practices (Moddr_).

The ambition to expose and reveal fallacies and problems in digital culture via art refers to an openly ideological stance. The work of these two groups or collectives criticises, at least indirectly, the relations of money and power behind social media services but also the naivety of their users. However, more than the ideology behind these works I am interested in the methods and tactics moddr_ and Les Liens Invisibles are using: they manipulate and exploit the technology of the objects they are criticising. Both *Seppukoo.com* and *Web 2.0 Suicidemachine* rely on the vulnerability of *Facebook* and exploit its own practices and process of logging in and deactivating the account.

Since opening, both of these art projects have gained interest in media. [4] While the publicity and popularity of digital suicide grew it was no surprise that *Facebook* threatened both of these art projects with legal action. [5] According to letters from the *Facebook* representatives, published on Seppukoo.com (Seppukoo, "Re:") and Suicidemachine.org (Suicidemachine, "Re:"), these art works solicit *Facebook* user login information, access *Facebook* accounts that belong to others, scrape content from *Facebook* and infringe *Facebook's* intellectual property rights. These actions were demanded to be stopped immediately. In addition, *Facebook* tried and at least partially managed to block and remove *Seppukoo.com* and *Web 2.0 Suicidemachine* from their site. [6]

In a sense these cases demonstrate how avant-garde art uses different kinds of tactics to create breaks and blackouts in our daily routines in order for something new to appear. Often these tactics are reduced merely to vandalism, sabotage or illegal actions. Action such as this, according to Jussi Parikka, is a common take on software art ("Ethologies" 116): it "is often not even recognized as 'art' but is defined more by the difficulty of pinning it down as social and cultural practices." Ideologically this is of course also the purpose of *Facebook*'s Cease and Desist letters. They do not acknowledge *Seppukoo.com* nor *Web 2.0 Suicidemachine* as artworks. Quite the contrary they are judged as harmful and illegal objects violating the rights of *Facebook* and causing a threat to privacy for *Facebook* users.

Now what we are dealing with here is exemplary of "bad objects" (Parikka and Sampson 11) or "evil media" (Fuller and Goffey 141). However, the idea is not to consider *Seppukoo.com* or *Web 2.0 Sucidemachine* from an outside vantage point and expose them to valuations of "good" or "bad" but to go beyond the claims of good and evil. It would likewise be biased to claim that these objects are harmful (the *Facebook* view) or that they are emancipatory (the activist view). Instead I propose following Parikka and Sampson (11) that we should look at the potentials of these objects. By way of illustration, this position means asking what kind of connections they make and how they express and are expressed in network culture. These objects are not external to

Facebook but instead are built and constructed with and partly within the site. The mere existence and publicity of *Seppukoo.com* and *Web 2.0 Suicidemachine* point out that there is a need and interest for digital suicide. Simultaneously they reveal the role that digital networks play in human lives these days and how our life is interconnected with these networks to an extent that we can conceptualise our interactions with machines and technology with notions such as 'life',' death' and 'suicide'.

Biopolitics & Business Models

Digital suicide points to a larger theoretical field of life, death and technology and their entanglements; what is living (and dying) in information networks. Following Galloway and Thacker (70) we need to understand how networks structure our views of the world. For Galloway and Thacker the basis for theory of the networks is to understand that networks are not neutral or democratised per se but instead their forms of organisation are in many ways politicised. Hence we need to analyse singularities peculiar to networks such as modes of organisation, power relations and different affects, relations and forces between human and non-human actors according to which their world is composed (Parikka "Ethologies" 116; Galloway and Thacker 70). To do this Galloway and Thacker suggest that we need to take the concept of biopolitics, discussed by Michel Foucault in his late writings and lectures, and use it in a very particular context of network culture.

Concentrating on the birth of biopolitics Foucault, describes how the biological came under state control. In particular he outlines how the focus of the state shifts from the threat of death towards a more subtle governing over life that is manifest, for example, in birth control and population management. Ever since biopolitics has been used in various contexts from discussing medicine to concentration camps and film philosophy. In the case of digital suicide we can extract two important and interconnected fields of what Foucault's biopolitics approaches: environment and informatics.

Paraphrasing Galloway & Thacker (71), biopolitics is at least partly created by (new) technologies through which populations are governed and organised. Adopting their ideas, one can argue that one of these technologies is *Facebook*'s virtual environment. Foucault defines the role of an environment as one of biopolitics' starting points. While Foucault's brief example considers epidemics linked to swamps he emphasises that we need to extend the concept of an environment also towards the built and urban environment. Hence, for the biopolitics of digital suicide the starting point is the digital environment in which it appears.

