CHAPTER 7

Online Selves: Digital Addiction

Moral panics around compulsive and addictive use of digital media have emerged every few years since the mid-1990s, building on older discourses around obsessive television viewing (and the social problem of the identifiable figure of the couch potato). Increasingly, public sphere issues reporting focuses on the imagination of Internet and gaming addiction, as well as crossing into various newer platforms of digital communication, most recently addiction to mobile devices. The release of Kimberly Young's pop psychology text *Caught in the Net: How to Recognize the Signs of Internet Addiction – and a Winning Strategy for Recovery* in 1998 caused a considerable media flurry about overuse of the Internet and a number of public confessions of Internet addiction. Popular and news media representations of digital addiction draw significantly on media releases regarding academic research which, for the most part, is conducted in certain narrow formations within the fields of psychology, information technology, and educational pedagogy departments. Several writers have supported or extended Young's initial work, although others have used psychodynamic research methods to suggest that there is nothing specifically addictive about digital gaming as an activity (Egli & Meyers, 1984). Some behaviorist research has sought to show a link between Internet or video-gaming addiction and problems of self-esteem or multiply addictive personalities (Greenberg, Lewis, & Dodd, 1999). And still others have outrightly refuted the concept of digital addiction or the value in drawing parallels between chemical drugs and substantial time spent online. Nevertheless, the idea of an addictiveness produced through individual exposure to digital, online, and mobile communication persists in moral panic reporting and anti-Internet opinion writing that evokes a prenetwork and presmartphone nostalgia for certain kinds of behaviors and cultural forms. This discourse of digital addiction has, then, had the effect of producing a new kind of self: an identity characteristic and set of concomitant behaviors and attributes that can be referred to as the "digital addict."

In 2005 a South Korean couple were arrested after their child, aged 4 months, died after being left alone at home while they left to play *World of Warcraft* at an Internet café (Moses, 2009). An example such as this is, of

course, contrary to panic claims that online activity and obsessive or addictive online behavior isolates subjects or makes heavy users hermits incapable of engaging with others in face-to-face settings (e.g., Technology, 2009), instead pointing to the important fact that gaming and other online entertainment are social activities that are, indeed, sometimes conducted in highly social public spaces and settings. However, the formation of moral panic results often in policy responses that seek to target and remove – rather than investigate – the situation of a scandal or incident (Cover, 2015). This is why responses to the South Korean incident resulted in a prime minister's initiative to provide free software designed to limit the amount of time spent online. Estimating that South Korea had two million web addicts, it planned software designed either to shut down connectivity after a predetermined time (set by a parent, guardian, or user) or another designed to make "games harder as time goes by so that the player becomes bored" (South Korea Takes up Arms Against Web Addiction, 2010). Digital addiction stories such as this likewise produce public community responses such as Digital Detox Week (run by the group Adbusters) and the challenge sponsored by the *Huffington Post* called Unplug and Recharge, both of which have been described as necessary responses to those who have begun using wireless connectivity to get a fix of digital time in settings away from the more traditional desktop computer (Pryor, 2010). Stories of parents attempting to gain police intervention by calling 911 to help stop a teenaged son playing computer games all night have emerged, including in one case from Boston where police were needed to persuade a 14-year-old boy to obey his mother and spend less time playing digital games (Mum Calls 911, 2009). At other times, more strenuous measures are adopted such as in China where rehabilitation bootcamps were operating in the late 2010s designed to cure Internet addiction – in some cases with punishments so harsh that teenaged participants have been beaten to death (Senshan, 2009). Also in China, it has been reported that psychologists and mental health hospitals have used electric shock therapy "to cure youths of Internet addiction," with obvious public questions over whether or not there is any scientific evidence of the value of such severe methods (China Halts Shock Therapy, 2009). Similar camps and rehabilitation centers have appeared in other parts of the world, including a residential treatment center for Internet addiction located in Seattle in the United States (2009). In such cases, digital addiction is reported as a "threat" to young people or to populations more broadly, either articulating it as an individual pathology or reporting very high figures of so-called Internet addiction as a social problem. In both cases, however, it amounts to a

particular kind of labeling or articulation of *time spent using digital media*. This is a culturally produced activity for which, following LaRose, Kim, and Peng (2011, p. 74), we need always to work actively to ensure that uses of digital connectivity that are time consuming, habitual, regular, or engaged are not necessarily problematic behaviors. Due to the nature of digital connectivity when viewed through some more conservative prisms that dictate how people should best relate, there is a tendency to see digital connectivity as generally problematic, particularly producing risks to the self, to the young, and to society more broadly – that is, moral panic discourse.

Thinking about online time as being time that one is at risk of becoming addicted involves problematic concepts which label digital media use as addictive and, more problematically, label those who spend large amounts of time engaged in on-screen activities, gaming, socializing online, or reading on-screen rather than on paper under the identity category banner of "digital addicts." This concept operates across governance policy, moral panic, community intervention and the interpellation of subjects who begin to see themselves as digital addicts. This is a case in which we witness the emergence of a new identity category or label and concomitant identity attributes as a direct result of widespread responses to the uptake of newer digital technologies and tools. The identity label emerges at the intersection of a range of discourses – the conditions necessary to produce the very *idea* of the digital addict as a subject more than just a behavior – and these discourses include the ways in which digital media are perceived as somehow like a drug or as a dark, murky, dangerous, and risky world, as well as through stereotypes, particularly of youth, of avid gamers, and of those whose social activities occur online or are face-to-face but enhanced by digital, mobile, and on-screen engagement. The murkiness of the online world is often articulated through associating a small number of tragic examples of outcomes of digital media use with the fact that a large number of younger persons (available to be categorized as being at risk of all sorts of terrible outcomes) are perceived as being heavy users. Unpacking these discourses by investigating their historical and conceptual development is an important aspect in studying online identity and in making sense of the ways in which such subjectivities as the digital addict are produced. While to many users (whether light or heavy, professional or excessive users) the very idea of the digital addict is an absurd one, it has clearly been taken up against many of the realities of Internet use that include simply the fact that time spent communicating online is increasing not as a threat or a risk to reality but in the same way takeup of the radio, television, and telephone

had occurred (likewise without harmful side-effects). As Nicola Johnson (2009) has cogently pointed out, heavy use is not an addiction, nor is it addictive; rather the discourse of computer addiction suggests that "as twenty-first century participants, [we] are dependent on technologies because they make our lives easier and we prefer to use them rather than not" (p. 4).

Whether digital games or Internet use can, indeed, *cause* addiction remains a moot point from the perspective of media and cultural theory, partly because it replicates media effects and a technologically determinist understanding of the relationship between behavior and new media, and partly because it represents the individual utilization of both digital games and Internet as level and homogenic. However, one aspect at play here is the insistence that online, mobile, and gaming platform use is an engagement with a kind of popular "low culture" in opposition to "high art." The distinction between high culture and popular culture emerged in the latter half of the nineteenth century as part of a series of classifications that produces a social boundary between different kinds of activities, texts, artforms and, ultimately, classes (Storey, 2003, pp. 32, 33). The dichotomy, of course, is mythical in that there is no logical boundary between different kinds of cultural practices, productions, textual/communication forms, and art, only an arbitrary set of distinctions that, at times, is built on taste and determined by those who have the social and cultural capital to produce and circulate opinions on appropriate and inappropriate cultural forms. Here, digital addiction is productively activated as a way of explaining the heavy use of online and mobile communication and gaming media by virtue not of a particular kind of behavior but in the context of its distinction from what, in elite terms, is labeled, understood, and spoken about as proper behavior, particularly for young people. For example, no one today would speak of a heavy, avid reader of novels as a literature addict. Nor, today, would there be a panic if it were revealed that a large number of schoolchildren were actively spending a great deal of after-school time reading the poetry of Wordsworth (presumably as a homework assignment, and regardless of whether it is read on printed paper or on an electronic book reader device). Young men and women who play football for many hours every weekend are not considered sports addicts. Residual and archaic activities that consume time might be considered eccentric affectations (e.g., knitting), but no ardent knitter is considered an addict with the same kind of scorn, parental concern, psychiatric investigation, policy prevention, or urgent techniques of intervention is devoted to the identity figure of the digital addict and the figure of youth who is, today, seen to be persistently on the verge of addiction to on-screen activities.

