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I

On the topic of burnout, recent art, and working remotely under conditions of pandemic, I begin with a seemingly impolitic question: *Why do we take things lying down?* Perhaps to some this will sound like an academic nonstarter—a crude provocation, to say the least—but in posing the question I mean something at once more literal and technologically charged than the rhetorical bluster suggests. Not so long ago, back when we routinely inhabited the physical spaces of museums or galleries, we might have encountered any number of exhibition arrangements that positioned the viewer's body as a kind of *flatness*. Indeed, in black-box galleries from London to Berlin to Beijing to São Paulo to Los Angeles, as the itinerary goes, viewers have been solicited not to take a seat, as polite theatergoers do, nor stand, with arms folded and chins stroked, in the traditional posture of aesthetic contemplation, but to go *horizontal*. To bed down in galleries and museums on cushions or beanbags; to commune with the floor; to experience a compulsory intimacy—as well as collectivity—with strangers lying in the gallery; to comport oneself in poses both vulnerable and supine, like new-media odalisques: Why has this become commonly accepted behavior in the contemporary art world? What might these habits tell us about the recent stakes of art, media culture, and the peculiar interface between liveness and digitization, from the systems discourse of the 1960s, the historic moment that sets the terms for these preoccupations, to lockdown in 2021? To the point of this thesis: How do such practices model new relationships between leisure and work, body and machine, gender and agency, in what the ethnographer Marcel Mauss called the “civilization of latitude” nearly a hundred years ago?¹

* With thanks to Lucy Hunter and Eric de Bruyn for comments and assistance. This essay was originally delivered as a lecture in several symposia: at the University of Basel; at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; and at Yale University. An abiding preoccupation with the relationship between current and historical media linked all three conferences.

1. Marcel Mauss, “Techniques of the Body,” *Economy and Society* 2, no. 1 (1973), p. 80.

Well in advance of the pandemic, burnout syndrome stemmed from the enforced productivity of an already exhausted workforce, ever mandated to labor and slog away, whether on the front lines of the health industry or from behind the screen. Today that workforce remains exhausted, perhaps even more so. But the *workplace* as we once knew it (that is, for those who enjoy the privilege and security of remote work) has undergone a radical mutation, collapsing the professional environment—the architecture of cubicles, conference rooms, and water coolers—with the domestic scene. Taking the measure of such conditions, this essay looks at the work of a loose consortium of artists, several of whom exhibited at the 2016 edition of the Berlin Biennale, as implicitly thematizing such interests. I treat such phenomena as both an allegory of and rehearsal for modes of *ubiquitous* computing emblematic of the third revolution of the digital age. As developed by Marc Weiser and others at Xerox PARC (Palo Alto Research Center) in the late 1980s, ubiquitous computing departs from the model of the desktop in generalizing computational power across disparate locations, platforms, and devices.²

The argument proceeds as follows. Considering the contemporary situation on the ground, as it were, I gloss the historical interests of systems theory as a prologue to our more recent preoccupations, seizing upon the rubrics of horizontality in the art and criticism of the 1960s. The associated tropes of sleeping, reclining, dreaming, and sex—oneiric, erotic, soporific—find their founding case study in a work called *She—A Cathedral* (or *Hon*, 1966), a monumental collaboration between Niki de Saint Phalle, Jean Tinguely, and Per Olof Ultvedt. This massive sculpture of a recumbent female figure—in actuality an outsized, immersive environment consolidating a range of media within its walls—establishes a model for thinking through our current conditions of reception. Leo Steinberg’s famous thesis in “Other Criteria” provides theoretical ballast, revisited for its uncannily prescient implications for cultures of contemporary work.

The second part of the essay considers recent work that departs from both Saint Phalle’s and Steinberg’s terms, and here I draw from Jonathan Crary’s formative *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (2013). Crary describes sleep as “an uncompromising interruption of the theft of time from us by capitalism” and analyzes the systemic incursion of working life upon our resting states.³ Such temporal interests, I argue, advance a new “civilization of latitude”: a learned attitude of the body that owes as much to Silicon Valley, ergonomics, and interface design as it does to contemporary art. Burnout would appear to be both symptom and motor of such developments. The widespread injunction to keep working—to be as innovative as one is resilient—will prove continuous with new technological affordances in which horizontality is colonized as *productive space*. And “flatness,” in turn, will acquire a radically different meaning relative to its art-historical genealogy.

