

IDENTIFYING WITH NUMBERS: A PHILOSOPHICAL AND PSYCHOANALYTICAL READING OF SELF-IDENTIFICATION

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ABSTRACT. The need to identify, name, count and categorize predates the rise of technology. With the wearable device, our relationship to numbers is far more complex: data flows back and forth amongst devices, consumers, companies, institutions, and networks. One might purchase a self-monitoring device for self-control or self-enhancing under the allure of the ability to self-manage. On the other hand, for self-care, to be the doctor of one's own ailments. Nonetheless, measurements associated with insights on the self do not end at self-improvement goals. In the quest for anything providing the possibility for self-guidance, numbers are attributed mythological weight, carrying the promise embodying one's own divine authority. Is this tied to an underlying dream to prolong life and master death? This essay presents a wide-ranging review of literature on self-tracking device, in terms of running and shame to explore how behaviour tied to technology plays out moral or ethical constraints, dilemmas and fear of dying. Data doubles are examined in relation to Lacanian psychoanalysis and the mirror stage as formative of self-identity, which is presently little acknowledged in relation to self-tracking. The contributions of Etienne-Jules Marey to the concepts of the body in relation to time are also brought to the fore. The aim is to raise questions about the philosophical and psychoanalytic causes that drive habits of self-quantification beyond identity, including internal obligations to divinity, knowledge and reality.

Keywords: *data double, ethics, biometrics, self-tracking, quantified self, knowledge*

Digital Doubles

Instead of watching the seasons pass, we count hours, and see minutes fly. Rather than feelings of fatigue, fullness, or sensing one is fully rested, one might look to hours slept, cups of coffee consumed, miles walked, or calories ingested. Circadian rhythm battles the screen's glow, interrupting your body's hopes to sleep

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at nightfall. The digital can inevitably change the way you feel. Feedback provided by *the numbers* can take precedence over how you physically feel and come to orient your biology. The numbers themselves shape how you feel in delayed reactions to their innocent curves and holy lines. In assessments of self-worth based on numbers, days are composed through an assortment of re-readings of the body based on metrics, accompanied by guilt and self-disgust, excitement, bouts of boredom.

Numerical signs are a digital self-model. Are the metrics a more controlled, real self, or just distancing us from our environment in real-time? Can we consider our emotions in themselves, devoid of self-accounting, and quantifying? The elemental environment, the hardness of the chair, a breeze, sensations of contentedness, of satiety, subtle brushes, shifts in temperature in the room, the sounds made by someone next to us, or unheard, —a dog's heartbeat, the activity of the organs, our blood flowing— these occur, and pass, without our ability to control or predict them.

Yet, much of self-tracking and monitoring behaviours are bound to establishing a sense of our control, channelling and counterbalancing the changing tides of the outer-world to resonate with inner biomes and rhythms. This essay centres on the inability to manage and control all that is external, all that collides with self-managing, and influences decisions about behaviour. One does not walk as much and feels shame, one eats too much food in one sitting and feels they have failed, or runs a PR (personal record) and feels on top of the world.

How long do these feelings last? How much time do we invest in tracking? Numbers themselves may not be accurate and may not accurately represent reality. In the lived experience that occurs without tracking, someone who has never used any device whatsoever to track their heart rate, or sleep, may be just as attentive about the passing time, and obsessive about wearing a watch, (on the other hand, for some athletes, their body's efforts are aligned with their calculations to such a degree that they can accurately predict their pace, regardless of whether they can see it displayed on their wrist, and then there are those that have no need for tracking to begin with). If we carry some degree of worry about losing time, at least there is some attention and care towards how we decide to fill it.

The reality that numbers themselves are weary, flawed and restless seems distant, hard to reach. If numbers themselves are something hazy on the horizon, way across the fog, not actually reflective of any truth, this issue belongs to any data set or statistical measurement, in the sense that data and signs have no picture of us, and are blind to us. While this will be elaborated later in relation to Lacanian psychoanalysis, in statistics and math sciences, it is an a priori given that numbers can be weak, wrong, and never whole. In the same way, in psychological research

studies, bias can occur during research, at any phase of the study. Yet when it comes to numbers that are such a part of one's identity, this can be sometimes forgotten. Instead, we treat them very precious, as if their figure represents a divine truth that we must return to, to pay our dues.