Part of this results from the still-nascent nature of digital communication, media, and gaming activities within the broader framework of contemporary culture. To say this is to refer to culture not only as the textual and artistic output of a society (high art, low culture, popular culture, or mass culture in terms of actual texts that can be read and viewed) but as the whole lived experience of those of us who engage regularly and at great devotion of time in the use of digital communication. For Williams (1976), culture is understood as a complete way of life for an identifiable group of people (pp. 80, 81), although it is not static and unchanging, despite the common claims to, say, British culture or working class culture or ethnic culture; rather it is always a process (Williams, 1981, p. 10). Structures of feeling is a concept used to understand the ways in which a culture is operating at a particular historical moment, which includes common perceptions and values articulated in politics, art, media, textuality, and forms of communication. Within the structures of feeling of a particular society is Williams' articulation of "dominant, residual and emergent" elements that operate as stresses and tensions in the context of culture as a persistent process of change. What is dominant in a culture is that which occurs through hegemonic processes. Contemporary late capitalism, neoliberalism, an ethic of work and – importantly for this study – cosmopolitan white-collar consumer masculinity can be considered elements of the dominant. The emergent refers to new meanings, values, practices, and relationships that are continually being created, not as an isolated process for they emerge from within culture but may be oppositional to that which is dominant or hegemonic even though they are often incorporated into it as the most direct means by which dominance maintains itself against the visibility of alternative and oppositional elements (Williams, 1977, p. 124). Here, it is not simply digital communication, gaming, or the Internet that is emergent but the uses, practices, attitudes, and ideas that emerge in ways which include very large amounts of time spent engaging with screens, interactive communication and play, and the production of online digital content. These emerge from within culture (not alien to it), but sit somewhat at odds from the dominant perspectives of cultural expectations on younger persons to develop and maintain patterns of the use of time in line with the norms established for older communication forms and media (e.g., from the landline telephone to television and books). Digital media and gaming are only available as targets for panics around addictive behavior *because* they are emergent, not because there is anything inherently addictive about the technologies or practices, nor because those who spend long hours in these pursuits are in any way addicted.

This is not to suggest that there are not problematic compulsive or obsessive behaviors in relation to online use ("Net addicts," 2009) – there are with any activities, for example from those who feel compelled to clean themselves obsessively in a way which interferes with normative everyday social and labor engagement to those who feel they can only function after knitting for several hours to those who jog or run far more than their bodies can safely handle. The repetitive activity of some kinds of digital media use, such as gaming, in addition to the possibilities that, for some, the production of adrenalin through gaming helps one to feel valuable in oneself – running and jogging can do this too (Elliott, 2014) – are factors that can produce the *idea* of digital addiction (Walters, 2009). However, the one real difference between claiming that there are millions of digital addicts and that a very small number of people demonstrate genuinely compulsive behaviors is that, for the latter, the technology and that activity are not in themselves causal of addictive behaviors in the way that a drug that chemically enhances mood (such as a cigarette) is genuinely addictive. It is important to bear in mind that the American Psychiatric Association's 2013 release of the codification of disorders in *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition* (DSM-5) did not include Internet addiction despite calls for its inclusion. Rather, it created in this update a new category for behavioral addictions and listed gambling as its only disorder. It was decided that Internet addiction be listed in the appendix to the DSM-5 in order to encourage further study without preempting research findings by describing it as an official addiction (Fairburn, Lane, Mataix-Cols, Tian, Grant, & Von Deneen, 2013). Problematic overall, of course, is that digital addiction is produced as a concept based on a myth that normal behavior involves limited time engaging interactively or via a computer screen, and that therefore those who do spend a great deal of time (because it is enjoyable or productive) are identifiable as – and have the identity of – digital addicts.

To some extent, public discourse writing on digital addiction articulates addictiveness through broad statistical uptake of new media technologies, often relating the concept of addiction to ubiquity. Much of this in recent years has been associated with the uptake of mobile phones and smartphones and the extent to which they are used for web-based activities such as social networking; often these are given in the number of hours an average person reports use of the device for these purposes (Wray, 2008) or the numbers of members of a specific population – typically a national population – who have begun using social networking in a given period (Moses, 2012), or focus on the assumed pitfalls of substantial market

penetration of smartphones and wireless connectivity (Galvin, 2012). At other times, it relates to Internet use in general and the idea that all online activity is somehow likely to lead to a loss of productivity for industry and the labor force generally and/or problems managing work/life balance (Lucas & Schneiders, 2013). Most articulations of digital addiction, however, focus on the figure of the individual addict as an at-risk younger person, spinning the narrative outward to argue that all young people, and therefore the future of humanity, are at substantial risk of becoming mindless addicts of digital communication. This is not, of course, wholly uncontested in public discourse as, at other times, the very idea of the digital addict has been caricatured or mocked in the press, indicating the ways in which the conservative articulation of a problematic digital media user is out of step with broader community understandings of the ways in which technology enhances sociality, the manner in which they are used excessively but not necessarily problematically, and the potential of networked digital communication for healthy entertainment, productive engagement, work, and relationships.

I am arguing here that digital media forms are by no means addictive in and of themselves, and that the representation of digital cultural products as addictive relates to understandings that attempt to *install* digital media within arguments that support an artificial divide between the real and the virtual, or the natural and the technological. The assertion that new media are addictive is produced in such a way that the conceptual and imaginative spaces of both games and various Internet documents and activities are given as unknown, dangerous, unsafe, or menacing with strong similarity to the discursive representation of chemical drugs. Such a connection between digital relationality and drugs is obviously tending toward the absurd, despite the one slightly comic scenario of the "i-dose" phenomenon in which a downloadable audio file was marketed in 2010 as a digital form of methamphetamine, cocaine, crack, and heroin, whereby users were duped into paying as much as USD $2000 on the false premise that listening to the file would provide a drug-like high (Hearn, 2010b). While there is no doubt that there are some social problems associated with spending excessive time online or in compulsive use of digital gaming (whether solo, with others physically present, or in online gaming), problematic behavior online has more to do with excessive sociality than with viewing, understanding, or relating digital communication, games, and media to the mythical über-addictive drug. As John Grohol (2000) neatly puts it: "Socializing with a friend, reading a book, work, and watching television are [also] all activities

which people enjoy but sometimes take to an extreme" (p. 140). It is the *specificity* of digital worlds as they are imagined in popular culture, news media, and certain strands of academic egopsychology discourses that provides digital environments with a set of significations making them, on the one hand, somehow less than real (virtual) and, on the other, hyperreal negative environments which are understood to be addictive in and of themselves.