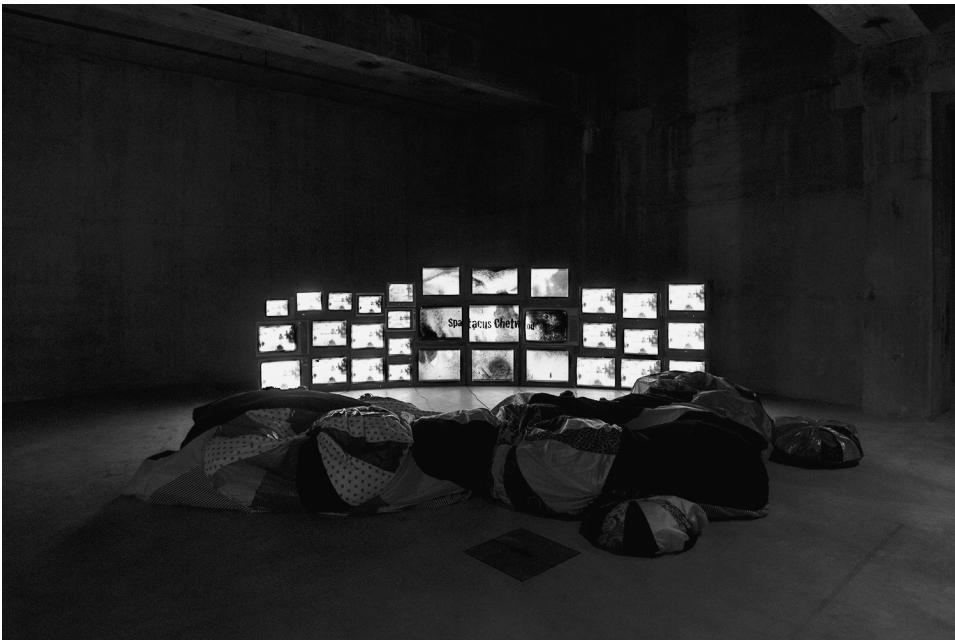
2. On ubiquitous computing (“ubicomp”) and media art, see the essays collected in Ulrik Ekman, ed., *Throughout: Art and Culture Emerging with Ubiquitous Computing* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2013).

3. Jonathan Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep* (London: Verso, 2013), p. 10.

II

In 2008, Monster Chetwynd exhibited *Hermitos Children, the Pilot Episode* (2008) in the Tanks Galleries at the Tate Modern, London. This twenty-minute film plays with the conventions of soap operas and detective serials to delirious effect, variously referencing Pasolini and the Brazilian musician Hermeto Pascoal. Content, however, is less at stake for my purposes than the peculiar staging of the narrative. Through a stack of some thirty-two TV sets curved just so, flashing images pierce the darkness, a mode of display to which we've grown accustomed for decades. From structuralist film to Nam June Paik to each successive generation of media artist, putting the apparatus of time-based images on display has anticipated what Erica Balsom calls "the cinema of exhibition" within contemporary art.⁴ What *is* novel, on the other hand, is the literal platform upon which spectators view Chetwynd's work, an object that, in its material and fabrication, seems at some remove from the slickness typically associated with media installation. For on the floor in front of the screens, a massive, artisanal beanbag chair colonizes a sizable portion of museum real estate. An island of funky patch-

4. Erica Balsom in *Exhibiting Cinema in Contemporary Art* (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam Press, 2013).



Monster Chetwynd. *Hermitos Children, the Pilot Episode*. 2008.
© Monster Chetwynd. Courtesy of Sadie Coles HQ.

work and gauche stitching, created, in part, from the costumes of the performers featured in the video, it solicits the spectator to relax into the experience of viewing within the museum.

What associations does this peculiar object advance? Lying in the gallery, in a subterranean space of the Tate Modern, you *might* think you were being transported to the domestic scenery of basements, rec rooms, and family lounges everywhere, where viewing is continuous with reclining, with relaxation, with traditional patterns of work and leisure that peg the realm of labor to the vertical axis—upright and public—and that of leisure as continuous with the low-slung, laid-back, private, and horizontal. This observation telegraphs the interests of horizontality in our actual orientation as viewers to such work; the production of meaning that horizontality enables; and the iconography of recumbence displayed in the gallery and, as it will turn out, everywhere else. For some, “horizontality” might evoke the decentered and anti-hierarchic processes of signification that Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari famously named “rhizomatic”—a hyper-linked and planar image of thought in contrast to arboreal models of subjectivity, root and branch.⁵ The difference here is that, rather than claim such viewing practices *affirm* or reproduce a relation to leisure conventionally aligned with the horizontal axis, I claim exactly the opposite. Lying in the gallery is, in fact, wholly consistent with the technics of contemporary work; namely, our habituation to its media platforms and the distribution of the network as an ambient and all-pervasive resource. For the moment, in returning to the object at hand, I’d note that these “chairs” are no mere adjuncts to Chetwynd’s art but central to its organization. As the museum’s wall text states: “To invite viewers to partake in the experience, Chetwynd designed a bean bag seat that feels like an extension of her film’s lo-fi, lumpy fantasy world.”⁶

Chetwynd is hardly alone in such endeavors. Beds also make repeated appearances across the spheres of the contemporary art world. Take, for example, *In Bed Together* (2016) by M/L Artspace, a New York–based collective formed by Lena Henke and Marie Karlburg, featured in the 9th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art (2016). Viewers watched videos of the group’s performances and social gatherings from the comfort of a large bed, complete with customized, screen-printed pillows and sheets. An airy canopy crowned the experience. The title of the piece flagged the literal intimacy of its spectators as it also trafficked in metaphors of corroboration and complicity. A number of similar exhibition strategies made their appearance in this iteration of the Berlin Biennale, which was named “The Present in Drag.” As organized by Dis, the fashion and art collective and online platform, the exhibition was crowded with representations of digital anomie, where post-net life was telegraphed in images of

5. In particular, see the chapter “Becoming Intense, Becoming Animal” in Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), pp. 232–310.