Facebook is an environment, which according to the capitalist system, provides us subjectivities and assigns to various processes of identification via categories of identity, gender, nationality etc. (Lazzarato "Machine"). Humans inside this environment are defined as beings of "in-between, plugged into and connected to a variety of possible sources and forces" (Braidotti 41). The environment offers different possibilities for the users to choose from (cf. Lazzarato, "From Capital-Labour" 192). On a very basic level people share data of themselves including personal information such as sex, age, political and religious views. Many have their work and study records visible for others to see. On a second level users share photos, notes and interact with each other by writing wall posts or sharing links. On a third level users use applications which are not made by *Facebook* but which work in the environment and often use the private data of the users. These include, for instance, games and quizzes but also statistical information about who is connected to who or age demographics of users *Facebook* connections.

The user agency in social media in general and *Facebook* in particular is built around user created content, social participation and information.[7] José van Dijck has analysed how these boundaries are redrawn from the perspective of commercial firms whose interest lies less in the actual content and more in the "vertical integration of search engine with content, social

networking and advertising" (42). In his critique of the hype of participatory culture, users are seen as *content providers* and *data providers*. The positive potential of social media lies in content production, which enable, for example, the users to create cultural products without costs and sharing them for free, but in contrast the users have no power over their data distribution (Dijck 47, 51, 53).

Now as it is known privacy poses a problem for social networks. When one signs up to *Facebook*, one renounces one's right to private information. According to *Facebook* the service is all about sharing information with others. These others, however, range from your friends and contacts to third parties affiliated with, not the user, but the company. In the Privacy Policy *Facebook* explains how it tracks the data and actions of its users. Everything is monitored from *Facebook*'s own functions to platforms created by third parties. One significant actor with and to whom information is shared are advertisers. Not only does *Facebook* provide information to advertisers but also mines it for them following users' consumption habits. In the name of "useful social experience" *Facebook* also provides information for certain third parties when the user visit their sites (Facebook "Privacy").

It is the shared data that becomes a key resource for biopolitics and simultaneously informatics rise as its core methodology of organising and regulating population. Forecasts, statistical estimates and overall measures, which Foucault (246) describes as mechanisms of biopolitics, are now used by private enterprises for commercial purposes. Thus, population ceases to mark a group of people defined by geographical location. Instead population is understood as a node or a cluster of people organised through individualisation and collectivisation (Galloway and Thacker 72). These notions imply that, while *Facebook* makes the user experience of the service as personal as possible, it is in fact, not interested in the single individual, but a mass comprised of individuals with similar interests. This is indeed a fine example of biopolitics and also in line with Web 2.0 business models analysed by Kleiner and Wyrick (72). Web 2.0 services are interested in humans as a mass of individuals which comprise a chunk of data. Or as Lyotard puts it, "all phrase universes and all their linkages are or can be subordinated to the sole finality of capital" (171). An evident example of this kind of manipulation and control is targeted ads which appear on a user's *Facebook* pages. According to *Facebook* (Facebook "Advertising") these ads are based on a user attribute, such as age, gender, location, or interest. Individuals and their information are turned into demographics and audiences, or more crudely, masses whose desires and consumptions are manipulated and controlled.

Here we can see a neoliberal shift from the state control written by Foucault towards control executed by privately owned business ventures and IT corporations such as *Facebook*. *Facebook* represents a business model in which user-created value is captured and exploited by a private enterprise (Cf. Kleiner and Wyrick 2007, 3). In this business model social life becomes commodified and hence the social becomes a part of the economy instead of the economy being a part of the social (Mejias 607). Internet security company F-Secure sums the premises quite simply in their first tip for safer facebooking: "Facebook is a business. It exists to take your online activity and turn it into revenue. Facebook will always be free. But there is a cost. You're paying by being exposed to advertising and allowing limited disclosure of your online activity." (F-Secure.) Concisely, when you bring your life, that is for example social connections, political opinions, habits and likes, in *Facebook*'s environment, you simultaneously allow your life to become a subject of both potential and actual transactions.

Disconnection & Premediation

Facebook 's biopolitical business model evolves with its users. It is based on moulding the environment according to the needs of informatics. As such it is a media ecology that constantly produces itself in order to create new forms of making money and keeping the users, their main product, on their website. Kleiner and Wyrick have, quite polemically, argued that "Web 2.0 is

not to be thought of as a second-generation of either the technical or social development of the internet, but rather as the second wave of capitalist enlosure of the Information Commons" (5). Following the trend of ubiquitous or pervasive computing everything is a potential node, everything from social relations to hobbies and interests are taken inside the network and transformed into commodities. As described by Parikka ("Digital") and Sampson (Sampson) capital is a machine of capture trying to absorb everything inside its system, often successfully.