I want to discuss, first, the processes and politics of *producing* a new identity figure in the form of the supposed digital addict as a new coordinate of performativity that is imposed through discursive deployment of frames of expertise and normativity and that, through surveillance and moral panic, interpellates some heavy users to see themselves as being addicted selves. I would then like to consider some of the ways in which digital addiction has been represented in academic and media discourses, and particularly in the pop psychology of online addiction guru Kimberly Young (1997, 1998, 2003). I will follow with an examination of the rhetoric of digital-gaming addiction that collapses the question of frequency of use with addiction, violence, play, competitiveness, tension, and questions of the loss of the self. Finally, drawing on an interview given by Jacques Derrida on drug addiction I show how the meaning of talk and debate *about* addiction works to represent *all* digital (as opposed to traditional) communication, games, and Internet as purely simulacral, unreal, and unnatural, thereby locating them together in an unproductive and undertheorized real/virtual dichotomy. I am particularly interested in dealing together with two representations of digital addiction (Internet and digital gaming) which are most often separated in both academic and popular discourses of new media use, neither because the concepts and rhetoric supporting these representations are easily collapsed, nor because they amount to the same thing, but because they both work in similar ways to establish digital and interactive media as forming virtual worlds that are equated with the conceptual unreality of physical drug use.

1 THE DICTION OF ADDICTION

According to Anne Federwisch (1997), the first identification of the phenomenon of "cyber addiction" was made by New York psychiatrist Ivan Goldberg who identified groups of people abandoning family obligations to stare at the computer screen. While Goldberg's statement was a spoof on contemporary North American culture's fascination with addictive behaviors (Federwisch, 1997), the idea of Internet and digital-gaming addictions

soon became a field of debate at a number of levels – including academic research, popular cultural production, judicial institutions, and news media. Goldberg's joke has been transformed into a number of discursive formations that weave together the digital and the behavioral. What the identification of digital addiction does, effectively, is apply a set of connotations under the drug-related signifier "addict" to a new set of behaviors, usually having no special or direct relationship with drugs (whether legal or illicit) or alcohol. Sex addiction, gambling addiction, workaholism, addictions to serial monogamy, addictions to violence or physical exercise, and compulsive eating have all been identified under the singular signifier addiction, and usually in such a way that reduces a set of *frequent* and/or *unusually excessive* activities to a single form and cause, relegating the object that is utilized compulsively to a danger, an unknown or a moral concern. The use of new media forms, particularly aspects of Internet use and digital games have likewise been subject to this identification in what appears to be a continued "netting" of behaviors under this one signifier.

Chemical drug addiction is often associated with moral disorder, a physical failing, a social failing, a bodily disease the symptom of which is substance abuse, (the view adopted by Alcoholics Anonymous who evoke the figure of the forever recovering alcoholic) or as an infectious disease that must be contained or monitored for fear of spreading addiction from one body to another (Lart, 1998, p. 61). It is variously one or several of these concepts that are used in the rhetoric of digital addiction to produce the figure of the frequent Internet user or game player as *an addict*. Often this is seen simultaneously as a psychological disorder and in the terms of a model in which addiction is determined by that to which one is addicted – digital media in this case (e.g., Holliday, 2000, p. 10).

While I do not have the necessary disciplinary expertise to engage fully with a neurological scientific account, I would like here to give a brief description of drug dependence in the physical context (what was formerly referred to typically as physical drug addiction) in order to demonstrate some of the ways in which it differs from both popular cultural representations of drug abuse and from the discourses of addiction as applied to nondrug activity such as gaming and mobile phone and Internet use. The body's drug receptors are molecules present at the cellular level to which a drug combines and mediates its effect. Certain physical drugs (both natural and chemically produced) alter the ability of nerve cells to fire and produce various body chemicals associated with pleasure. Different drugs are understood to react with different receptors, for example, specific opiate receptors

in the case of opioid drugs. Drugs are eventually metabolized by the body, broken down by enzymes in the liver or bloodstream, and flushed from the body through urine or sweat. Although biological accounts of addiction to most chemical drugs agree that biologic, psychosocial, and cultural variables need to be taken into account, prolonged use of drugs is predominantly understood to alter permanently the system of receptors such that persistent use is necessary for receptor function (Zweben & Payte, 1990). This account is merely one particular narrative or language of addiction and, from the perspective of cultural theory, none of this is to suggest that what constitutes a drug is necessarily clear or final, nor that biological responses to drug-like substances are universal or necessarily will ever be fully mapped. That is, there is a substantial difference between externally sponsored addiction through the drug that comes into the body and fosters the production of dopamine, and behaviors which are enjoyable, productive, and/or habit-forming and which demand or result in large amounts of time devotion to those behaviors (e.g., playing games and interacting socially online or through mobile devices).

Much of the problem with the application of drug rhetoric to digital media is that it fails either to take into account the more nuanced neurobiological narratives around the permanent and physical alteration of the body's receptors, or to query how the very notion of drug *can* be applied to digital media. Young, whose widely distributed and frequently cited study *Caught in the Net* (1998) is a popular example of moral panic writing, utilizes the pop rhetoric of chemical drug addiction and, indeed, modeled her clinical framework for Internet addiction on examples of dependency on psychoactive substances without criticizing the distinction between an injection or infusion of chemicals and the activity of engaging with others online (Griffiths, 1998, p. 68). Her writing is filled with comparisons reductively suggesting that Internet addiction is not different from "alcoholism, chemical dependency, or addictions like gambling and overeating" (Young, 1998, p. 7). Young explains an apparent frequent use of the Internet by undergraduate students in her study as the result of a higher legal drinking age (21 in parts of the United States), suggesting that the Internet becomes a "substitute drug of choice: no ID required and no closing hour" (Young, 2003). She refers to Internet addiction as an epidemic (Young, 1998, p. 5), much as the moral panics around drug use among youth invoke concepts of spread, contamination, and conformity. She also suggests that Internet users experience various "mood states derived from such on-line stimulation [ranging] from reduced loneliness, improved

self-esteem, and euphoria" (Young, 1997). Importantly, Young does recognize that this is the application of addiction rhetoric to a nondrug dependence phenomenon. However, rather than establishing too close a set of parallels between the Internet as "drug" and drugs themselves, she works through a notion of addictive behavior, drawing on previous writings which have looked for commonalities between chemical drug dependence and habits such as compulsive gambling, chronic overeating, sexual compulsion, and obsessive television viewing. For Young (1998), it is the feeling experienced that is addictive rather than the digital media itself (p. 17). However, in relying on a pedestrian account of technological determinism, her claim locates itself in an idea that exposure itself to the Internet is the root *cause* of the addiction, much as two or three shots of heroin or a couple of days of smoking are understood to bring on physical drug dependence: "Most Internet addicts, you'll recall, get hooked within months of first venturing on-line" (p. 97). The terminology used in her theorization and subsequent recovery program also works to solidify a comparison between the digital and the chemical drug: hooked, denial, relapse, triggers (Young, 1998, 2003).

The application of drug rhetoric to nonchemical behaviors and activities works to constrain a complex set of behaviors, patterns, and analyses within a narrative of addiction that, on the one hand, suggests frequent or compulsive use is a weighted negative and, on the other, defines the artifact used as dangerous, negative, or, as with certain chemicals, the cause of addiction. In an interview on the cultural semiotics and connotations of drug use and dependence, Jacques Derrida (1995) referred to a "diction of addiction" notion as a set of significatory characteristics that are applied to drug users and effect connotations which bind the applicant within particularly fixed ideological and political valencies. I want to return to Derrida's diction of addiction at the end of this chapter, but it is important at this stage to note that the application of the addiction metaphor constrains behavior, performatively producing behavior in the form of the identity "digital addict" through establishing the digital world as an unnatural, unreal, dangerous substance.

