January 2012

Adopting Killer Ignatian Apps for Facebook: Employing Jesuit Pedagogy to Enrich Student Involvement in Social Media

John C. Freeman
Professor of English, University of Detroit Mercy, freemajc@udmercy.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://epublications.regis.edu/jhe

Adopting Killer Ignatian Apps for Facebook:
Employing Jesuit Pedagogy to Enrich Student Involvement in Social Media

John C. Freeman
Professor of English, University of Detroit Mercy
(freemajc@udmercy.edu)

Abstract

Social researchers Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa recently reported that nearly half of undergraduates today "showed almost no gains in learning in their first two years of college." Two sources of the problem emerged in the study: "instructors…more focused on their own faculty research than teaching younger students, who in turn are more tuned in to their social lives." While few would argue that the social dimension is not an important element of the student's learning experience, students' absorption in social media too often reflects a mere frittering and twittering away of their time. Why not meet students where they socialize and encourage them to explore the deeper implications of such social media? This essay seeks to bridge this divide by applying such "killer apps" as St. Ignatius' discernment and the examen. Facebook already offers a "platform" for such apps. Often consulting their Facebook pages several times a day, students already practice, *pro forma* at least, a ritualized set of behaviors. Loyola's Examen (examination of conscience), can be employed by asking students to inventory how they use Facebook in their daily lives. The concept of "status updates" can be enlarged here as well: What is the nature of the on-line personae or avatars that they exhibit? In what ways do they differ from their off-line selves? How does Facebook shape (and limit) their identity? What potentials for growth are there?

Introduction

A **killer application** (commonly shortened to **killer app**), in the jargon of marketing teams, has been used to refer to any computer program that is so necessary or desirable that it proves the core value of some larger technology, such as computer hardware, gaming console, software, or an operating system.[1]

In a study featured in *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses*, researchers Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa reported that nearly half of undergraduates today "showed almost no gains in learning in their first two years of college."[2] Arun and Roksa cite a study of one Midwestern public university in which Mary Grigsby discovered that "70 percent of students reported that social learning was more important than academics." Two sources of the problem emerged in the study: "instructors…more focused on their own faculty research than teaching younger students, who in turn are more tuned in to their social lives." An unbreachable divide, or so it would seem. On the one hand, monkish

professors toiling away in their solitary endeavors. On the other hand, students caught up in the social whirl of status updates and friending. Social media like Facebook—or SurFacebook, in this pejorative sense—too often engage students at a superficial level. While few would argue that the social dimension is not an important element of the student's learning experience, students' absorption in social media too often reflects a mere frittering and twittering away of their time. Why not meet students where they socialize and encourage them to explore the deeper implications of such social media? Rev. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S. J., identifies *cura personalis* as one of the hallmarks of Jesuit education, requiring teachers "to become as conversant as possible with the context or life experience of the learner."[3] Ignatian pedagogy, he asserts, "stresses the social dimension of both learning and teaching." He cites as a reason for the historic success of Jesuit education its ability to be "eminently adaptable to the environment of the learner." Is it possible, then, to find and employ new killer apps for Facebook so that the Ignatian method can both help students be more critical of

the role social media play in their lives and also help them explore ways in which their engagement with such media can become more profound and, yes, transformative? Indeed, the Ignatian method of self-evaluation, moral and ethical questioning, and meditation upon a higher, more-encompassing power in our lives can be employed to encourage students to think more deeply about social media.

While any given cohort of students, even in a Catholic institution, will reflect a variety of religious and even atheistic or agnostic stances (and I do not wish to proselytize), familiarity with Ignatius Loyola's life and his practices can lead students to situate themselves vis-à-vis social media. His transformation during convalescence from a military, outward-looking to a spiritual, inward-looking mode of life can provide a starting point for the students' own self-explorations. Generally speaking, Ignatian practices such as mindfulness toward a higher principle can be readily recognized by students with different religious persuasions. For the agnostic or atheist, this higher principle can be translated into concerns for community, the larger good. Such an approach also addresses another critique of higher education by Arun and Roksa: that students are too often ethically and philosophically adrift in the university environment. Guidebooks are lacking. For example, despite sporting a provocative title—*Your Digital Afterlife*—Evan Carroll and John Romano's text does not offer a great deal of guidance concerning the ethical and spiritual possibilities of social media. While the authors tout the potential of social media to offer "a permanent archive of your life that could exist beyond your physical life,"[4] they do not pay sufficient attention to the quality of the life to be so archived.[5] Certainly there is some solace in knowing that we now have digital headstones equipped with a chip in a medallion that "can communicate up to 1,000 words and an image to an NFC-RFID-enabled mobile device" so that visitors can access your "memory."[6] There are not, however, comparable software applications that can ensure the "core values" by which you programmed your own life's "operating system" will prove worthy of such recording and memorializing.