Figure 1. Facebook

The capitalist system of *Facebook* does not only satisfy the current demands of the users but also anticipates future demands and reacts to them beforehand, making them happen (cf. Lazzarato, "From Capital-Labour" 193). This is parallel to biopolitical regulation mechanisms, which aim to control masses and predict, modify and compensate for the effects of events affecting them (Foucault 249). Disconnection poses an ultimate challenge for both biopolitics and the capitalist system since it means dropping out from the system of control. The business model of *Facebook* is based on the communities who share and create content, and thus one of its key success factors is keeping the users inside its system. It must be ready to change its practices constantly according to the exigencies of a situation. Instead of building a total system, *Facebook* is in a constant state of being 'under construction'.

Richard Grusin has recently described mediated actions of anticipating future possibilities and reacting to them in advance with the concept of premediation. [8] For Grusin, premediation works in two senses. Firstly, it produces specific future scenarios. Secondly, it creates continuity with the present and the future to maintain their connection and to exclude disruptions in the flow of daily lives (Grusin 48.) One example would be excluding disconnection. Producing potential scenarios of the future at an accelerating speed, time compresses the future into a condensed present in which "the future is remediated at the very moment that it emerges into present" (Grusin 48; Mackenzie 1). Grusin argues that through ubiquity of interconnected media technologies everything becomes premediated, from social relations to non-human objects and their interactions.

Now disconnecting *Facebook* gives us a few different examples of how premediation works as a design principle. For the user who wants to leave *Facebook*, three different choices are offered. The

first one is simple and used daily by most of the basic users. That is logging out. This operation is enabled simply by clicking the Account menu bar on the upper right corner of the *Facebook* page and simply selecting logout. This throws the user out from the personal profile *Facebook* page back to the front page where the user is able to sign in again. Quitting using the logout option on *Facebook* is not permanent. It is meant for users who do not want to leave their personal profile page open for other users. This may be the case if someone is using public computers for example. If the user chooses not to logout but only closes the browser the personal profile page opens directly without the necessity to log in the next time the user accesses their *Facebook* page with that browser. However, the logout feature does not actually equal quitting. The personal profile remains on *Facebook* and no one actually knows you have left. Logging out is just a method for a temporary break from the service.

A more drastic way to disconnect is to deactivate one's account. A *Facebook* user needs to click on the account menu, located in the right upper corner of the *Facebook* frame. From there the user selects Deactivate Account and clicks deactivate. According to the *Facebook Help Center*, "if you deactivate your account, your profile and all information associated with it are immediately made inaccessible to other Facebook users. What this means is that you effectively disappear from the Facebook service" (Facebook "Help"). What happens is that your personal profile page disappears. Your friends do not find you using the search function and *Facebook* promises not to use the information of deactivated accounts. However, the user's personal profile does not disappear completely. *Facebook* saves the user's profile information (friends, photos, interests, etc.), so if the user wants to reactivate the account at some point, it will look just the way it did when it was deactivated (Facebook "Privacy: Deactivating"). All the friend connections are saved and so is the content of the personal profile.

These two modes of quitting are easily accessed by the user. Both are found from the account settings menu and neither appears hidden. There is however a third way to quit *Facebook*. The user is able to delete the *Facebook* account permanently. This means that all the content of the user's personal profile is removed permanently including pictures, friends, wall posts and messages. This process is irreversible; there is no option for recovering the permanently deleted *Facebook* page. Deleting one's account permanently is not easy. For example, the user cannot find a "delete account" option from the account settings or any other menu. It is accessed through the *Facebook* Help Center. From there the user is able to find a link which directs them to a form by which the user requests a permanent deletion of his/her *Facebook* profile. Also, the profile is not deleted instantly but a reconsideration period is given for the user. The permanent deletion request may be cancelled anytime during this period by logging in to the user's *Facebook* profile.

The described modes of quitting *Facebook* show how premediation is not neutral but in fact tied into the subtle mechanisms of control. While there may be various ways of quitting *Facebook*, only some of these possibilities are "encouraged by the protocols and reward systems built inside the game" (Grusin 46). Control is not about creating an object that can be controlled but for example anticipating the behaviour of the users and reacting to that beforehand (Savat 57). Indeed while premediation condenses time and gives different future directions it does not offer total freedom for the user nor total control of the user's choices but works somewhere in the middle providing paths and links to follow, preferring some and pushing others back.