6. Wall label, Tanks Gallery, Tate Modern, London, 2008.



*M/L Artspace. In Bed Together. 2016.
Image © Timo Ohler.*

wan youth swiping listlessly at screens or dabbing whiteboards. The biennial ostensibly registered the cynicism of the digital natives as a new cultural dominant: Its unofficial mantra, coined by the PR firm commissioned to brand the show, was “No critique, no discourse, no stakes.” What those stakes once were, or what they have become in the present, is a question we might obliquely raise at the conclusion of this essay. The galleries, meanwhile, were a sprawl of beanbags, Fatboys, mattresses, and beds, alternately user-friendly, messy, louche, casual, narcotic. What to make of these conjunctions?

III

If what I’ve identified in contemporary art is to be of any consequence beyond a catalog of random furniture or a scorecard of millennial affect, I need to sketch the most basic rudiments of systems theory to chart the incipient interests of horizontality and media from the 1960s to the present. A capacious and complex topic, systems theory has come down to us as a science of self-organization and the ways in which such “organisms” might evolve in the adaptation or progressive regulation of complexity. Among its many methodological preoccupations, the Austrian biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy described “the appearance of structural similarities or isomorphisms in different fields.”⁷ He was

7. Ludwig Von Bertalanffy, *General System Theory* (New York: George Braziller, 1968), p. 33.



Robert Rauschenberg. *Bed*. 1955.
 © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation.
 Image © The Museum of Modern Art /
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 Art Resource, NY.

speaking, in other words, to analogies, structural equivalences, and the like—drawn between ostensibly very different genres of organisms, organizations, fields, and disciplines: biological, psychological, economic, linguistic, environmental, corporate, computational, etc. Whether such systems are bodies or machines, brains, businesses, or governments, an emphasis on holism and organizational processes sets them in isomorphic or analogous relation.

We might consider the links between horizontality, media, and the art of the post-war moment in the spirit of such investigations. To be sure, horizontality has assumed a critical role in alternative narratives of modernism, as the phenomenological counterpoint to Enlightenment, reason, and progress incarnated by the virtual and literal ascent of the human subject as upright *man*.⁸ The art of this period is rife with such contrarian props and iconography, including Claes Oldenburg's *Bedroom Ensemble* (1963); Robert Rauschenberg's *Bed* (1955); Andy Warhol's *Sleep* (1963); Yoko Ono and John Lennon's *Bed-In* (1969); and Hélio Oiticica's *Eden* (1967) and *CC5-Hendrix War* (1973). Different as these works are in both their formal as well as conceptual agendas, all could be broadly classed as set pieces of desublimation: a collective blow against verticality as the de facto stance of modernist

progress—and what that progress implies. In the case of Oldenburg, we see this as both simulacrum and fetish of domestic intimacy; in the case of Rauschenberg, as the inversion of portraiture, the anthropomorphic genre par excellence. For Warhol, on the other hand, horizontality suggests a queer erotics of media and duration, where nothing much happens save for the rise and fall of a lover's breath, mingled with the onanistic pulse of the frame rate. For Ono and Lennon, meanwhile, horizontality advances a performative détente in which stay-

8. For example, the work of Georges Bataille and the *Documents* group, for whom the notion of *informe* and *basesse* represented a “low blow”—a desublimation—against Enlightenment philosophies of reason and progress. On *informe* as it relates to art, see Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss, *Formless: A User's Guide* (New York: Zone Books, 1997).

ing in bed means resisting the labor of war. And Oiticica's installations, outfitted with sleeping platforms and breezy hammocks, are directed to modes of leisure, flouting Western capitalism's imperial mandates to work.

For my purposes here, the foundational case study flagging such interests is the immersive media environment known as *She—A Cathedral*. A collaboration between Saint Phalle, Tinguely, and Ultvedt, it was installed at Stockholm's Moderna Museet, then under the directorship of the formative curator Pontus Hultén. In the early chronicles of art-world spectacle, *She* proved wildly popular, welcoming over ten thousand visitors during its summer tenure at the museum in 1966. Eighty-two feet long, twenty feet high, and thirty feet wide and weighing in at six tons, *She* was based on Saint Phalle's "Nana" figures, her ongoing sculptural paean to femininity. On the outside, the work appeared as a monumental female body, colorfully painted, flat on her back and with legs splayed. On the inside, it was a dark space of interactive media housing what one critic called "a



Niki de Saint Phalle, Jean Tinguely, Per Olof Ultvedt. *She—A Cathedral*. 1966.