Given the advances in technology, it is safe to say that numbers shown in our gadgets come pretty close to accuracy, and if we see them as whole, perfect measures of the divine, what is the meaning of their values and our faith in numbers? Trust in numbers is always a choice. I often feel it is because of my hypochondriac death neurosis that I have been drawn to my own obsession with patterns and numbers, worried about losing time, about spending time, and wasting it, anxious about its passing. Is it anxiety about death hiding behind these behaviours, and if so, are the attempts to mitigate death and prolong life not leached to any expert self-trackers tendencies? Or are these numbers less important than our identity, as it is *made* through and with devices: the comfort of our screens, the time spent and attachment with our watches, these have been with us, encouraging us through all of our struggles and wildest moments, right there, month after month, as a witness, — watch as private talisman?

I will circle back to my experiences with numbers, and elaborate on the concept of a data double, after this introduction on some of the literature around self-tracking. While the research in this field cannot be fully breached here, the data referenced in this essay explains several moral and ethical questions posed by our identities as they are embedded in a double through self-tracking devices, at once, rather than investigating one particular facet in depth. In this way, it allows for a discourse that merges several fields and questions that revolve around shame, technology and identity through both current research and psychoanalysis.

With the endless range of materials and avenues through which one can approach self-tracking, this essay seeks to identify the complexity of the multitude of human and nonhuman parts that work together to configure self-tracking devices¹. Moving forward, I will examine my concern for the socio-economic and community aspects of these devices, I will then examine self-tracking in relation to psychoanalysis, to bring to light the importance of Lacan's work in relation to the digital to underscore the value of the emotional body in relation to technology and the image of the self.

The relation to devices, the many options for how to approach, construct, and meander through our experience is examined through the concept of data doubles. This term has been used widely in the literature, and I will lay out my own working definition which I believe demands to be examined in relation to the

¹ These terms appear in the work of Latour and Haraway.

formation of the self from early childhood, from developmental psychology, and in relation to the creation of a self, before it reaches any commercial, governmental, data body or internet community. An often-cited philosopher in relation to self-tracking is Michel Foucault. Foucault established the concept of biopower, to represent how disciplinary institutions operate at the bodily level to shape behaviour and individuals. Biopolitics, as a new technology of this power, aims to manage at the population level for the preservation of health. I simply bring him up here to situate us in the philosophical framework built on the promotion of life, counter to where I see the real guiding force of self-tracking. Ethical incompleteness and moral obligations regarding work on thyself contribute to notions of selfhood and citizenship.

In this essay, I will aim to provide evidence of a conversation about how the guiding force behind each of these self-tracking behaviours is a quest for longevity, and greater control over destiny, to master fate and death. One important aspect of self-tracking is to induce changes in habits, but how many of these actionable changes actually take place? How many users modify their ways of living not only to accommodate the devices by reading over their data, but by changing their behaviour based on the data? As I explore these questions through a composite of research sources and from my own perspective, the goal is to raise further questions and issues for future scholarship in this area, as I will be able to outline only several here, those that have been relevant throughout my engagement with self-tracking behaviour, (more specifically, using a watch to track my runs). This essay does not claim to be wide in scope, but instead is based on personal experience and a focused and experimental digestion of Lacan and the literature on self-tracking.

Self-improvement, External Incentives and Social Differences

Self-tracking bears an obvious link to self-improvement. More sophisticated than journals or diaries, an incredible range of apps allow people to analyse patterns and data, which can also be shared with third party users. Numbers act as catalysts, insights for an online community of users. Sociological research, health and wellness companies, big businesses and marketing schemes are developed riding on the backs of personal numbers— many of these numbers are not private, and instead sourced for business schemes. Healthcare and health promotion professionals and agencies, workplaces and educational institutions encourage people to engage in self-tracking.