2 THE YOUTHFUL ADDICT – A STEREOTYPE

In Australia in 2010, a research team from the Psychological Medicine Department of a Sydney hospital surveyed almost 2000 users of digital games aged above 13 years and found that 8% appeared to have an addiction problem. For the researchers indicators of a digital addiction problem included

"if gamers admitted playing longer than they had planned, or were playing games despite knowing "one should not do it," arguing that respondents who were "male, young and single" were more likely to have lost control playing games such as *World of Warcraft* (Pullar-Strecker, 2010). In the same month, indicating a peak in panic reporting on Internet and gaming addiction, a London hospital announced an intensive inpatient program directed to teenagers to help them reduce the amount of time spent in front of a computer screen, with a spokesperson stating that the service "will address the underlying causes of this addiction to transform screenagers back into teenagers" ("London Hospital," 2010). The articulation here not simply of addiction online as an identity attribute but as a category of self-hood and identity – the "screenager" – is significant. In this framing, both youth in transition from childhood to adulthood and the figure of the addict as suffering from an endemic disease that stems from within while simultaneously being produced through the use of digital communication is important. The picture of the teenager to which the program seeks to return these youth is, of course, a figure grounded in nostalgia for a teen who is seen to be sociable, active, fit, and engaged in a face-to-face community – ignoring that playing online games and communicating through digital and visual technologies is, indeed, being sociable, active, fit, and engaged in community, only that this is a community that is articulated relationally through online communication (and, naturally, may well be a subset of a peer network or community that also is engaged face-to-face at other times). The idea that the screenager is a figure who performs addiction in a way which is deemed nonnormative, pathological, and in need of intervention from psychiatric medicine in hospital settings actively stereotypes along generational lines. It operates alongside very outdated stereotypes of gamers as being young, teenaged, and male spending time in the basement playing games alone, the result of an inherent lack of social skills or confidence (Campbell, 2009). Yet, in cases of digital addiction, this stereotype is always combined with a generational discourse of youth. For cultural theorist Mark Davis (1997), generations of a population that are determined by categories of age range are overdetermined through the deployment of an artificial distinction that categorizes particular traits and attributes for an identity group articulated by age (pp. 1–20). Indeed, generations and the discourse of youth have often been used as a policy-led excuse for biopolitical governance and increased surveillance, ostensibly to protect such youth from themselves.

Earlier than these moral panic accounts of digital addiction, Rob Latham (2002) usefully drew on the mutual concepts of vampirism and

consumption to argue that contemporary young adults were being figured as subjects who were both voracious consumers (of culture and technology) and actively consumed (commodified, used, and exhausted by such cultural and technological engagement). Latham stated that digital communication technologies in this context represented "a convergence of commodifying logics, in which subversive technology and resistant youth are mutually recuperated and exploited" (p. 194). Here, we see the figure of the digitally addicted youth who is, on the one hand, out of control in the use of digital media and gaming by virtue of being a youth and, on the other, articulated as being at risk to an addictive nature of the technology itself through a technologically determinist sensibility in which digital communication and gaming are represented as dark, shady, and dangerous activities capable of corrupting young persons and young minds. For example, British commentator Janet Street-Porter (2010) proclaimed Facebook to be a "toxic addiction" in an opinion piece in the *Daily Mail*, arguing that the murder of a 17-year-old girl by a serial sex offender who contacted her on Facebook using a fake identity is preventable if only teenagers, described as "[i]nnocent, normal kids," were able to control themselves and spend less time engaging in this dangerous online space of social networking. For Street-Porter: "Going online to chat is like taking crack. It's so addictive, you soon find yourself constantly tweeting, texting, messaging, emailing. Mostly harmless bilge, but for vulnerable teenagers it's a drug that can end in death." In writing that uses the kind of rhetoric designed to generate widespread panic, Street-Porter views the Internet as "a jungle online" and the problem "too late to do anything about," labeling those who use social networking as among the millions of fans, associating the behavior with some very old representations of hedonistic group behavior and loss of control among, for example, fans of the Beatles in the 1960s – a claim to youth using online technologies not as rational beings with agency but trapped in a drug-addled mindlessness. In her framework, this situation is not entirely of young people's making, but a social problem in which exposure to digital technologies puts young people at risk *because* they are vulnerable and at risk.

   Such discourses effectively deploy a stereotype of youth as both addictive and corruptible, producing a particular kind of identity. All stereotypes serve to link an identity category – usually a minority representation or characterization of a group deemed nonnormative but sometimes threatening – with a set of behaviors, attitudes, desires, and norms (Rosello, 1998). Easily recognized because they are built on repetition and difficult to eradicate, stereotypes work as a "package" or "byte" of information (not necessarily accurate

or truthful) about an identity or identity group. In that sense, stereotypes are consensual, communicative, and operate at a collective level within ongoing social processes (Karasawa, Asai, & Tanabe, 2007, p. 516) and are thereby implicated in the ways in which younger persons' identities are performed toward collectivity, coherence, and belonging. In the case of digitally addicted youth, a particular identity is conferred on younger persons who are actively using digital media. Younger users are being read as not just heavy or sometimes even obsessive users of digital communication technologies, but are being actively hailed to adopt and recognize themselves as digital addicts, forever at risk from the digital world and, at the same time, producing an enhanced addictive engagement with digital media in order to fulfill that identity category's requirements for coherence and intelligibility. This identity leads to examples of younger persons self-articulating their need for help and intervention to overcome their addiction. Part of this emerges from the *culture of confession* related to problematic behavior, in which we are culturally compelled to speak about any behavior, attribute, attitude, desire, dream, fantasy, dysfunction, or nonnormativity in public and private as part of the articulation and telling of the self (Plummer, 1995, p. 4). In the case of digital addiction, this is a response to the call to find a behavior that is deemed problematic such as digital addiction, to identify with the problem, and to draw parallels. This requires people to adopt the identity category of digital addict as it is presented by "experts" and then go on to speak about that problem within a framework either of adopting the identity as nonnormative but acceptable to oneself (in a claim to agency) or adopting the identity as nonnormative but seeking help to overcome it, while – like the alcoholic – always being able to claim and call upon the identity as something from which one is persistently recovering and always at risk of relapsing into that identity category and its associated behaviors.

This confessional behavior operates as a form of performative articulation of particular kinds of digital self-hood and includes those who have confessed to journalists that they are digital addicts, such as Alexander from the United States discussed in an article in *The Age* newspaper from Melbourne (Australia). The article states:

> Alexander is a tall, quiet young man who always got good grades and hopes to become a biologist. He started playing World of Warcraft, *a hugely popular online multiplayer role playing game, about a year ago, and got sucked right in.* "At first it was a couple of hours a day," he said. "By midway through the first semester, I was playing 16 or 17 hours a day. School wasn't an interest," he said. "It was an easy way to socialise and meet people." It was also an easy way to flunk out. Alexander

dropped out in the second semester and went to a traditional substance abuse program, which was not a good fit. He graduated from a 10-week outdoors-based program in southern Utah, but felt he still had little control over his gaming. So he sought out a specialised program and arrived in Fall City in July. He thinks it was a good choice. "I don't think I'll go back to World of Warcraft *any time soon," Alexander said (Net Addicts Get Clean with Hard Labour, 2009).*