© The artists /Bildupphovsrätt 2018.

Image © Hans Hammarstiöld/Moderna Museet.

number of highly *ineffective* [my emphasis] machines.”⁹

Our engagement with this work hinges on its equivalence between a horizontal body, gendered female, and a multimedia environment presented as a space of interiority. Visitors to the museum entered *She* through the object’s vaginal “portal,” in a kind of reverse birthing scene in which the dark recesses of the body were imagined as both social space and media arcade. The animated interior at once referenced a long list of communications media and contained several interactive displays, including a crude mobile of a man watching “television” and a bar where you could stop for a drink and crush the empty bottle in one of Tinguely’s cranky machines. There was a cinema featuring a Greta Garbo movie, and a red velvet banquette for smooching, complete with hidden microphones that might broadcast such couplings to a neighboring audience. Tinguely’s *Radio Stockholm*—one of his many randomized radio pieces begun around 1962—was also on offer. A pay phone was installed on site and outfitted with a plastic bubble to dim the social interference. The museum’s press release, upbeat and cheerful, issued its verdict as to the work’s significance, banking on the period’s affirmative rhetoric of “art into life”: “*SHE* could be seen as a representation of our life, in anthropomorphic form. A synthesis of facts, dreams, actions.”¹⁰ Such language finds visual complement in the images documenting its reception: photographs of children gamboling throughout the art-installation-cum-playground. But while it’s hard to ignore the ludic associations of such images and the air of innocence they project, not all was fun and games. Lying in the gallery, *She* staged a disorienting and chaotic experience, encountered through the figure’s spread legs and a womb pregnant with dysfunctional media.



Saint Phalle, Tinguely, Ulvedt.
She—A Cathedral. 1966.

© The artists/Bildupphovs rätt 2018.

Image © Hans Hammar skiöld/Moderna Museet.

9. Pontus Hultén et al., *HON—en Historia* (Stockholm, Moderna Museet, 1967), page unknown.

10. For documents relating to the construction and reception of *She*, including the press release and the many reviews of the work, see Hultén, *HON—en Historia*.

The tacit dialogue between *She* and the art criticism from the period prompts further speculation. In his formative lecture delivered at the Museum of Modern Art in 1968 and later published as “Other Criteria,” Leo Steinberg discussed one of Saint Phalle’s and Tinguely’s closest collaborators, Robert Rauschenberg, as auguring a peculiar retooling of the humanist subject through the horizontal register. Steinberg famously identified a structural movement in Rauschenberg’s work that virtually desublimated the axis of nature to the calculating tables of culture. He seized upon how the artist’s silk-screen technique reoriented the vertical picture plane—historically conceived as a perspectival window in the evolution of oil painting—to the horizontal surface of a flatbed printing press, a field of inscription and thus media. “The painted surface is no longer the analogue of a visual experience of nature but of *operational processes*,”¹¹ Steinberg wrote. The art historian’s emphasis on operational processes, with its techno-cultural resonances of automation, computing protocols, and the management of information, prefigures the language we’ll put to different use for recent art. On *Bed*, Steinberg notes, “Perhaps Rauschenberg’s profoundest symbolic gesture came in 1955 when he seized his own bed, smeared paint on its pillow and quilt coverlet, and uprighted it against the wall.”¹² Linking the orientation of the work to both its erotic and hypnotic associations, he further observes,

There, in the vertical posture of “art,” it continues to work in the imagination as the eternal companion of our other *resource* [my emphasis], our horizontality, the flat bedding in which we do our begetting, conceiving, and dreaming.¹³

To apply this perspective to the discussion of *She*: The body assimilates such operational processes as the figure’s interior life—internalizes them—but remains supine and grounded, horizontal and unmoving. To what end? If the work’s mainstream reception seized upon its invitation to play, an occasional review identified something pernicious, even monstrous, at work. The critics Arthur Secunda and Jan Thunholm, for their part, addressed the peculiar gendering of the sculpture as something that perhaps only the proto-feminist Saint Phalle was in a position to understand. “The interior ends up being a sort of international bourgeois playboy club,” they note; it is “more revealing of the contemporary male than . . . the female.” They continue: “She is a double for us, lying flat on our backs in a primeval position, passive, victimized helplessly, mauled over, exploited and used.”¹⁴

11. Leo Steinberg, *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth Century Art* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 84. Note also Steinberg’s other discussion of horizontality, if oriented in the other direction (i.e., the “verticalizing of the supine”) in “The Philosophical Brothel,” *October* 44, (Spring 1988), pp. 7–74.