Maybe the most evident example that shows the premediation in actions happens when one tries to deactivate one's *Facebook* account. After choosing to deactivate the account, the user is guided to a page where he/she has to confirm the deactivation. This of course is nothing new. Quite simply it is just a way to prevent deactivations by accident. However, the way the page is implemented is something remarkable. Not only the present situation of choosing to confirm the disconnection is mediated but also the future is premediated by showing a set of pictures of friends "who will miss you" after deactivating the account. Here premediation relies heavily on the affects created by profile pictures and names of the user's *Facebook* friends. Notably these

images are not limited to profile pictures but also posted pictures where the user appears tagged with a friend or a sibling may be shown.

One cannot stress enough the importance of the posted image next to the profile pictures among friends who are said to miss one after disconnection since it leads towards the logics of how *Facebook* works and also what many of the users who are afraid of losing their privacy dread: it is the content the users themselves create that is used for different purposes which escape their original intentions. Entering to the time of premediation means also entering to a time of databases and data mining, where any piece of data may be accessed and used at any given point of time (Savat 52-53). It is here where the subjectivity of the user starts to unfold. When entering social networks we move from being individuals towards the being of what Deleuze calls "dividuals." In social networks we become codes, images, posts that cannot be reduced to our offline presence. [9] We begin to exist simultaneously in different databases, information banks and other technomaterial assemblages. This, in fact, is what many of the *Facebook* users fear and loathe: their data being used, distributed and exploited by third parties such as marketing ventures or central intelligence agencies. As Genosko writes, "offline individual" is merely one actualisation of the dividual because "nobody totally corresponds to their data double or silhouette" (101). The catch is that after logging in to a social network service there really is no return to the offline individuality. Even if we deactivate our account we remain in the databases of *Facebook* as a potential resource for exploitation.

Tactical Suicide: *Seppukoo.com* & *Web 2.0 Suicidemachine*

If our every action in *Facebook* is premediated and controlled by pre-emptive strategies, for which we ourselves provide the means by sharing content and information, how are we ever able to disconnect from these services? As discussed, even the ways of disconnecting, not only leave backdoors open for returning to the service and re-enabling our social contacts with one simple click, but also leave our content and information to be potentially exploited, used and circulated by the service and possibly third parties.

According to Rita Raley, in recent years we have seen various direct responses to the rise of digital capitalism in the field of new media art, information art, and digital art. With the concept of 'tactical media' she describes art forms that use practices such as hacktivism, denial-of-service attacks and reverse engineering. If there is a combining factor for these practices it is the disturbance they create to the predominant system within they work. "In its most expansive articulation, tactical media signifies the intervention and disruption of a dominant semiotic regime, the temporary creation of a situation in which signs, messages, and narratives are set into play and critical thinking becomes possible" (Raley 6).

Evidently digital suicide services *Seppukoo.com* and *Web 2.0 Suicidemachine* fall under the same category. Instead of being static art objects they invite users inside an event. The main theme of *Seppukoo.com* and *Web 2.0 Suicidemachine* is reclaiming one's life through self-destructive actions in the digital world. *Seppukoo.com* seduces the *Facebook* user to commit a virtual suicide: "Discover what's after your facebook life. We assist your virtual identity suicide" (Seppukoo "About"). The same kind of rhetoric is also found in the description of *Web 2.0 Suicidemachine*: "Liberate your newbie friends with a Web2.0 suicide! This machine lets you delete all your energy sucking social-networking profiles, kill your fake virtual friends, and completely do away with your Web2.0 alterego" (Suicidemachine "About").

To revise, what is important here is to understand that neither *Seppukoo.com* nor *Web 2.0 Suicidemachine* would exist without *Facebook*. Both of the services have specially emerged out of, and in direct response to *Facebook*. This, however, does not mean that *Seppukoo.com* or *Web 2.0 Suicidemachine* are oppositional to *Facebook*. Quite the contrary, *Seppukoo.com* and *Web 2.0 Suicidemachine* are forced to operate within the parameters of *Facebook*. Following Galloway and

Thacker (81) we could say that tactical media does not even want to change its target but instead find and exploit holes and security breaches inside the system and project potential changes through them. In this sense, as also Raley (12) observes, tactical media reshape its target creating a temporary disturbance to the service instead of exiting the system entirely. As Parikka argues, "resistance works immanently to the diagram of power and instead of refusing its strategies, it adopts them as part of its tactics" ("Ethologies" 118).