In many respects, Facebook already offers a "platform" for Ignatian apps that can serve to improve this medium's "core values." Often consulting their Facebook pages several times a day, students already practice, *pro forma* at least, a ritualized set of behaviors. Loyola's Examen (examination of conscience) can be employed by asking students to inventory how they use Facebook in their daily lives. The concept of "status updates" can be enlarged here as well: What is the nature of the on-line personae or avatars that they exhibit? In what ways do they differ from their off-line selves? How does Facebook shape (and limit) their identity? What connections have they made with others in their on-line community and what possibilities are opened up by these connections? How can that community be enriched, expanded? What potentials for growth are there? Since the internet realm already creates the potential for a "second life," often a romanticized but down-graded version of the person's "first life," students might be asked to create an Ignatian avatar and explore how such a creation would speak and interact in that student's virtual community. Through a process of reflection covering a wide range of issues involving Facebook and other social media, students can practice what Rev. Kolvenbach identifies as "the underlying principle" of Jesuit education, the notion of Tantum Quantum: "that which may work better is adopted and assessed while that which is proven ineffective is discarded." Of course, performing such a sorting out process requires a certain degree of discernment. Judging by *The Social Network*'s portrayal of Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg, discernment was not an initial ingredient in the mix cooked up in this wildly successful social medium innovation. All the more reason to seek applications for it.

Discernment

> ERICA (close) [to Zuckerberg] You are probably going to be a very successful computer person.
>
> (MORE)
>
> But you're going to go through life thinking that girls don't like you because you're a nerd.
>
> And I want you to know, from the bottom of my heart, that that won't be true.

It'll be because you're an asshole. [7]

The greatest irony I find in this movie, *The Social Network*, loosely based on the founding of Facebook is that the creator of this so-called "social network" is portrayed as a painfully insecure, isolated loner whose innovation led to a tangled, very unsociable web of friendship betrayed, trust violated, lawsuits and recriminations. After his bitter break-up with Erica, Mark retreats to his dorm room, where he indulges in a public flogging and blogging of Erica about her character, family background and even her bra size ("*she's getting all kinds of help from our friends at Victoria's Secret*"). To get his mind off her, he transmogrifies his roommate's idea of comparing Harvard's "horrendous facebook pics" with pictures of farm animals into something with a "more Turing feel." He hacks into several University houses' photofiles and sets up Facemash, a program that allows users to rate women against each other. Indeed, the intermixing of scenes in the first five minutes or so of *The Social Network* connects the founding of Facebook with the misplaced desire for popularity and self-aggrandizement. Mark's solitary programming of Facemash is interspliced with scenes of young women being bused to the Porcellian Club where they hope, in Erica's words, "*to party with the next Fed Chairman.*"

The movie itself offers a number of opportunities for students to examine the character Zuckerberg's lack of discernment in the context of their own Facebook practices and experiences.[8] In *Virtually You: The Dangerous Powers of the E-Personality*, Elias Aboujaoude argues that "the Internet facilitates dramatic shifts in identity and behavior."[9] He elaborates:

> These include an exaggerated sense of our abilities, a superior attitude toward others, a new moral code that we adopt online, a proneness to impulsive behavior, and a tendency to regress to childlike states when faced with an open browser.[10]

Later, in a scene from *The Social Network*, Mark runs into Erica and tries to pull her aside to explain—apologize for—his past behavior. As though she has read Aboujaoude, Erica jabs:

ERICA   Comparing women to farm animals?

MARK   I didn't end up doing that.

ERICA   It didn't stop you from writing it. As if every thought that tumbles through your head is so clever it would be a crime for it not to be shared. The internet's not written in pencil, Mark, it's written in ink and you published that Erica Albright was a bitch right before you made some ignorant crack about my family's name, my bra size and then rated women based on their "hotness".

. . . .You write your snide bullshit from a dark room because that's what the angry do nowadays. I was nice to you. Don't torture me for it.

When Edouardo arrives just a second later on the scene, he (mistakenly) congratulates Mark for apologizing. It was "the right thing to do." Distracted and distraught, Mark's only response is "We have to expand." Like the blowfish when under attack, Mark's own response to criticism is to self-inflate, to seek further aggrandizement rather than to take Erica's rightful criticism of his actions to heart.