12. Steinberg, *Other Criteria*, p. 89.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 90.

14. Arthur Secunda and Jan Thunholm, “Everyman’s Girl” (1966), in Hultén, *HON—en Historia*, p. 150.

However melodramatic, the phrasing remains important as we edge toward the present. In 1966, *She* was deemed “a passive receptacle and helpless life,” an indictment of media culture at large in a work that otherwise appealed for its entertainment value. The key word summoned here is *passive*. How is such language inflected by the advent of an image economy, one that presupposes horizontality as its first, hyperlinked principle—*operationalizing* such processes, to borrow from Steinberg? Steinberg’s thesis, as it turns out, would be cited by no less than Deleuze on more than one occasion.¹⁵ So how do we contend with what Steinberg describes as “our other resource, *our horizontality*” today, where the agentic ratio between human and computer hangs in the balance, ever more submitted to the logic of machine learning and artificial intelligence? Steinberg offers this impacted and elliptical phrase in an essay filled with brilliant observations. If once the isomorphism between the body and the computer was historically assumed as a structural given—an equivalence—the word *resource* now triggers irredeemably economic associations that can only unsettle the relation.

IV

That horizontality might be extracted as a *resource*—something expedient and commoditized, like gold or oil or *information*—dovetails with the thesis of Crary’s polemic *24/7*. Treating horizontality through this framework suggests the dispiriting prospect of incentivizing sleep—*unproductive* time—through commandeering the horizontal axis as *productive* space. “The huge portion of our lives that we spend asleep, freed from a morass of simulated needs,” Crary writes, “subsists as one of the great human affronts to the voraciousness of contemporary capitalism.”¹⁶ Unpacking the insidious logic of the phrase “24/7”—the unerring temporality not just of the news cycle but, more to the point, the digital economy—he discusses how sleep may well be the last reserve of the subject in a culture in which human agency is increasingly capitalized as work, network, and resource.

It is true that one might think that “begetting, conceiving, and dreaming,” as Steinberg put it, rather than working, was folded into the experience of the contemporary art at the center of this essay. Much of this art does seem to produce a phantasmatic and nocturnal ambience. Take the dreamworld of Chetwynd’s black-box gallery, barely lit by a mosaic of flitting images, or the holographic projections viewed from pillows in the uncanny, digital disfigurements of Cécile B. Evans. Or consider the work of Ryan Trecartin and Lizzy Fitch. Their videos, complete with an unblinking cast of distracted personalities, have

15. For example, “On the Movement-Image: Conversation of September 13, 1983, with Pascal Bonitzer and Jean Narboni,” *Cahiers du Cinéma* 352 (October 1983), accessed via *Onscenes*, <https://onscenes.weebly.com/film/on-the-movement-image>; and Gilles Deleuze, “The Fold,” trans. Jonathan Strauss, *Yale French Studies* 80 (1991), pp 227–47.

16. Crary, *24/7*, p. 10.



*Cécile B. Evans. What the Heart Wants. 2016.
Image © Timo Ohler.*

been exhibited with sleeping bags, as if the artists were throwing a millennial slumber party. The multimedia artist Korakrit Arunanondchai, whose work mines epic themes of history, myth, and culture, often with reference to his Thai heritage, is exemplary in this regard. His video and painting installations prominently feature customized beanbag chairs that are somewhere between Fatboy and futon. At the Berlin Biennale, Arunanondchai and Alex Gvojic exhibited *There's a word I'm trying to remember, for a feeling I'm about to have (a distracted path toward extinction)* (2016). The work was screened on a tourist boat that plotted a lazy course up the Spree River, although sightseeing was arguably the opposite of what was intended. Instead, passengers entered a black-lit space belowdecks evoking a subterranean cave, a murky interior complete with faux root-like vegetation hanging from the ceiling and mud-colored rugs on the ground. Mostly the room was crowded with the artist's signature beanbag chairs. Covered in a pattern that recalls Jackson Pollock by way of batik, this unorthodox seating compels the viewer to take in the work from a reclining position.

The video itself is a scattershot collage, a noisy, prosumer-ish mix of vignettes of a wedding, a postapocalyptic wilderness, and a dinosaur theme park, among other discontinuous scenes. Characters include giant rat-like creatures in laughable costumes communing with human elders; a pop singer rapping, blingy and



Top: Korakrit Arunanondchai. 2012–2555. 2014.

Courtesy of CLEARING New York / Brussels. Image © Matthew Septimus.

Bottom: Arunanondchai and Alex Gvojić. There's a word I'm trying to remember, for a feeling I'm about to have (a distracted path toward extinction). 2016. Image © Timo Ohler.

bombastic; and the performance artist boychild, playing God in a fetching blonde wig and high heels. I confess I can't tell you what the video was about: It touched on something about the climate crisis. What stays with the viewer, on the other hand, is an encounter with images that come at you fast and furious, threatening to override any coherent, or at least singular, narrative of the work. The encounter begs further description of the ground-level optics the installation staged: what lying in the gallery (or a boat, in this case) requires of its audience.