Here we have a number of intersecting — as well as conflicting — discourses of addiction, identity, normativity, and technology at play. At one level, the article articulates the problem for individual younger persons, such as students at school and university deemed to be particularly at risk. Alexander confesses the interruption to study that gaming presented. At another level, however, he actively reveals the social, rather than isolating, nature of using digital media and gaming for relationality with others. However, by presenting himself for treatment he not only suggests himself as a person expressing what he sees as nonnormative behavior (*too much* time spent online) but also as an addict with the identity figured by the category "addict." The fact that he will, subsequent to treatment, avoid playing *World of Warcraft* establishes an identity performativity context in which he confesses to being permanently at risk of becoming addicted again should he engage with the game. At yet another level, however, Alexander's confession points not only to the discourse of addiction but to an underlying uncertainty over addiction, by framing his digital media use as potentially a formation of procrastination which has sometimes been articulated as a result of the distractive nature of hyperlinked web surfing (Knight, 2013). As a student, he found that his study was boring and he began engaging socially using *World of Warcraft* to meet others. Should he have articulated this as going to a bar regularly or attending parties more often than he thought healthy, he would have been no different from the vast majority of older teenagers and tertiary-level students on a worldwide scale. Of course, digital sociality and physical, corporeal, and localized sociality are regularly distinguished in popular media accounts of problematic computer and mobile use, with the latter typically related to being an impersonal interaction and therefore problematic (Pfarr, 2011). Here, digital media and digital gaming are assigned responsibility for being a problematic site through which to procrastinate, and the confession simultaneously articulates Alexander's identity as one of risk, vulnerability, permanent addiction, loss of agency, and incapacity for normative (read: conservative, proper) everyday studious living. At the same time, the potential alternative discourses that point not to addiction but to heavy sociality and relational engagement persist alongside the confession,

effectively pointing to the fact that younger persons are typically *positioned* for greater social activity that may, temporarily and without any pathology, interrupt more serious obligations. That is not about addiction – it is about being young.

3 ONLINE ADDICTION

Young's research has argued that 5–10% of Internet users (at the time of writing approximately 5 million Internet users) are addicted. Having utilized user responses she articulates a particular narrative of online addiction, but in methodological terms her estimate of addiction rates have little legitimacy, and her concern that 97% of her respondents spent more time on the Internet than they might have liked tells us little about overall estimates of addiction. Young's study has been criticized for its reliance on a self-selected sample replying to advertisements posted on Usenet groups and internationally distributed newspapers (e.g., Griffiths, 1998; Grohol, 2000, p. 139) and might be further criticized for her attempt to use such a sample to estimate rates of Internet addiction among a much broader demographic. However, it is her production of the normative and its location in the real that has much broader implications for the idea of digital addiction. Likewise, it is important that her premise relies on the assumption of a total separation between online and offline which no longer makes any sense in an era of the ubiquity of digital access in Western social and technological settings in terms of connected devices. Today, one does not log in to the Internet as such, as if it is a particular (and dangerous) pastime separate from other activities in everyday life and sociality.

However, Young sees the space of digital communication, digital textuality, and interactive performance as a highly separated realm that, unlike reality is a world of make believe (1998, p. 21) which has dangerous consequences for one's personal identity and behavior. By enforcing a strict distinction between real life and virtual life behavior, she validates the real over the digital, while presenting only a nostalgic and predigital picture of real life. Her concern is that in spending time online, inhibitions are broken down and people will type "words you wouldn't dream of saying in your real life" (p. 21). She claims that heavy Internet users neglect their real lives: "other family members and friends of Internet addicts lament the addict's total loss of interest in once-treasured hobbies, movies, parties, visiting friends, talking over dinner" (p. 7). Rather than examining the ways in which the availability of online communication might afford opportunities

for new social and personal arrangements and interests, or might indeed be viewed not through a technological determinist approach that understands the Internet as foisted on users rather than as produced through various cultural demands for new forms of interactive communication, she bemoans the ways in which it distracts from the real:

> Mary Lou is neglecting her husband and four kids, Bob's children can't get through to him, and Jennifer disappeared so far into the black hole of cyberspace that her mother worries that she won't get back. ... Brenda and Bob are withdrawing from those around them to hang out with their friends on the Internet, much as alcoholics prefer the company of fellow drinkers who will support them in their addictive behavior (pp. 16–17).

The validation of the real as normative over digital communication shuts down the possibility of addressing the ways in which online communication is sociality itself and how arrangements for conducting communication, friendships, learning, information access, entertainment, and leisure activities might indeed be highly diverse and productive. Instead, she works to establish the *physical* and *local* as the real, while viewing the social space of the Internet as the virtual or the pseudo – a lesser form of communication experience that is addictive by virtue of its virtuality. In public discourse about productivity in the workplace and work/life balance, email is bemoaned as unproductive interruptions with the sometimes valid response that a more interactive phone call or face-to-face chat would be more efficient; however, we should not thereby assume that all online communicative activity such as email or Skype is unproductive, problematic, antisocial, unsociable, or less than real.

For Young, it is not only the predication of a virtual world that is problematic, but the amount of *time* spent engaging with it, communicating through it, or utilizing it for some purpose. She separates the experience of the Internet from other experiences in which time is wasted or lost or flies: talking on the telephone, evenings out with friends. For her, time spent online is the major criteria to indicate addiction: as she puts it, "In my survey *97 percent* of all respondents reported that they found themselves spending longer periods of time-on-line that they intended" (Young, 1998, p. 36). Television and radio are not treated to the same concerns around interactivity because they are not viewed as an ingress into a virtual or cyber world. I would suggest that they in fact do invoke imaginary spaces, a point Joshua Meyrowitz (1997) makes in invoking the conceptual difference between physical place and communicative social space utilized through television and telephone. These are exempt from claims of addictiveness, then, not

because they differ substantially – they are all media and communication forms of varying levels of interactivity – but because television and radio are structured around scheduling and time.

There are three further methodological or conceptual problems in Young's work that contribute to a reductive view of the Internet as addictive. The first of these is that she collapses all Internet usage into one form or into several related activities that center on one form and one use. Young relates the chat room as the hub of the Internet:

> … the path that leads to obsessive involvement with the Internet community usually leads directly to the center of chat rooms and interactive games. Once you get there, you rapidly immerse yourself in this community despite its limitations, its pitfalls, and its addictive nature that pulls you away from your actual life and the people and predicaments you should be facing (Young, 1998, pp. 114, 115).

Even in the late 1990s of Web 1.0, such views were highly outdated: email and browsing were already dominant activities becoming more ubiquitous than the characterization of online engagement through Relay Chat. The multiplicity of sites, uses, forms of information and activities – indeed, the very multiple structure of *the* Internet as a combination of Usenet newsgroups, email use, chat use, websites, and interactive games – is ignored.

Second, rather than viewing the *use* of digital media as diverse, Young works through a severe and strict technological determinist method – the blame for Internet addiction lies in the dynamic between the addictive potential in all users and the presence or existence of the Internet. For Young (1998), repressed and buried emotions are brought out in accessing the Internet, and she is particularly interested in the ways in which playing violent games draws out repressed childhood resentments of being ignored, causing subsequent violence to be expressed in real life (p. 73). The Internet here is understood as an invention that will have significant effects on human behavior, not as emerging within and through culture and being accessed as a result of particular cultural demands and desires, as a culturalist model would have it (Williams, 1990). In Young's discourse, the Internet is alien to culture, and comes to destroy the civilizing processes that are already in place.