They participate in actively contributing to self-tracking culture at times through endorsement, rewards, or monetary compensation. Deals with employers and insurance companies benefit the wearable manufacturers. In these cases,

monitoring behaviours are not only voluntary, but also related to an external reward, part of a monitoring actively encouraged outside the self. Users' behaviour is conditioned by the feedback received from a community or endorsing body, the study that requires it. As others depend on the user for their data, personal data is not private, individuals know others are depending on their results, in some cases, numbers on devices are linked to pay and promotion opportunities.² This can be enough to encourage users to adopt healthy habits depending on how much they value the expectations and opinions of others, and how much they uphold to others when they are held externally accountable, how much they will be penalized, emotionally, but also financially.

Not only do these behaviours create both internal and external conflicts in terms of how to analyse and reflect on data, imposed societal and moral judgments are embedded in self-tracking culture. These tracking habits also make obvious social inequalities. Flanking the entrance of this topic is a caveat I must acknowledge that I've been dragging around— an area in need of further critically examination—the under-acknowledged social justice issues, the reality that tracking equipment is indicative of class, race and economic status, an elite group that has access to these devices and the time to consider the value of their data. Even if the spreading of data tracking has allowed those less fortunate more access in the recent years, the subject of equal access to devices is no less urgent then it ethically feels.

While some are penalized with higher health insurance premiums for not participating in wellness programs, others will never be offered the choice to participate because of the government they were born under or the place they live. Those with socioeconomic privilege are able to exert control over their lives with different resources than the disadvantaged. Studies have shown that older people, those with less education, lower incomes, people with disabilities and chronic health problems and people living in rural and remote areas have less access to and skills in using digital technologies.³ Given the individualistic and self-related issues within self-tracking, it is clear that reinvention within self-tracking is not an option available to everyone, and involves a privileged class. While self-improvement is not limited to a certain socio-economic class, it is evident that the tools amenable to do so are not distributed opportunities belonging to all. As a fortunate Californian, I am aware that in many cultures, and countries, the need or desire to self-track is culturally and contextually irrelevant.

In societies wherein optimizing one's life and self-improvement is rewarded, those who do not participate may be disadvantaged in terms of both financial costs

² Lohr, 2014.

³ Broadbent and Papadopoulos, 2013; Hargittai and Hinnant, 2008; Olphert and Damodaran, 2013.

and moral judgments. Cultural meanings and social structural factors shape human lives, but the family also forms society, in the early years of life, hence the need for a productive return to psychoanalysis in relation to Lacan's work with ego formation in the early stages of child development.

Without enmeshing ourselves too fully into either an objective literature review or the bowels of psychoanalysis, there is a need to wade within the canals where these planetary bodies meet, to take from such a meeting what can be smeared across the use of data and self-tracking, in a way that is missing from the literature on self-tracking. I will briefly summarize the main elements of self-tracking examined in the Quantified Self (hereon QS) literature I have read, before leaving this behind to recount personal experiences with self-tracking and the inevitable feeling that what I sought in the QS literature missed out on the elements of time, memory and emotion I felt my watch was somehow also inextricably bound to, on a much deeper level. Many scholars tread these murky depths outlining data's spirit. In the ethos of data, how are numbers also vibrantly moving, and carrying our being, as they also emit knowledge and map our freedom?

Self-tracking

The physical activity monitor is only one form of data. There is also sleep, mood, sweat tracking, and a range of other variables that can be weighed. With the overwhelming diversity of approaches, there is also the different sets of data. Each leave a range of combinations as to how they are to be used. Various gadget types are involved that might be put together in myriad combinations. Each user faces choices about what extent to engage with reviewing and analysing the numbers, given the amount of time and value attributed to the numbers. Despite the infinite number of options for generating insight from these numbers, it is clear that self-knowledge and self-control may be involved with these numbers, giving the user some authorship and control over their bodies. At the same time, others will argue that such tracking is purely self-obsession, narcissism and raw ego.