Here's what happens. You enter the space and can opt to either remove your shoes or slip on a pair of disposable shoe covers. If you leave your shoes at the entrance you pad around in your socks, as if you were at home; otherwise the shoe covers protect the floor within the boat, as if you were visiting a hospital. You then negotiate relatively cramped quarters before stationing yourself on one of the pillows. You bed down: You go from vertical to nearly horizontal. But there's nothing especially comfortable about it. The beanbags are marginally supportive, kind of lumpy; the fabric is already shopworn, a little greasy. Best to avoid direct skin contact; you shift about, ever conscious of the position you're assuming. Horizontality may be thought of as "natural" to sleep or sex—as inevitable, perhaps, as death—but nothing about this situation feels "natural" at all. This is no organic extension of the body. You confront instead the inescapable sense of an enforced intimacy with neighboring viewers, which translates, paradoxically, into a sense of enforced



Arunanondchai and Gvojić. There's a word I'm trying to remember, for a feeling I'm about to have (a distracted path toward extinction). 2016. Image © Time Ohler.

collectivity in the watching. A heightened degree of lassitude mingles with a heightened social dynamic, organized around the activity of fixing your gaze on the screen. Together you're certainly not sleeping, and you're not really relaxing; and you're not really engaging the video as the act of an individual spectator. You're in an in-between state, with others who occupy that same state. The images wash over you. You take them lying down.

The experience tells us something pervasive about contemporary attitudes towards horizontality and the body within digital culture that are far from unique to Arunanondchai's efforts. Let's acknowledge that there's a technology at work here. It's a habitus and a complex of learned behaviors that are not merely adjunct to the mediation of images set before us but serve, in fact, as their foundation, a physical substrate continuous with them, registered through the body's relation to the environment. Arunanondchai's installation, like many others by artists of his generation, is effectively reproducing these techniques. Such encounters might seem cozy, intimate, and fun on the face of it: They appeal to both individual and collective experience and offer a novel way of looking at art as relaxation. Art becomes a casual hangout, an occasion for new modes of sociality—with the caveat that such experiences *cannot* be universalized across diverse demographics of artists and the imagined participants engaging such themes.¹⁷ Indeed, as the example of *She* would suggest, these encounters are not without historiographic or thematic precedent in their tacit address to mediation, let alone the ways in which media socializes. A literature far earlier than Steinberg or Cray dramatizes these critical possibilities as a matter of compulsory labor, perhaps even military conscription.

In “Techniques of the Body,” his storied lecture of 1934, Marcel Mauss describes how the postures we assume to be given and natural are anything but, perhaps nowhere more so than in the apparently neutral activities of resting and sleeping. “The notion that going to sleep is something natural is totally inaccurate,” Mauss writes, reflecting on the historical conditions framing sleep's terms. “I can tell you that War taught me to sleep anywhere, on heaps of stones, for example.”¹⁸ In this instance, the ethnographer has been trained in a novel arrangement of the body: a learned behavior born of wartime necessity. He will go on to distinguish between “societies that have nothing to sleep on except the floor” and those that have “instrumental assistance,” from mats to cots, from rocks to pillows. He refers to the latter as the “civilization of latitude, 15 degrees.”

17. Critically, these forms of sociality are not universal within contemporary art, particularly in the relationship between race, rest, and horizontality. For example, the installations of Black Power Naps (Navild Acosta and Fannie Sosa) create spaces of self-care for Black subjects; while Tricia Hersey's Nap Ministry examines the nap as a form of liberation. See, for example, Hodson, “Rest Notes,” in this volume, and Janine Francois, “Reparations for Black People Should Include Rest,” *Vice* (January 18, 2019), <https://www.vice.com/en/article/d3bbay/sleep-gap-black-slavery-reparations-black-power-naps>.

18. Mauss, “Techniques of the Body,” p. 81.

The “civilization of latitude” today is necessarily conditioned by new forms of “instrumental assistance,” none of which are natural relative to the assumed horizontality of the human body sleeping. Such techniques, we’ll see shortly, are endemic of current techno-cultures. But they are directed not so much to *when* we sleep or bed down as to *where* we work; and where we work, for many of us under the terms of pandemic, can be—even has to be—just about *anywhere*.¹⁹ To repeat my earlier formulation on the spatiotemporal complex we’ve been tracking from the 1960s to the present: The colonization of nonproductive time that is sleep is remediated in an increasingly productive axis of space that is horizontality.

On this point, take a workplace reference that is a hardened cliché not of the art world but of Silicon Valley. The activities of reclining on the floor, getting horizontal in groups, and lying together in shared spaces dominated by mediated images is the de facto posture of the digital workplace. Of course, such arrangements are not restricted to the campuses of Google or Facebook but are the ubiquitous furnishings of the start-up world, where the profusion of such tools of “instrumental assistance” is claimed to be necessary to foster innovation, collaboration, and creativity. As in



Top: Google campus, Dublin. Courtesy of Evolution Design. Image © Peter Wurnli.

Bottom: Xerox PARC, ca. 1972. Courtesy of Xerox Corporation and the Computer History Museum (CHM).

