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Reading Reflection #5
Digital Media
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In the article "*How Social Media Silences Debate*." Miller talks about how, there is a misconception when it comes to social media enhancing our political participation. It instead hinders it. People who frequently use social media such as Facebook and Twitter are less likely to speak their own opinions on the web and in real life. Why? The general trend that people are always seeking approval from one and other, we only are really good friends with people who think and act more like ourselves. The internet is helping the polarization of America. I think this is interesting, because the trend in our culture is to be more individualistic, but when it comes to disagreeing with our social circles, we are afraid of not being accepted? Then in chapter 14 of the book, *"You're not a gadget"* Lanier discusses a new possible language. One entirely made up of visual characteristics, unlike our current symbolist language. Lanier also talks about the concept of neoteny, a concept largely felt by humans. Where the "growing up" process is elongated to incorporate new learning experiences into our lives and make up a more functional culture. We currently do this largely through literature and the process of learning to read, however, Lanier suggests also incorporating pictorial visuals, not simply pictures on a page— in abstract— but a physical manifestation of the image made up of our own bodies. Of course, this seems silly to think about in real life, because humans themselves cannot morph willingly into anything, but Lanier talks about this concept via the way of virtual reality. And creating a new programming language where this could be possible.

When I think about the idea that social media is helping to polarize America, I can't help but think that this is true. Because I have been in those conversations where I have a different view than one of my friends who has posted something that I do not entirely agree with and have said nothing. I think this is, in part, because I was afraid that people would look at me differently, but also because it wasn't worth the fight. There is something so contrastingly different about having a lively debate around the dinner table with your family, than a public one with a "friend"; who in all reality is more likely to fall under the term acquaintance in real life. There are too many "unknown" factors when it comes to online debating: who is spectating, who is joining in, who agrees/disagrees, the list can go on and on, because it is the world-wide-web after all. Verses having a real face-to-face conversation, with people who are required to love you, no matter how different your ideas are from theirs. I think that it's ironic that we stress individuality in our culture, and then are afraid to be different from those closest to us. It feels like yet another universal paradox the internet has sprung on us, and as we sift through all the mumbo jumbo to try and understand how the invention is affecting us, we are left to hang in the balance of political correctness, and being able to express ourselves freely, as though we were face-to-face.

Thinking about Lanier's' idea seems to tie in a bit with the fact that social media is silencing debate. Lanier mentions that neoteny, is the extension of childhood, where we learn how to operate in an already existing society. Perhaps, it is because of this elongation we fail to see how to operate the same as we do in real life, like we do online. The online culture is so new to us that it is still "growing up". Additionally, Lanier discusses the creation of a new way of communication. Humans exist the way

they do because of language, it's our thing. I really enjoyed Lanier's explanation of cephalopods though and how they use their bodies to morph and become a new object, for survival, you could say that morphing, is their thing. And if they had any sense of neoteny they would be rulers of the earth and not us. This concept reminds me a lot of Halloween. It is our feeble attempt, whether realized or not, at Lanier's concept of a fluid concreteness. Where we put on costumes and attempt to change our physical appearance to whatever monster, or inanimate object we are trying to become. Although Lanier's concept is easier to think about in the realm of virtual reality, where "anything is possible". As he points out, "anything" is limited to our current way of symbolic communication and that concept also limits the coding that goes into the creation of these virtual worlds. Due to this limitation, even in a virtual world not anything is possible. Can you imagine a world where you could willing transform into any shape? This concept reminds me of a video game that I play with my friends, Gary's mod-- Prop hunt. Although it doesn't entirely embody the concept Lanier portrays, it's as close as we can get right now. In the game, you disguise yourself as inanimate object in a series of rooms and your friends "hunt" you. You can pick to turn into anything, a pencil on the ground, a shelving unit, a box, anything. The key is to blend in with your surroundings. The piece that I find most like Lanier's though is that you can jump from object to object. So, one moment you are a doll on a shelf and the next you're the shelf itself. It would be an interesting concept to picture playing this game in real life with all my friends. Another thing that reminds me of this concept, is the character Morph, from Disney's Treasure Planet. If Lanier could somehow embody morph, in the virtual reality world it would seem so much easier to transform into anything you wanted. It's interesting to me to take this thought and reflect on the movie, when I think about the interactions between Morph and the other humanoid characters, there wasn't so much conversation happening because Morph was communication via the shape of his body, not through words, and spoken dialect. Even though Morph had the ability to speak, you never really hear him form a coherent sentence, because his mode of communication was more along the lines of what Lanier depicts in this chapter of his book.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BjgL7cg6ET0