Numbers themselves are not fixed and static, as they would seem. Nor are they whole, but rather they too are ever morphing, in flux, and never complete, as is the image of the self. Importantly, this resembles the Lacanian questioning of the symbolic realm that can be put into place in relation to the supreme deity of the sign that is the number, which I will return to.

In terms of statistics, it has been estimated that the shipment of wearable technologies will exceed 485 million annually by 2018, and that in 2013, 61 per cent of the wearable technologies market was occupied by sporting and physical activity

personal tracking devices⁴. If there are wider political and social justice implications, these are established and compounded by the choice the individual self-faces with their data double. Data doubles are here referred to as a term to aptly sum up the entanglement of the body with the digital, the development of the human alongside technology. A data double creates a certain representation of a person, but has its own life and material, a material that is distinct from the body that produces measures within this double, a material that originates elsewhere. The concept of a data double can be seen as something that is constantly remade and re-enacted. These are recursive and reflexive, self-trackers are used but a feedback loop is established, whereby behaviour can be modified according to these numbers.

While the numbers constitute and represent the body they are also playing a role in re-constituting the body, its capacity, goals, and possibilities, in a sense reinterpreting the body itself. As reflexive numbers that can be reflected upon, to make sense of them, they constitute the body as much as the body constitutes the numbers initially. In a chance to negotiate and manipulate ones data, to engage or ignore, there is the self-impelled, propelled and voluntary aspects of self-tracking. If it is harnessed to broader collective commercial, economic or social imperatives, self-interest still operates and ignites these behaviours at the source. Individuals may also have the illusions that they are starting these habits independently when it is societal, family, or external pressures driving them to engage, there may not always have full choice or freedom over whether or not they engage in self-tracking and may be coerced into taking part. The concept of data doubles is complicated by the fact that there is a wide range of data doubles, themselves. Data doubles comprise different and changing numbers, a gamut of values that can be configured on the body and self.

I will take a brief detour to more intimately tie this work to my personal experiences with tracking. Every morning that I run, which is often five out of seven, I put on my TomTom⁵. This habit, by many, is deemed as healthy, and of course, the use of wearables to track one's fitness goals have been on the rise for years. At the French American School, a private school in San Francisco where I teach, I have seen seven years olds in fit bits talking about how many steps they have already walked that day. When I substitute in the preschool classroom, there are students all gathering around a four year old's wrist when he has a watch that has games on it; it takes up most of their attention for the day. The next day, the boy is crying when his dad drops him off because the watch is at home being charged because he played with it all-evening. Much older than him, I still find myself frustrated on the

⁴ ABIResearch, 2013.

⁵ TomTom Spark Cardio + Music, GPS Fitness Watch + Heart Rate Monitor + 3GB Music Storage.

off days where I pick up my TomTom and found that I forgot to charge the battery, and have all my running clothes on and I'm about to start a long run on a strip of Ocean Beach on a grey day, my favourite days to run, and I'm irritated that I know I will be going far and long and won't be able to track it, which makes it feel like it doesn't count. The obsessive neurotic has a difficulty with limits. Or maybe it is the object that become a fetish object that provides a reassuring touch, like a hand on ones shoulder in understanding as you are practicing staying.

For the first few years, I ran with a simple silver Casio women's digital watch, and just looked at the time. I would run for 30 minutes, if not more. Eventually, I was running nearly every day and I decided to start tracking my miles. I love every aspect of tracking my time, because it allows me to quantify my distance. However, this fascination with numbers has also left me on other days depleted, depressed, and self-loathing. It is easy to fall into negative self-talk. On the other hand, without the watch to remind me how many miles I've run, I might actually run too much, run more than what I feel my body is allowed to run and lose to track of time. I have trouble with time and sometimes feel no time has passed when it has been hours, and once I am rolling, can go for some time. So, this lets me log my miles and check on it after about a week to calculate my mileage for the next three days so that I do not end up injured or unable to run the following day.