To elaborate this more thoroughly we need to take a closer look at how *Seppukoo.com* and *Web 2.0 Suicidemachine* actually work. It is the protocol of username and password through which both *Web 2.0 Suicidemachine* and *Seppukoo.com* infiltrate *Facebook*. The suicide starts by giving these sites a user's *Facebook* username and password. In general, the password-username combination has become an order-word of network culture. Following Guattari we can say that they give out stop and start orders but above all activate the "bringing into being of ontological Universes" (*Chaosmosis* 49). Passwords and usernames transmit the user from one line to another, from one service to another, from one identity to another. With password and username we enter into different web services from *Facebook* to our banking services. According to Deleuze, passwords and codes define the key rules of control societies: the "digital language of control is made up of codes indicating whether access to some information should be allowed or denied" ("Postscript" 180).

Seppukoo.com uses the password to log on to the user's *Facebook* account and then uses his/her information to create a memorial page on the *Seppukoo.com* site. The user is able to choose a skin and utter last words that are shown on the memorial page. The last words and a testimony of committing suicide are sent to the user's *Facebook* friends. By using the viral strategies of contagions and distribution *Seppukoo.com* aims to get more people to commit virtual suicide. The *pièce de résistance* of the social suicide is the game implemented in the experience. One gets points and raises the rank according to the amount of *Facebook* friends who follow his/her lead and also commit *Seppukoo.com*. [10] The memorial page shows friends who have committed suicide and friends who are still on *Facebook*.
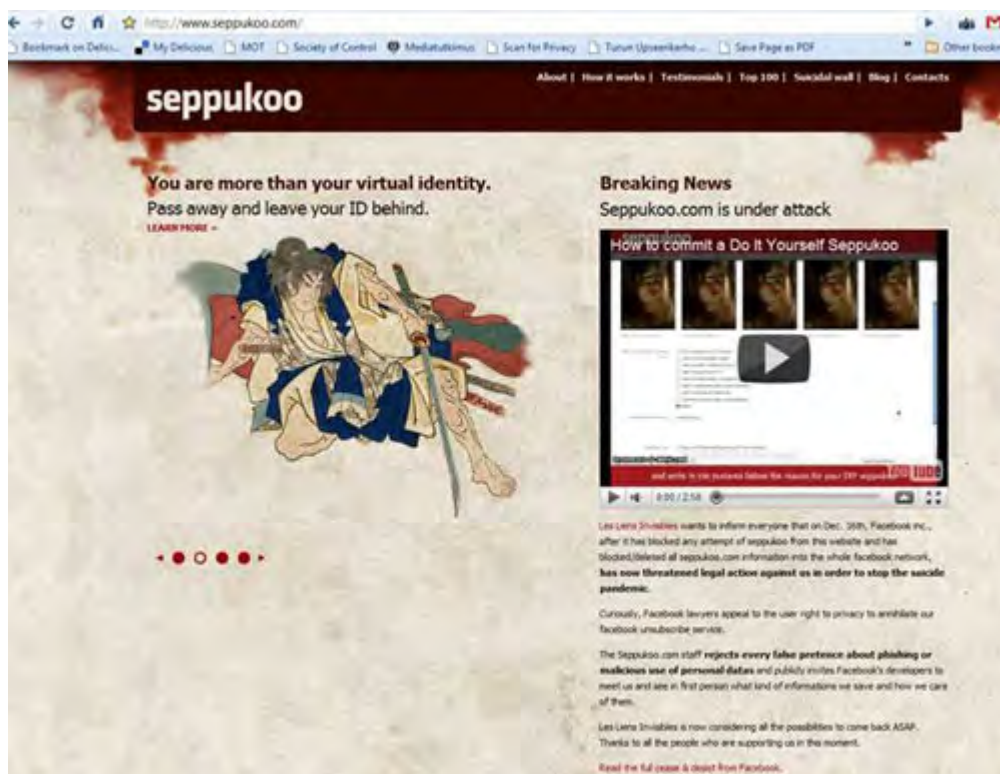

Figure 2. Seppukoo.com

Web 2.0 Suicidemachine on the other hand, uses the password to cut the offline individual from *Facebook* permanently. It does this by changing the password – the user is not able to log in anymore. Along with the password the identity of the user is vacated to the software. Digital suicide is made irreversible. In addition, *Web 2.0 Suicidemachine* changes the profile picture of the user into the *Web 2.0 Suicidemachine*'s noose logo and joins the user to a *Facebook* group named "Social Network Suiciders." Simultaneously it starts to remove the connections to *Facebook* friends one-by-one at the time. The whole process is automated and visible to the user. The *Facebook* life is disappearing in front of the user's eyes. Also, *Web 2.0 Suicidemachine* has a ranking system in which the more friends you got to join you before the suicide the higher you are ranked.