This leads to a third point: the ways in which Young presents particular social arrangements not only as normative but as desirable. In favoring her conception of real life over the mythical "virtual," she predicates not only physical and geographically local relationships over communication, entertainment, and information seeking in digital forms, but celebrates the suburban and conservative family as a social unit to be hermetically sealed off

from alternative friendships, relationships, and communicative practices that occur through digital means and across distances. She is concerned with what access to the Internet *does* to people, like Jeanne,

> *… a 34-year-old wife and homemaker from South Carolina. By appearances, Jeanne had a perfect life; an attentive husband, a nice house, two healthy toddlers, a few good friends through her church (Young, 1998, p. 18).*

After use of the Internet, Jeanne "began sharing her most personal thoughts and intimate details of her life" with online friends (not her husband or real-life friends) and soon began an online rendezvous with another man, exchanging erotic messages as cybersex. "Through the Internet, she had formed a bond so close that she tossed aside a 15-year marriage" (Young, 1998, pp. 18–20). Rather than examining the ways in which a marriage-interrupting bond formed through online communication might not be dissimilar from those formed in other social experiences, the statement here is that access and frequent use of the Internet destroyed the normative family which is given here as the "perfect life." Likewise, players of interactive games are seen to be ignoring their real families who "are in the next room singing and laughing with holiday merriment" (p. 89), and Young bewails the fact that families "hardly ever eat together" (pp. 113, 114). Although all sweeping gestures to a conservative articulation of home life, these obscure the possibility of viewing the Internet as emerging culturally alongside broad sociocultural changes, including variations in the perception of family, friendship, and ways in which leisure time is legitimated. Instead, it is presented as an alien substance facilitating the breakdown of lived culture *per se*.

4 GAMING ADDICTION AND NEW TEMPORALITIES

While a markedly different media form from the Internet, digital gaming is likewise subject to accusations that it is inherently addictive, which works to locate the activity of gaming as a dangerous yet virtual substance separated from the cultural. Digital games, computer games, arcade games – all have been subject to various ideological positions on their social valency, the promotion of violence, and ideas around the loss of self in the notion of the collapse between self-identity and game character identity (e.g., Slater, Henry, Swaim, & Anderson, 2003; Funk, Buchman, Jenks, & Bechtoldt, 2003). Indeed, many of the arguments in public discourse which attempt to assert that digital games are the *cause* of violence often cite or at least imply an idea of addiction to digital gaming as a significant factor working to desensitize

players to violence (Plusquellec, 2000). Academic research into digital gaming and addiction has often pointed to digital gaming as an addictive activity (Wolf, 2001, p. 4), although this view is also frequently denounced as overly reductive. Nevertheless, a certain wariness at denouncing gaming as addictive is discernible, frequently by making the point that although there is nothing addictive in games themselves, they are subject to excessive use leading to personal isolation from social activities (e.g., Plusquellec, 2000). As with the frequent collapse of Internet and online communicative and media forms into a single phenomenon, digital-gaming activities tend to be relegated to just one form, usually under the heading "video games." There is of course an array of different gaming genres, from action adventure, god games, first-person shooters, fantasy (Berger, 2002, pp. 12, 13) and significantly diverse forms of utilization of gaming, from solo play on a computer or gaming platform such as PlayStation 2 or X-Box, as well as online gaming (Humphreys, 2003). This collapse of gaming serves the accusation of addiction by allowing critics to ignore the vast array of uses, types, and pleasures that inspire ongoing game play in diverse ways.

Digital gaming is a markedly different category of digital media and entertainment from most online use (with the exception of online games), although one marked similarity, which I will discuss in more detail in the next section, relates to the ways in which both gaming and the Internet are seen to establish a separate, dichotomous, and virtual imaginary space in opposition to real-life activities and real play. Nevertheless, gaming in the popular imaginary is often seen to be diametrically opposite to the Internet, particularly in celebrationist accounts of online interactivity. For Lister, Dovey, Giddings, Grant, and Kelly (2003), a dichotomy between computer-mediated communication (CMC) forms and video games is supported by several of the following binaries: creative content versus mindless entertainment; adult users versus youth consumers; fluid identity versus hypermasculinity; sociality versus commodified space; tool versus toy. More importantly, where the Internet is sometimes seen as positively immersive, gaming immersion is rewritten as addiction (Lister et al., 2003, p. 263). What also appears to differentiate the video-game addict from other digital addicts produced within popular culture is the differing weighting given to the concept of the addict as a social menace. While online Internet addicts are produced within a discourse of liberal egopsychology and popular neurosis, the addicted gamer is seen as a low-class, protoviolent, addicted, and dangerous kid (Beavis, 1998), learning to express repressed anger and aggression (Young, 1998, p. 73), sociopathically isolated (Thompson, 2002, p. 28), and potentially capable

of perpetrating extremely violent behavior such as a high school shootout (King & Borland, 2003, p. 175). Unlike writers such as Young who lump games and online use together and read all digital immersion as addiction, there is clearly a strand in popular discourse that seeks to celebrate one over the other, marking *only* digital games as addictive. Two reasons are significant: the greater association of gaming with youth culture, and the interactive goal-seeking form that constitutes much of game play.

Although it is certainly true that younger persons, children, and teenagers, make up a significant proportion of the known game player demographic (Latham, 2002, p. 47; Buchanan, 2004, p. 143), it is also the case that games have now for some time been a highly popular lifestyle choice among adults (Newman, 2002), particularly since the marketing of Sony's PlayStation 2 and Microsoft's X-Box consoles. Nevertheless, the nexus between youth, gaming, and addiction continues to be posited in popular discourse, alarmist moral panics around game culture, and some academic writing. Popular concerns that children are now playing digital games rather than with physicaltoys such as building blocks or footballs are made often by opinion makers and politicians (Hudson, 2004). Some public discourse continues to reaffirm the older framework of separating the value of reading literature from digital gaming as activities appropriate for children. Chris Bantick's *Why Computer Games Should Worry Parents* (2004) suggested three problems with younger persons playing computer games: (1) games usurp the creativity involved in playing with Lego building blocks, (2) games along with DVDs distract from reading, and (3) games are compulsive and addictive. What is striking yet representative about this particular piece is that it continues an artificial high/popular culture division, and locates the alleged addictiveness of games within an anxiety over interactive, participatory, and immersive formats that are understood to compete with the conceptual representation of high art that is embodied in the noninteractive print book. Compulsive reading, then, is exempt from calls of addiction – though there may well be grounds for the application of addiction rhetoric to some readers – because it bears no resemblance or association with the less legitimate form of new media arts.

There remains at play, then, a logic which suggests that frequent use of games and digital media is addictive *because* they are used by youth. This is part of what Davis (1997) identifies as cultural generationalism in the West that denounces the practices, behaviors, concerns, ideas, and pastimes of youth and children while nostalgically venerating those of the recent past. Certainly, Bantick's (2004) concern that Lego has been displaced in favor

of digital games and online entertainment is rooted in a celebration of the popular toys of a baby boomer generation over those used by people currently under 30. At the same time, it is fed by a concern around the toys of the real world over those available in digital formats. Bantick expresses a concern that it may lead to an "addiction to electronic stimuli at the expense of the physical." With this set of connections between youth and digital media, and given the already packaged discursive linkage of youth and drugs (Redhead, 1997, pp. 58, 59; Murji, 1998, p. 78), associating youth and digital cultures in the rhetoric of drug addiction and risk finds a moral basis in a set of panics around the protection of children and younger persons.