This watch is also a link between knowledge and freedom, it does not give up on the cognition of the user, myself, but it also becomes itself an author of politics. How is this the case? We must first look at the problem of how it makes explicit the constructed nature of the operations, structures, and habits of factually lived, empirically experienced reality. It articulates a dominant symbol, in its divinity, the number, and I directly mediate and affect the conditions that contribute to the number. It becomes the rule for the rule-less. I am also the watch's divinity, it's only God. The number stands for something that cannot be figured unless process itself is a figure.

In Lacan's seminar "On Aggressiveness in Psychoanalysis", something stuck with me, when he noted that we are too obsessed with understanding, and instead must become familiar with knowing, from the Greek *gnosis* in the sense of coming to know something. In terms of running, what becomes difficult is retraining yourself to know your exact pace when you have no watch on, because this will never be exactly accurate. Nevertheless, some of the most renowned of Lacan's teachings are the often-cited teachings about the Mirror phase in infants. It is through a child's early experiences looking into a mirror that the child develops his ability to recognize his own corporeal integrity and take control over his body. The "imago" he sees stabilizes and organizes his identity, creating something cohesive out of the chaos that is the world. The relation with this self-image remains aggressive however,

because the image that he recognizes in the mirror is both the image of someone that he recognizes but also as the imaginary master, he is not. This mirror image is thus an image from which he is alienated.

The aggressiveness that torments the self is itself discounted, and appears in “disjointed limbs, or of those organs represented in exoscopy, growing wings and taking up arms for intestinal persecutions⁶. There are many fantasies, of mutilation, castration, bursting open of the body and various iterations of the body that becomes fragmented. The image of a child in the mirror allows the child to first encounter this fundamental rupture, one that resurfaces differently and is pushed away later in life so that the anxiety of fragmentation can be rejected, given its unpleasant paranoia, since “...paranoia is related to the mirror-stage attempt to manufacture a future perfect mastery”⁷. The other becomes a “persecutory object”, the other, holding something the subject lacks.

Freud would impart the important self-emotional bond formation within identification, whereas Lacan examines and emphasized how identity allows the self to form opinions and differences, judgments about distances. What we see in any other is not only the other but the other’s desire, one that we want to possess—hence the aggressivity and destruction embedded in the judgment of the lag created in difference between the self and any other. The image itself can be castrating as far as it is powerful. Rather than circle only around the theme of *jouissance*, excess, and the desire and pleasures in death, which is too much a load for the direction in this essay, I will shift the focus of this desire and this splitting of the self to the image of the self as it appears in the watch. Not in the wristwatch, that tells time, but in the self-tracking, heart rate monitor, the athlete or health worried wearer’s own object of desire, the object that leads one to madness and self-destruction, of the self. The watch is also an image of one’s desire. This can be the watch I refer to when I mention ‘watch’.

Like the mirror, the watch comes to represent not only the subject me but also my ideal self, the imaginary that masters me. In an interview with Dean Karnazes, who ran over one hundred miles in the Greek running feat, he talks about a moment when he was asleep on the trail, watching himself from above, and imagining a stick figure that was running, sleep running as he was, after his body had shut down and willed him to continue along the course. I have had numerous experiences of watching myself as if from above, perhaps in some kind of a God’s seat if that is the belief that you follow and believe this experience is familiar to many of us. However, the object itself can also appear to embody the gaze of the big Other, as if it is shaming you, it knows what you have done, and forces you to be honest.

⁶ Lacan, 1977, p. 4-5.

⁷ Ibid p. 4.

The difficulty of the watch is that it will only show an external representation, a numerical value for the effort of my run; the pace and the heart rate are more or less accurate. As mentioned, even if they are not accurate, as many devices are bound to have errors, like any statistic, the device still reflects back to me in real time my distance. Obviously, there is much that exceeds it and much that is not satisfied or contained within its figures. The terrain, my thoughts, the sounds, everything else that is not contained in a number, the enjoyment of the run itself which comes from me and is directed from me and is always unconsciously fortified in my neurons the more miles and months or years that I run. One part of me actually wants to see these trackers display information on dopamine's firing. Still the numbers have the power to threaten me, alien as they are. The symbolic order they fall into seem to oscillate another kind of ontological and linguistic pressures, but these are limits that I am also battling my attachment and belonging to. This belonging to and in language and this belonging to and in knowing.