Figure 3. Web 2.0 Suicidemachine

Seppukoo.com and *Web 2.0 Suicidemachine* demonstrate quite clearly how tactical media emerges with its target. As Raley states, "tactical media comes so close to its core informational and technological apparatuses that protest in a sense becomes the mirror image of its object, its aesthetic replicatory and reiterative rather than strictly oppositional" (12). Both digital suicide services use *Facebook*'s own logic in order to function and spread. If the aim of *Facebook* is to envelop the user's life inside the network, *Seppukoo.com* and *Web 2.0 Suicidemachine* do the inverse by affirming and embracing death.

Consequently, *Seppukoo.com* and *Web 2.0 Suicidemachine*'s connection to the environment of *Facebook* entails also their connection to biopolitics. It is phrased as a question in the *Facebook Suicide Bomb Manifesto* (Dockray): "When someone disappears from *Facebook*, does anyone notice?" The answer of course is yes. The suicide of the user is updated in his/her *Facebook* status, the user is added to the group of social network suiciders, even the profile picture is changed to remind others of the digital death of the user. As such *Seppukoo.com* and *Web 2.0 Suicidemachine* are not detached or freed from the biopolitical discourse. For digital suicide death is not a threat but a way to affirm life in tactical media. *Seppukoo.com* and *Web 2.0 Suicidemachine* control and guide the users to select another way of life, which is disconnected from the premediated workings of

Facebook but never the less connected to the potentials and possibilities the service provides. For there would be no digital suicide without *Facebook* and without *Facebook*'s impressive machinery of attention economy no one would know about it. As Dockray puts it, "social networks need a social suicide."

There is however another biopolitical side of digital suicide software related to our interests. From Dockray's Manifesto we are able to find a question concerning data mining: "Does this software retroactively invalidate all of the marketing data that has been collected from the account?" To answer this question we need to elaborate on the model of resistance for tactical media.

If there is to be no direct oppositional positions in tactical media, what, then, is the possible model of resistance? First off, following Raley, we need to understand that tactical media does not adhere to the ideology of the Left or the ideology of cyberlibertarians. Paraphrasing Foucault she points out that there is no single locus of refusal but a plurality of resistances. Instead of replacing one ideology with another, tactical media supplements its targets with creative destruction (Raley 25-26).

If we consider digital suicide as creative destruction it seems evident that dying is something more than simply a termination of the biological functions that sustain a living organism. An alternative interpretation is provided by Deleuze to whom every death is a double. According to him on the one hand there is the very personal death of the individual, the I that dies, on the other there is the impersonal death, the one that dies, which refers to the virtual power of endlessly becoming other outside the forms and mould of the I or ego (Deleuze, *Difference* 137-138).

What, then, happens in digital suicide? Firstly, the access to the online identity and its data is given to software and its automated processes. When the password and user name are set, the suicide begins. In consequence the offline individual is cut off from his/her *Facebook* profile. A reference point here is the concept of dividual and its death. It is this very moment when the online identity loses its attachments to the moulding 'I' of the offline identity. Thus, the question is not what happens to the offline individual who is now cut off from *Facebook* but on the contrary what happens to the online identity. The online identity is the key to understanding how digital suicide exceeds, for example, Claude Shannon's machine's biased models of being either "on" or "off," and affirms the double nature of dying as creative destruction. It is the impersonal dimension of death we are interested in, *Seppukoo.com*'s invitation to "rediscover the importance of being anyone, instead of pretending to be someone" (Seppukoo "About").

I argue that the goal of *Seppukoo.com* and *Web 2.0 Suicidemachine* is to break the representational scheme between the online identity and the offline individual. Thus, the goal is not simply to help users quit but to introduce different potential ways to exist in social networks. What follows is that due to digital suicide, the online identity is given a non-existence that is full in the sense that it does not refer to any other subject than itself. Quite simply the very personal data of the user ranging from basic information to consumption behaviour data starts to exist independently without the user.