A further way in which the signifiers of addiction and digital gaming are frequently conflated in alarmist responses to game culture is through the amorphous and undecidable nature of games as text and/or play. This is to continue the misreading of immersion or interactivity as addiction, but it is a perception that is legitimated by the subsequent goal seeking and anticipation that constitute this form of digital interactive entertainment. Games are a form of digital media that work across the interface between narrative and play or, in Henry Jenkins and Kurt Squire's (2002) terms, a hybrid of text and interactive play (p. 65). Play, as Huizinga (1949) pointed out in his *Homo Ludens*, is virtually always conditioned by tension through goal seeking (pp. 10, 11). As he elaborates:

> There is always the question: "will it come off?" This condition is fulfilled even when we are playing patience, doing jig-saw puzzles, acrostics, crosswords, diabolo, etc. Tension and uncertainty as to the outcome increase enormously when the antithetical element becomes really agonistic in the play of groups. The passion to win sometimes threatens to obliterate the levity proper to a game (p. 47).

His mobilization of the concept of passion is highly significant here: many of the fears invoked around violence and games and around digital-gaming addiction have to do more with a passion for the game, for game play, and for achieving a success in the outcome of meeting a goal. Such goal seeking across many games requires *familiarity* with the game, its environment, and its internal narrative structures; it requires training and practice; it requires dedication – whatever the personal or social value in game play, it remains that in the discourses of moral panics passion is rewritten as addiction, supported by the witness of a player's time and dedication.

Familiarity, temporal engagement, and pedagogical learning of skills necessary to play a game – whether alone or as part of online, multiplayer-gaming sociality involves a particularly *necessary* set of traits for digital game play, in which various physical and mental skills are required. The introduction

of the joystick in the 1980s into the home computer game-playing environ-
ment was met with initial negative reactions by some over the difficulty of
its use – not because it was inherently difficult but because it took some time
to gain familiarity with it. Other interface devices such as the mouse also re-
quire time to gain familiarity; indeed, switching computers can cause some
delay in efficient use of interface devices if they have been programmed
differently or are set to have different reaction speeds, for example between
a mouse and the cursor. The gaming environment itself takes time: there are
instructions either on screen or in print form to be read, the various goals of
more complex games need to be learned, a god game such as *Civilization III*
requires time to learn strategies for success – often by trial and error. This
itself, along with some forms of sociality, is both the passion and pleasure of
game play for many players. No doubt, for some lifestyles, certain particu-
larly difficult games must be shunned for the amount of time that may be
required to become familiar with the internal narrative operations of the
game, for example, the goals, narratives, play maneuvers, and possibilities of
older games such as *Tetris* or *Space Invaders* are far more apparent on first
playing than those of, say, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: Chaos Bleeds*. A sporting
game, such as *Stacey Jones Rugby League*, will be more easily learned by those
familiar with the rules of rugby than by novices to the sport that the game
replicates and represents. Whatever the personal or social value in game play,
it remains that in the discourses of moral panic, passion is rewritten as ad-
diction, supported by the witness of a player's time and dedication. It is of
course ironic to note that a passion for career, a sporting activity, or even
legitimate politics is seen as healthy, whereas passion for that which is in
digital form is represented as dangerous or addictive, a reaction to the con-
tinued novelty of games as opposed to other, more essentially physical or
localized activities.

Simultaneously, the question of time emerges as something in game play
that is measured differently from those more traditional forms of media ac-
tivity and engagement, and causes a certain amount of anxiety among those
suggesting game play is addictive or overly immersive. Time, as we have
long known, is purely subjective, and multiple conceptions of time exist for
any social or media formation. As Paul Virilio (1991) has remarked, "time is
lived – physiologically, sociologically and politically – to the extent that it
is interrupted" (p. 82). This is a useful way to think about time spent with
older media forms as opposed to digital games. Television as a concomi-
tant set of media texts and a form of media flow is temporally segmented
(Cubitt, 1991). Its schedule is produced and familiar, generated within what

Manuel Castells (1997) refers to as "clock time" which "characteristic of industrialism, for both capitalism and statism, was/is characterized by the discipline of human behavior to a predetermined schedule creating scarcity of experience out of institutionalized measurement" (p. 125). The television schedule is media time that both disciplines and is disciple to the conventions of Western human time as they arise through patterns and standards of work, sleep, dinner, family arrangements, and so on. The rise of new, networked, digital, and recorded media forms, however, has worked to change the ways in which media time operates. These changes are not determined by media form or alterations in media programming but emerge simultaneously with changes in the temporal structure of labor such as in the growth of flexitime (Cooper, 2002); the growth of a consumer society and changes in consumer practices such as 24-hour and 7-days-a-week shopping in the rise of a consumer society; and the rise of a network society in which digital forms of communication produce a nowness in which information and communication are present and patience is (sometimes) unnecessary.

There is nothing inherent about television, radio, or print that prevents, alters, or produces different uses of time: television can be watched for an entire day, whether stationary on one channel or zapped endlessly for hours. A book can be read with few breaks throughout the night. And like digital games, they invoke a particular imaginary space where time operates in different cycles – the temporality of a television narrative is generally not working at the same speed as the clock time of the viewer; the narrative of an epic novel can span generations but be read in a matter of days or hours. Likewise a digital game such as a god game can narrate interactively the events of a thousand years but be played in 5 hours. I would suggest that these invoked and imaginary spaces can be related in the same way that Joshua Meyrowitz (1997) separates and differentiates the conceptual physical place from the communicative social space imagined through television and telephone use. The difference in temporality, then, is not that one entices or immerses the reader/player to a greater or lesser extent, but because television is structured around scheduling and time, a standard print work of fiction is likewise visibly structured by chapters and an ending – both in the sense of the narrative ending (Kermode, 1967) and the physicality of the book produced in its limitation of pages. Indeed, in the case of the television program, the clock on the VCR beneath or above the set seems to indicate clearly how long you've been accessing that virtual and imaginary world, and how long you can expect a particular

program to continue. Because (1) the interactive nature of most games relies on human input, user familiarity, and user training, (2) the random generation of events, situations, and configurations that emerge through the program and the CPU, and (3) the frequent lack of clarity over, for example, the number of levels in which a player might be engaged in a first-person shooter, game time is unknowable, unforeseeable, external to Castell's clock time and beyond measurement according to our contemporary social criteria of time use.

Where the television is thus thoroughly marked by cycles of clock time, gaming is marked by unstructured time, and this causes anxiety for those who would in conservative terms see time as responsibly measured (by work, family). It may be this fact that leads some people to look to the analogy with drugs and drug rhetoric, as well as the concept that lengthy periods of play are an indication of addiction. Playing an action adventure game such as *Myst* or an online game such as *EverQuest* between 2.30 p.m. and 7.30 p.m. might have been difficult or impossible given some traditional twentieth century labor, familial, and temporal arrangements. However, in emerging social formations in which activities such as labor are frequently disconnected from standards based on measured time, it is possible to choose to play at such times. This, however, is subsequently read by alarmists as addiction as if a compulsion toward game play has distracted from those traditional activities rather than viewing the game player as exercising a choice to play at those times. Indeed, under new conditions of contract and casual labor, such temporal flexibility is imposed: if gaming is an increasingly dominant entertainment form among those in their teens or the late-30s – loosely constructed as "Generation X" – then they are a group who are more likely to be long-term unemployed (Davis, 1997) and a group who have experienced a growth in casual, flexible, and shift-based employment over permanent salaried positions with their standard operating 8-h day beginning at 9 in the morning (Hardt & Negri, 2000). They are also a group who have more amorphous family living arrangements including single-parent and blended families (Colebatch, 2002), leading to schedules that are less easily engendered by and through cycles of child feeding, family meals, or Sunday outings. However, rather than examining the ways in which various alterations to social arrangements or their general diversity can be represented and understood in the context of digital game use, alarmists of game addiction look only to the differences in time and to the extent to which games are played (as opposed to watching television or reading print).