19. It is important to acknowledge two sectors of the working population that trouble the strict binary opposition between verticality and horizontality as corresponding to normative categories of labor, their assumed postures, and technologies of sleep: sex workers, on the one hand, and disabled and chronically ill, workers who have long worked remotely, on the other.

the gallery, the workplace has now been laid low through a relaxed design sensibility incorporated by the so-called creatives. The once-upright carriage of middle management, not so long ago stationed at the desk and the desktop, restricted to one task, has now reclined into the low-slung posture of ambient intelligence. While the aesthetic is immediately associated with millennial tech workers, its roots are in the 1960s, as a photograph from Xerox PARC makes explicit.

Lest you think I'm drawing a simple parallel between lying in the gallery and reclining in the office, as if the space of our media were so easily circumscribed and contained, reducible to the workplace as such, I'll add that the culture of contemporary work has been generalized to the point that the "workplace" itself has been flattened, rendered horizontal, everywhere. This stems from a moment in which our relationship to the architecture of the interface has become progressively generalized and cognition itself is increasingly understood as a distributed or networked resource, as in, for example, the everyday rituals of crowdsourcing. Today, when so many of us are compelled to work from home (a decisive privilege, it bears repeating, compared to the situations of essential workers on the front lines, to say nothing of the nearly sixteen million Americans without stable access to the Internet, let alone the millions more without jobs), work itself bleeds out into the environment, such that no separation between workplace and home obtains. *Ambient* is one term that names the generalization of this workplace, not to mention other brick-and-mortar institutions, schools and universities chief among them. Two related although not synonymous modes of computing—ubiquitous and pervasive—thus capture the *exteriority* of a media apparatus as environmental, as our daily surround. As theorized by Mark Weiser at Xerox PARC, circa 1988, ubiquitous computing ("ubicomputing") speaks to the constellation and embedding of networks in space—wireless sensors, RFID tags, the Internet of Things, locative media, and so forth—such that the historical interface is rendered increasingly invisible, in the background. As N. Katherine Hayles puts it, this shift in network design represents "the movement of computation out of the box and into the environment."²⁰ An information-intensive environment is quiet, calm, and invisible. It's not the buzzy if static architecture of our hulking CPUs and PCs but is embedded everywhere and elsewhere, at the periphery of our consciousness.

In this regard, the "civilization of latitude" today is at a striking remove from standard histories of ergonomics and "human factors," both of which chart the efficiency of the body as an *active* and autonomous agent in the workplace, from Taylorism's time and motion studies to the phenomenology of the cockpit at the dawn of the Information Age. Historically, when the balance sheet between human and machine has been understood not in strictly isomorphic

20. N. Katherine Hayles, "Radio-Frequency Identification: Human Agency and Meaning in Information-Intensive Environments," in Ekman, *Throughout*, p. 504.

KEY INSIGHTS:

New **technologies** combined with new **behaviors** have led to **NINE NEW POSTURES** that are not adequately addressed by current seating solutions. There are ergonomic implications to these postures that, if not addressed, cause pain and discomfort.

What we discovered is that new technologies demand new ways of moving and working.

The **physiology** of today's new technologies and their impact on the human body has greatly been ignored. Much of today's seating was designed to support the very traditional one-task, one-technology, one-posture experience. With today's multiple devices, our body is forced to respond to these small technologies, leaving much of the body unsupported.

The **sociology** of work has changed. Work is an inherently social process that requires people to rapidly shift between individual, focused tasks and creative collaboration. Each new activity causes us to change postures. Generational and gender differences also impact our posture preferences.

1. THE DRAW



2. THE MULTI-DEVICE



3. THE TEXT



4. THE COCOON



5. THE SWIPE



6. THE SMART LEAN



7. THE TRANCE



8. THE TAKE IT IN



9. THE STRUNCH



Steelcase Global Posture Study of Systemic Interfaces, 2013. © Steelcase 2020.

terms, it has tipped in favor of the former such that the subject maintains presumptive control in “his” interactions with such machines. That subject, in other words, is imagined to stand as the ultimate arbiter in this relationship, ever alert and attentive to manipulating such operational processes. But the discussion of worker agency in the present acquires a new urgency, paradoxically because that role has become progressively *non-urgent* where the techniques of the body are concerned. Notably, it is less the active comportment of the deskbound worker than the *passive* figure of the recumbent laborer that emerges.

Take, as one such illustration, the “Global Posture Study of Systemic Interfaces” commissioned by the American furniture manufacturer Steelcase.²¹ The document describes a “human-centered design process” accommodating a new workplace environment, reorganized by ubiquitous, mobile, and pervasive technologies. Nine “new postures” are identified, tracking both the range of motion or relative immobility stemming from the use of such technology. Several of these “new” postures represent the figure in near-reclining states. The question the study raises is whether so-called human-centered design is a function of information-enabled productivity advanced by the human actor or by the machines progressively conscripting them, automating them, into service. More pointedly, we might also ask of the study: Is there anything like an actual or stable *center* out of which such designs are generated?