The identity that remains in *Facebook* after digital suicide becomes meaningless for the machinic subjectivation of capitalism: its data cannot be used for marketing, its consumption habits cease to exist. It is not representative for statistical analysis since it does not represent a population that exists. Simultaneously its actions cannot be anticipated and premediated since it does not have any. It remains in the network as passive and ascetic. In this sense it is non-existent and becomes absolutely irrelevant to controlling authorities (Galloway & Thacker 135-136). The most evident example of this non-existence is the group of "SNS - Social Network Suiciders" in *Facebook* created by *Sucidemachine*, which is a multiplicity of online identities cut off from their offline individuals. This group forms a mass of "generalized dynamics" that emerge when you extract "attributes, predicates, qualities or references from a large group of people" (Terranova 136). Quite bluntly

this is what happens when one commits a virtual suicide through *Web 2.0 Suicidemachine*. Users' private information such as email notifications, friends, groups and wall posts are removed. One ceases to be social. One's data turns meaningless. The part of the dividual that remains on *Facebook* has no gender or class. It remains in the network, not as an individual but as a part of a multitude of others who have also committed virtual suicide.

Figure 4. SNS- Social Network Suiciders

Interestingly, digital suicide starts to appear as a passive rather than active form of resistance. If we turn to the online identity disconnected from the *Facebook* user, it reminds us of the death of *Bartleby the Scrivener* in Herman Melville's short story whose refusal "I would prefer not to" resulted in the end in isolation from the surrounding environment and death by starvation (Melville "Bartleby Part 1"; "Bartleby Part2"). Quite similarly through digital suicide the user cedes power to *Facebook* but retains the power to withhold. The identity stays on *Facebook* but does not fit into its user representations or biopolitical models of data mining. The remnant does not affirm or negate anything particular on *Facebook*. It is an identity without reference or preferences (cf. Deleuze, "Bartleby" 70-71; Raley 25).

As an affirmation to Hardt and Negri's (58) demand that it takes a network to fight a network, the group of social network suiciders aggregates these remnants without particularities. It is a group that works against data mining with its own logic. It creates a multitude of passive nodes, whose data is meaningless and cannot be exploited via commercial means. It is a multitude of virtual suiciders whose identity remains and continues its own life without the other half of the dividual. They do not actively participate in *Facebook*'s normal activities such as writing wall posts, creating status updates, updating photos or commenting on other's posts. Indeed these remnants of suicide become what Meijas (612, 614) has described as paranodes. They are nodes that do not conform to the logics of the network but instead occupy the space between active nodes and their links. Yet they are involved in the topological act of linking by being collapsed, bypassed or bumped into.

"Don't become nothing, the singular point defined by an absence, become everything, with everyone else," the *Facebook Suicide Manifesto* calls, and as we have seen, this is indeed just what *Seppukoo.com* and *Web 2.0 Suicidemachine* both do (Dockray). Committing digital suicide with these services does not mean disappearing from the networks or non-being in them. Instead it denotes the virtual side of reality, the creative potentiality to become something other outside actualised forms of being (Parikka, "Ethologies" 119). After the digital suicide masses have ceased to be a subject and cannot be given a subject position. Indeed the masses of suiciders are what *Facebook* really hates: passive identities who do not like any pages, do not share any information, do not

allow their identity to become a product for consuming. They just remain on *Facebook* altering its development and also reminding that there are methods of disconnecting oneself.

Coda

Analysed from the perspective of leaving, *Facebook* appears as what Nigel Thrift has called the "cultural circuit of capitalism" (6). *Facebook* is developed for various means of governing bodies, objects and data for the sake of profit. New forms of commodity and commodity relations are built. Users are turned as consumers but also consumer products since they are involved in the act of consumption through sharing, collecting, experiencing and "in general, participating in all manner of collective acts of sensemaking" (Thrift 7). *Facebook*'s media ecological environment is animate in the sense that it constantly forges new practices for users to create content and share information and most importantly, it adapts to the needs and desires of users in order to keep them under its influence. Paraphrasing Guattari, it works like a drug producing machinic subjectivities by providing sensations of belonging to something, or of being somewhere ("Machinic" 158).

Gary Genosko has argued that consumerism, which inserts subjectivity into incorporeal networks, sometimes requires "detox by disconnection" (93). What he basically suggests is that to escape the cultural circuit of capitalism, one needs to unplug. While the question of the possibility of actually unplugging oneself from these networks remains unanswered, *Web 2.0 Suicidemachine* and *Seppukoo.com* show how disconnection may also function inside the system, within the machinic subjectivities created by *Facebook*. Both of these art projects exist within the process of producing these subjectivities. As shown, in both cases committing digital suicide does not mean permanent or total exclusion from *Facebook*. *Seppukoo.com* lets the user log back into *Facebook* and repeat the suicide as many times as the user wants. *Web 2.0 Suicidemachine* creates a remnant of online identities that are left loitering around the *Facebook* servers.

