

ut of its detour into the analog. *The processing may be digital—but the analog is the process.* The virtuality involved, and any new possibility that may arise, is entirely bound up with the potentializing relay. It is in not contained in the code.

It is of course conceivable that the digital may succeed in integrating analogic process ability into its own operations. Adaptive neural nets approach this, since they are capable of generating results that are not recorded. They automatically produce unforeseen results using feedback mechanisms to create resonance and interference between routines. In other words, what is coded is recursivity—machined self-referentiality. The digital processing becomes self-modulating: the running of the code induces qualitative transformation in its own loopy operation. Evolutionary digitality. Machinic invention. There are also more literal attempts under way to integrate analog process into digital processing. These include robots powered by biological muscles produced in laboratory cultures and attempts to plug digital devices directly into living neurons. On other fronts, the sight-confining helmets of early virtual reality systems have given way to immersive and interactive environments capable of addressing more directly other-than-visual senses and looping sense modalities more flexibly and multiply into each other, packing more sensation into the digitally-assisted field of experience—and, with it, more potentialization. The notion of ubiquitous computing championed for many years by the MIT Media Lab is seeming less futuristic by the day. The idea is that inconspicuous interfaces can be implanted in everyday environments in such a way as to seamlessly and continuously relay digitally coded impulses into and out of the body through multiple, superposable sense connections, eventually developing into an encompassing network of infinitely reversible analog-digital circuiting on a planetary scale.¹⁴ After all, the earth itself has always been the ultimate immersive environment.

Perhaps the day is not far off when the warnings that this essay began with—not to confuse the digital with the virtual—will be anachronistic. But, for the time being, the warnings hold. Certainly, if there is one day a directly virtual digitality, it will have become that by integrating the analog into itself (biomuscular robots and the like), by translating itself into the analog (neural nets and other evolutionary systems), or again by multiplying and intensifying its relays into and out of the analog (ubiquitous computing). The potential for this becoming of the digital is missed as

long as the relationship between the digital and analog is construed in mutually exclusive terms, as if one entirely replaced the other. A commonplace rhetoric has it that the world has entered a “digital age” whose dramatic “dawning” has made the analog obsolete. This is nonsense. The challenge is to think (and act and sense and perceive) the co-operation of the digital and the analog, in self-varying continuity. Apocalyptic pronouncements of epochal rupture might sell well, but they don’t compute. When or if the digital virtual comes, its experience won’t be anything so dramatic. It will be humbly quotidian: no doubt as boring as the Web can be.

The “superiority of the analog” over the digital alluded to in the title does not contradict this closing call to think the two together. It refers to the fact that the paths of their co-operation—transformative integration, translation, and relay—are themselves analog operations. There is always an excess of the analog over the digital, because it perceptually fringes, synesthetically dopplers, umbilically backgrounds, and insensibly recedes to a virtual center immanent at every point along the path—all in the same contortionist motion. It is most twisted. The analog and the digital must be thought together, asymmetrically. Because the analog is always a fold ahead.