I’ve discussed how the colonization of nonproductive time as rest or sleep has now become a productive register of space in horizontality.²² The bed or beanbag is not simply a new pedestal, not just a new device enabling spectatorship; rather, it emblemizes a mode of working: the civilization of latitude in the age of ubiquitous computing. If the medium is the message, as Marshal McLuhan long ago proclaimed of a pre-net information era, the prostrate has now become the substrate. And it’s on



Advertisement for
Bluebeam
Software, 2013.

21. Steelcase released the study in 2013, which “observ[ed] more than 2000 people in 11 countries,” working in a range of settings. For the company’s discussion of ergonomics vis-à-vis the increased use of laptops, tablets, and smartphones in the workplace, see <https://www.steelcase.com/research/articles/topics/wellbeing/posture-support-changing-workplace/> (accessed July 2016). For the Global Posture Study, see <https://www.steelcase.com/content/uploads/2019/05/global-posture-study.pdf>.

22. Indeed, since this essay was first written and delivered as a lecture on multiple occasions over the last several years, a new meme/phenomenon has emerged in the wake of the pandemic: “working from bed.” Supporters of this trend claim working from bed enables efficiency, creativity, and productivity but otherwise accede to the “collective malaise” (pandemic burnout) that has driven them there in the first place. As a journalist described working from bed, it is “a perfect metaphor of giving up and giving in.” Not surprisingly, “working from bed” has been charged as a deeply privileged position, particularly as it appropriates the rationale of remote labor essential to disabled workers. Taylor Lorenz, “Working From Bed Is Actually Great,” *New York Times*, December 31, 2020.

this note that I return to the historical example of *She* alongside an image from the present. The comparison shores up the widening gulf between this equivalence. It dramatizes, in fact, that any isomorphism imagined between humans and computers has skewed radically in the ways of agency and control.

In the case of *She*, it is 1966, the Information Age, a pre-digital moment for the artists involved. For some of the work's contemporary critics, unconvinced by its largely flattering reception, *She* was no fun house installed in the museum but a monster. If *She* inaugurated a new moment of curatorial spectacle and audience participation, perhaps it was also because *She* was "a passive receptacle and helpless life," a recumbent female body presented as an assemblage of disparate media technics, a cavity to be penetrated and enjoyed by thousands of art-viewing denizens. Lying in the gallery, *She* had taken up those technics at her core, as an interior dwelling. Media have here been internalized within and by a body that has been deemed a passive, because gendered, object.

More recently, consider an image from 2013, an advertisement for Bluebeam Software. A strange, certainly disorienting representation of contemporary work, it pictures a young woman lying in bed, legs raised and propped against a wall. We're no longer in the gallery, and we're nearly fifty years after the fact of *She*, but we're still in contact with what Saint Phalle communicated way back in the 1960s, if now upended. The ad neatly collapses the terms of sleep and work, of bedding down and booting up, of a crude sexualization of media, agency, and control. That the advertisement feminizes this new relationship between work, horizontality, and passivity is plain and embarrassing. Something like an iPad or tablet assumes a vertical, indeed dominant posture atop the horizontal body of a female model. Prostrate, barely clad, certainly eroticized, she is a platform for the platform. She's a new work surface in the new workplace-as-boudoir. She's both inverted and reclining—for media goes anywhere. More accurately, it is everywhere. There's no doubt many of us have taken our laptops to bed, or at least our tablets and cellphones. But I'd be surprised (or maybe impressed?) if any reader has ever assumed such a posture, which if not quite requiring a contortionist's skills at least communicates that there's nothing *natural* in the doing. Still, like a good press release, the posture in this ad gets the job done. It returns the body to its formative role as medium, which is the message. It incarnates the ubiquity of digital media in the waking nightmare that is our contemporary work life.

The copy for the advertisement reads like a script for the new spatiotemporal dominant this essay describes. "Collaborate in bed . . . or at work. Sometimes your best work happens away from the office . . . easily collaborate in real time or anytime." What *is* the difference between real time and anytime, one wonders, if work now happens anywhere? Just where the advertisement takes leave of our historical example is that now such conditions are exposed to the clear light of day as pure

exteriority. The copy enjoins us to collaborate, presumably with another worker lying elsewhere, maybe similarly upended. But the fundamental collaboration, in fact, reduces to the one between the woman, the network, and the tablet—to her *embeddedness* within this system.

She had concealed a range of media within its body while lying in the gallery as a passive receptacle. This advertisement, on the other hand, externalizes such conditions, networked beyond the usual conventions of human agency and their corresponding fantasies of interiority, subjectivity, and control. A question elaborated in the 1960s becomes a more pressing challenge for us today, updated in the language of the posthuman and shattered by a pandemic that would demand that we keep working, as if present circumstances were business as usual, the capitalization of crisis, with so much left to innovate and produce. Returning to Steinberg, we need to ask: Has our other resource, our horizontality, the flat bedding in which we do our begetting, conceiving, and dreaming, now become a Procrustean bed?