Rather than detox, *Seppukoo.com* and *Web 2.0 Suicidemachine* could be described as doping by disconnection for the machinic process of subjectivation. Instead of disrupting these processes, *Seppukoo.com* and *Web 2.0 Suicidemachine* accelerate them to another speed and another level of being and belonging. To put it crudely, while *Facebook* aims to serialise and stratify users and their data into commodities and value, *Seppukoo.com* and *Web 2.0 Suicidemachine* take advantage of the same users in promoting "mutant singularities and new minorities" (Guattari, "Machinic" 161). Hence, digital suicide does not negate the being of and on *Facebook* but instead shows alternative ways of using the service outside its designed practices and uses. Paraphrasing Guattari, ("Machinic" 161) this can lead to either miserable exhaustion or the creation of unprecedented universes.

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Endnotes

1. <www.facebook.com>
   <www.seppukoo.com>
   <www.suicidemachine.org>.

2. One of the most famous pranks was a book called Net.gener@tion, which to put it bluntly, was a book made of made up content. This book was published in 1996 by Mondadori, one of Italy's biggest publishing houses and taken off the market quickly when the Luther Blissett Project revealed the hoax (Bazzichelli 50).

3. While *Seppukoo.com* is targeted to *Facebook*, *Web 2.0 Suicidemachine* also disconnects other social media services such as *Twitter*, *MySpace* and *LinkedIn*.

4. For example, the *Web 2.0 Suicidemachine* was reported by the *Los Angeles Times*, *The Guardian* and *TIME Magazine* to name a few and *Seppukoo.com* was taken into the headlines for example by *L'Express*, *Le Figaro* and *The Globe and Mail*. In addition to the interest in media *Seppukoo.com* was also nominated for the Transmediale Award in 2011.

   Los Angeles Times. "Facebook fights back, disallows the Suicide Machine." 04/01/2010. <latimesblogs.latimes.com/technology/2010/01/facebook-fights-back-disallows-the-suicide-machine.html>;

   The Guardian. "Facebook blocks 'social media suicide' website." 05/01/2010. <www.guardian.co.uk/media/pda/2010/jan/04/facebook-social-media-suicide-machine>;

   TIME. "How to Disappear from Facebook and Twitter." 19/01/2010. <www.time.com/time/business/article/0,8599,1954631,00.html>;

   L'Express. "Suicide virtuel mode d'emploi." 29/01/2010. <www.lexpress.fr/actualite/high-tech/suicide-virtuel-mode-d-emploi_845451.html>;

   Le Figaro. "Facebook interdit le «suicide virtuel»." 05/01/2010. <www.lefigaro.fr/web/2010/01/05/01022-20100105ARTFIG00551-facebook-interdit-le-suicide-virtuel-.php>;

   The Globe and Mail. "Social-media suicide." 27/01/2010. <www.theglobeandmail.com/news/arts/social-media-suicide/article1446354/>.;

   Transmediale. 2011. <www.transmediale.de/seppukoocom>.

   All sites accessed April 20, 2011.

5. This information is based on the cease and desist letters published on the Suicidemachine's and Seppukoo's websites. Official information from Facebook Inc. could not be retrieved.

6. Despite the cease and desist letters from the *Facebook* representatives *Suicidemachine* and *Seppukoo.com* tried to keep up and running for a while. However, in February 2011 *Seppukoo.com* (Seppukoo "Front") announced that "due to the paradoxical controversy between the giant Facebook and Seppukoo, our suicidal services are now useless." Equally the *Suicidemachine* does not work anymore. The disturbance these art projects created for *Facebook* was temporary. What is important here however is the way they illustrated the

mechanisms and ideologies behind *Facebook* and digital capitalism in general.

7. While there has been discussion of the connection between mass media technologies, communication and capitalism since the 1970s (Smythe), new media technologies bring new actors and practices into these discussions.

8. For Grusin (35, 41) the emergence of premediation is connected with the world after 9/11. It appears from the same mental ambiance as pre-emptive strikes that led to war in Iraq. Practically premediation means the tendency of media to try to predict and describe future events.

9. This is described quite interestingly in *South Park* season 14 episode 4, where Stan Marsh is drawn inside the world of *Facebook* and needs to fight against his own *Facebook* profile.

10. There are six different levels due which the points are given. The first level equals 32 points, which are given from every friend that commits *Seppukoo.com*. Level 6 equals 1 point and is given for each suicidal friend of a friend of a friend of a friend of a friend of a friend. The current leader of the Top 100 rank is Simona Lodi with 4,914 points.

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