5 DIGITAL/REAL AND THE DISCOURSE OF THE ADDICT

It follows within the diction of addiction that there is an addiction of the self or the body or the personality or some other facet of performative selfhood *to* something. While drugs are seen to be an ingested physical supplement (a pill, a powder, a liquid) penetrating the body through the hypodermic or otherwise consumed, it is what drugs represent – effect – that is considered virtual, unreal, without reality, or outside reason. Addiction is generally given in terms of an addiction *to* the unreal, something that is lesser than that which is categorized as natural, righteous, appropriate, beneficial. In the rhetoric of digital addiction, both game play and online Internet experience is given as the unreal or the virtual not because of something that takes it outside physicality and normal behavior, nor because they are technologies which are relatively new, but because the narrative, communicative, articulable worlds that are evoked interactively have no *physical* substance – they are represented as a substance of unreality. Both the real and the virtual, as a number of writers have pointed out, are conceived simultaneously, such that both are represented as pure, self-sufficient, and separate. Both technology celebrationists and Luddites view the virtual scape of video games, Internet usage, and other virtual reality (VR)–related technologies as the realm of order and a new world, posthuman, postculture. As Elizabeth Grosz (2001) puts it:

> *Whereas many see in VR the ability to aspire to God-like status, to create, live in, and control worlds, to have a power of simulation that surpasses or bypasses the uncontrollable messiness of the real, others (sometimes even the same writers) revile and fear VR's transformation of relations of sociality and community, physicality and corporeality, location and emplacement, sexuality, personal intimacy, and shared work space – the loss of immediacy, of physical presence. … Unashamed apologists of cybertechnologies and nostalgic Luddites yearning for days gone by see VR as a powerful force of liberation and a form of ever-encroaching fascistic control, respectively (p. 77).*

It is significant that an era of digital ubiquity has arisen in the decade and a half since this quotation was written, taking us beyond notions of being introduced to the digital from within a nondigital and nonnetworked real life. The binary of real and virtual was always mythical, but it reemerges specifically *in order to* assert a notion of online addiction. The salient point here is that whether those who celebrate or denounce new media forms from *within* a binary concept of real/virtual, all see a transformative potential for the real and the real self (whatever that might yet come to mean) in the encounter with the virtual, such that repetitive, frequent, passionate, and

even obsessive encounter*ing* of digital media sparks an anxiety that equates the virtual with the unreal drug. Digital media and games are understood as addictive not because they are compulsively used, but because as unreal they are like drugs, and thereby become subjected to a discourse of drug addiction.

For Derrida (1995), we reject the drug addict because:

> … he cuts himself off from the world, in exile from reality, far from objective reality and the real life of the city and the community; … drugs, it is said, make one lose any sense of true reality. In the end, it is always, I think, under this charge that the interdiction is declared. We do not object to the drug user's pleasure per se, but to a pleasure taken in an experience without truth (pp. 235–236).

Although I am arguing here that the connection between drug addiction and digital addiction is more than a metaphorical comparison – for *both* are rooted in a perception of what it is that constitutes real – a simple insertion of the signifiers "game" or "Internet" or "digital" or "online" in place of drugs in the above quote indicates neatly the ways in which digital addicts are produced in contemporary culture. Because they are not within the knowledge of objective reality, digital communication and interactive entertainments are seen as a pleasure experienced without truth. The digital world is seen, then, as a paradox that makes it foreign to the representation of the real – it is both ordered and chaotic. In the rhetoric of digital addiction, digital media are seen as chaotic, neither structured around time nor centralized; categories are mixed, crossbred, hybridized, and blurred (Gaillot, 1998, p. 44). Indeed, Young's (1998) connotative terminology for online media bespeaks a messiness in its unreality, it is "make believe" (p. 21), it will "lure" the user into a "world without limits [that is] multidimensional" (p. 23), it asks for time to "trudge through the garbage swirling in the whirlpool of info glut" (p. 38). At the same time, digital forms are viewed as being too structured – a sealed world, such as the narrative space of an interactive game that no matter how complex, has a structure that is overdetermined and simplistic (Newman, 2002), a set of rules that one can imagine breaking but are impossible to defy (Humphreys, 2003, p. 84; Beavis, 1998), and lacks the genuinely random pleasure of real life play and communication.

The fact that the work of Young and others on digital addiction is driven by the ideological position that digital texts and communication possess less value than physical artifacts and relationships conducted in face-to-face capacities point to the fact that addiction is located in the digital viewed as a negative space, negative spaces being addictive by nature in her view. But for Young and for the diction of drug addiction, the object of addiction is

neither that which is consumed nor that which influences. Rather, both drugs and the digital are seen to pervade the mythical naturalness or *nature* of the user. As Derrida (1995) puts it:

> *By the grace of the technical or artificial, and ever-*interiorizing *violence of an injection, inhalation, or ingestion, by taking into my self, inside myself a foreign body, or indeed a nutriment, I will provoke a state of productive receptivity (pp. 240–241).*

For Young (1998), digital addiction is seen to "penetrate" like an "epidemic" (p. 5), a foreign and (to her, at least) unknowable or unreasonable substance that comes to infiltrate her ideal of the natural body. The factor that comes into play here relates to the fear of digital forms, not because of a cultural fear of new technologies or Luddism, but the result of the available politics of new media forms. As John Downing (2003) has pointed out, it is possible to typify mainstream media as focused on hegemonic integration and alternative media "with their frequent focus on challenging the structures of power" (p. 626). If the familiarity of the ideologically hegemonic brings it into the real – the production of our everyday realities – then that which challenges it is relegated not only to a place of fear and danger, but to a virtuality which is exacerbated in the contemporary cultural imaginary by its frequent digital form and its accessibility through the screen, keyboard, joystick, and other accoutrements of cybervirtuality. Alternative media and alternative, structure-challenging politics thus become associated with the digital world, and relegated to a space on the other side of the artificial real/virtual binary. The terminology of escapism into digital media and communication – escape from the real – is also dominant in addiction studies and panics about digital addiction (Binaisa, 2002, p. 45; Reid, 1998, p. 29). What occurs in a deconstructive understanding of digital addiction, then, is that one takes inside the real body or identity the virtual in order to escape the real.

Thinking about digital addiction becomes productive for thinking about the relationships between digital media and sociality if it begins with breaking down the artificial, outdated, and problematic distinction between the real and the virtual that is so pervasive throughout both celebrationist and alarmist discourses of new media. Grosz (2001), among other writers, points out that what the world of the digital does best is "reveal that the world in which we live, the real world, has always been a space of virtuality" (p. 78). It is thus to look at how a sociality that is built today on a broad addiction to digital connectivity and interactivity comes to inflect how we think about and represent addiction otherwise. Simon Cooper (2002) links the idea of addiction to communication technologies as an addiction to

sociality (pp. 3, 4), thereby drawing back from the artificial separation of real space and digital space. It is only in rejecting this distinction and looking to how the concepts of the virtual teach us what might constitute real that we can move beyond the reductive arguments as to whether or not digital media are addictive and consider the more important issues not only as to how or why they might be compulsive for some users or players or how they might produce the self-confessed and declarative figure of the digital addict, but what it means that this form of compulsion emerges at this time in contemporary culture.