Even if many of the self-trackers data is eventually recuperated into the hands of developers and large companies, ultimately sabotaging any attempts for the individual to combat this system of techno-invasion, by reversing the authority of governmental bodies that harvest individual personal data without our ability to impede it, self-tracking is also a form of resistance to identification and a way of empowering oneself rather than submit to the exploitation of personal data by others. As the human body merges with the digital data economy, to gain currency, value is produced in turn, in relation to intimate bio-digital knowledge generated by thousands of bodies, this bio-capital is alive, digital data is recursive.

In a study published by Deborah Lupton, the researchers lay out five different modes of self-tracking that have emerged that intersect and are themselves recursive: private, pushed, communal, imposed and exploited⁸. Not only are the data amassed recursive, the relationship between different forms of self-tracking can also be seen as recursive. There is also a cadre attracted to self-tracking that is engaged for the experimental benefits, bio-hacking, finding knowledge about oneself for self-optimization given they are often care about noticing and managing the subtle differences between various activities and their mood. Given that personal data is often only relevant to the person who measures it, it may not be transferable, relevant or interesting to others. At the same time, the argument can be made for the community aspects of self-tracking: when self-trackers sees themselves as part of a community of others that similarly engage with another mode of self-tracking, some more invested in the positive benefits of sharing their information with others. Digital data is invested with commercial and symbolic value, as personal metrics contribute to the aggregate of big data sets.

⁸ Lupton, 2014.

In the QS literature, an initiator of this concept stretches as far back as 2000. The digital double is product of surveillant assemblages: assemblage operates by abstracting human bodies from their territorial settings and separating them into a series of discrete flows. These flows are then reassembled into distinct doubles, which can be scrutinized and targeted for intervention⁹. Self-tracking may be further conceptualized as a data practice that produces data assemblages. A data assemblage is a complex socio-technical system composed of many actors whose central concern is the production of data¹⁰. In the case of self-tracking, these data assemblages are configured via systems of thought, forms of knowledge, business or government models, human users, practices, devices and software and also sometimes by networks of other users and agents other than the self-trackers who seek to make use of the data for their own purposes¹¹.

Not only is the double isolated from the body, it is also isolated from the process of making itself, of coming to be as it is isolated from the process of its creation, the creation of the double. Interestingly, in Zhao's research, this isolation itself allows the data itself to be an agent turned object, in itself that can be acted upon, exploited and taken advantage of¹². As well, put in a study by Bode and Kristensen, 2015: "There is rivalry in the mythical structure, based on the inverted hierarchy of the double denying the ontological priority of the original"¹³. Despite the rationality of numbers there is constant negation, separation, reassembling, the double is always stuck in becoming, performing its way of being embedded in ontology its power.

The Language of the Number

Etienne Jules Marey, a chronophotographer of animal and human motion, a French scientist, writes that the visual representation of the data eliminates the construct of human sense and language; graphic display is the language of the phenomena itself¹⁴¹⁵. Marey saw the body as marking out time on its own. The time that a muscle was not engaged was considered "lost time" and the relationship between duration and energy expenditure was seen as the basic component of the

⁹ Haggerty and Ericsson 2000: 606.

¹⁰ Kitchin and Lauriault, 2014. These formulations also appear in the work of Bruno Latour.

¹¹ Lupton, Deborah. The diverse domains of quantified selves, 14.

¹² Zhao, 2005, Haggerty and Ericson, 2000.

¹³ Bode and Kristensen 2015, 7.

¹⁴ Douard, 1995. As cited by Bode and Kristensen, 10.

¹⁵ He is cited here though others have written on visualization, simply because he is one of the first to make an advanced contribution to these concepts, historically.

management of the body. Without getting lost in the conventional registering of time marked out by the clock — for Marey, time is cultural and the science of the body was a machine, that moves through the world physically rather than vitalistically. How does the body in motion register time? Seeing physiological time as a spatialized idea of time, Marey wanted to eliminate the breaks by using a camera that would photograph them. Marey's effort was to put time back in motion.

He began experiments by having subject dress in white and perform before a black screen. Here the photos abstract the body rather than bringing them into the frame, presence and the bodies express the condition of being photographed, striking the pose and performing the body. Reveals that which is typically not shown to us. Amount of detail the camera records can be problematic, but it is not dissimilar to the lapses posed by a watch. It is as salient to consider the affective states and emotions, moods and triggers that influence the behaviour themselves, in the wide and complex languages of sensation in relation to movement. The banality of the sign, whether number, letter or other symbol as a language of phenomena, chases the unsaid and the unwritten that seems the most elusive in self-tracking phenomena.

The under discussed and more hazy areas of the entire QS movement lie not in the numbers themselves but in what is not recorded in the numbers. Not only the technical discrepancies, the background third party users, the fact that whatever you track will not account for your mood, but the many things that amount to neural firing and the variety of signals and triggers influencing how you move across your day and relate to objects. Each subtlety is interpreted and absorbed in all that you carry with you. Info graphics and corporate materials, annual reports and financial health incentives never measure up to or mirror reality, but rather numbers operate as windows with air and currents passing through.

Each of these is squeamish in the face of death. If self-tracking is all in the quest of health, is our attempt to control our bodily functions and improve our health not ultimately to see ourselves as deathless in the face of our fate? If we are hyphenated and fractal post humans of neurobiological dispersion, what to do of our auto-insubordination? Aren't the devices themselves parallel to us in this regard? If we are a genetic *mélange* fused with our avatars, what grounds our directions is in our responsibility and accountability for our behaviours, our discipline to arrive at a goal, the ability to have distance from behaviours and actions and achieve an accurate picture of oneself. Commitment, structure, self-discipline, rewards, goals, and moral values are integrated into ones choices about self-tracking, which complicates our self-portrait. How can we critically examine ourselves as much as how we choose to manipulate ourselves? What are we sacrificing by translating into data?

Mood tracking may appear to be a relevant area of self-tracking to discuss in the context of emotion, yet this brings an entire different group of individuals, interested in charting their moods, habits and addictions, to tackle the behaviours that they seek to improve. While tracking moods throughout the day is a method proven to be efficient to reduce the duration and intensity of mood swings so that individuals may become more aware of emotional states, and confront feelings, grounding users to help them retain emotional balance and understand how reactions and events influence longer-term goals and happiness. Mood data may help individuals become more self-aware, to motivate them and invest in activities and patterns that led them to be happier. For others many of this may be intuitive and some may not have the same time in the day to note each of these moods, given how many moods arise per hour, how useful would mood tracking? This kind of activity would require the person to be patient, disciplined and diligent enough to begin with, for the activity of tracking itself—yet as in running, it requires a secondary workload- a re-assessment of the data, and then an implementation or incentive to change the data itself.

The use of mood tracking as an alternative and viable strategy offers an area of tracking to be further developed. If moods are changing as quickly as we are interpreting our data, gaining distance from it, we are growing with these data, we are growing as much as them and changing with and through them.

Ultimately, our moods are also established in relation to our bits of plastic, these carry the spectrum of our mood and accompany us. We carry our devices with us emotionally, storing them in the body, both physically, mentally, in keeping with the *geist* of numbers. Relating to them has a soothing effect in itself, which may delay some fear of death, giving us a sense of promoting health and thus prolonging life, even if this is not quantifiable, not measurable against the chance or accidental deaths that might knock us out indefinitely, the curves and lines are the dearest friends we return to. These devices too are our friends, and the activity of charting itself, the moments of looking at them and being with them provoke entirely different emotional states, depending on the time of day, the week and how frequently we engage with any device and so on. Somehow, my dependence seems to get stronger. While our morals and ethics that tie us to the world and hinge us to connections that are made in the flesh, our attention is also wedded to how we create and extend ourselves in these devices, but after all, we choose what we see. Ultimately, there is no I to find in the numbers.

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