An app from St. Ignatius would be appropriate here. He identifies the spiritual exercise as an opportunity for, "examination of conscience … and other spiritual activities … in the name given to any means of preparing and disposing our soul to rid itself of all disordered affections."[11] Loyola's own life offers a constructive example here, as his original transformation led to overzealous practices such as extreme fasting. At Manresa, he came to acknowledge how ego can subvert even the best will to be transformed. During his extended stay there, he was able to sort through and weed out elements of his personality that stood in his way. Emulating these efforts at self-examination, students can avail themselves of the works of several contemporary critics of the perils of Facebookery.

Social media critics like Aboujaoude, a practicing psychiatrist, have compiled and catalogued a plague of "ill-ordered affections" that can bedevil the spirit of even the most well intended participant in these social media. Facebook tends to nurture and increase participants' narcissism, Mark Leary describing it as "a self-presentation vehicle" in which "the rules of advertising apply to ordinary human beings."[12] Like *The Death of a*

Salesman's Willie Loman, many Facebookers are not satisfied simply to be "liked," they must be "well-liked." As Zuckerberg announced on the homepage of his Facemash site: "Were we let in [to Harvard] for our looks? No. Will we be judged by them? Yes."[13] Summing up the early days of Facebook's popularity at Harvard, Zuckerberg's friend Sam Lessin notes that there has always been a lot of "'latent social competition at Harvard.'"[14] In a *Crimson* article, reporter Amelia Lester surveyed all the résumé padding and persona-building attendant on being accepted into Harvard, noting: "Most of all [Thefacebook] is about performing. . .and letting the world know why we're important individuals. In short, it's what Harvard students do best."[15]

One assignment stemming from this issue could be entitled "Facebook as Performance." Students would be asked to research and evaluate how people profile themselves or "self-advertise" on Facebook. Jeremy Sarachan's essay, "Profile Picture, Right Here, Right Now," would be an excellent starting point here. Noting that Facebook "demands the constant recreation of the self," he investigates the strategies its netizens employ in their profiles to "self-advertise," Facebook constituting an Art Gallery of portraitures.[16] Examining how others create written profiles as well as picture profiles of themselves, students can then consider and critique their own self-presentation styles as an exercise in discernment. Students would be encouraged to consider how social network formats come with features that limit the expression of self-identity while creating the illusion of an authentic presentation on one's Facebook page. As Nancy K. Baym points out, most social media sites profile participants within the framework of five categories: "general interests, music, movies, television, and books." This one-size-fits-all has its limitations:

> One of the unique qualities of most SNSs [Social Network Spaces] is that they engineer self-presentation by providing predetermined sets of categories through which to build identities. Though the categories vary, most provide slots for demographic information including age, place of residence, and general interests.[17]

Baym proceeds to point out that "We build self-representations by linking to others."[18] She cites a study that found that people with better looking friends were themselves rated as better looking.[19] These subtle pressures to define oneself from the outside-in rather than the inside-out can be identified and, if need be, confronted.

In addition to the dangers of "ill-ordered affections" such as narcissism and self-aggrandizement posed by Facebook, Aboujaoude discusses the disinhibition and dissociation fostered by social media. One thinks here of Erica's words to Mark: "*You write your snide bullshit from a dark room because that's what the angry do nowadays.*" Aboujaoude likens the kind of dissociation that he finds in Internet-addicted patients to a digital form of Multiple Personality Disorder (MPD). He cites the instance of his patient Alex "who had serendipitously joined an online community that advocated dropping out of normal life and living, virtually, whatever alternate existence one wished to have." Anxious and shy, Alex reinvented himself in this world as "Sasha, a gregarious former high school jock…and CEO of a high-tech company."[20] Much to the consternation of his real-world fiancée, he became increasingly detached from his real-world existence. While most students do not go to such extremes, social media can contribute to such a "splitting" of personality.

In the postmodern era, where simulations are in constant conflict with a reality that is increasingly questioned and undermined, it is more important than ever for students to examine their on-line versus off-line identities as a means of bringing the simulated and the real into some sort of alignment. Students sometimes operate under the naïve assumption that who they are in real-life matches up exactly with who they are in cyberspace. As Baym indicates, though, cyberspace often serves to split and then alienate its participants: "Digital media seem to separate selves from bodies, leading to *disembodied identities* that exist only in actions and words."[21] This disembodiment threatens to make participants more like passive spectators of their actions and words rather than responsible actors standing behind them. Baym summarizes what has become

increasingly apparent about the postmodern condition:

> Identity scholars such as Goffman (1959) have long argued that the self plays multiple roles in everyday life and cannot be understood adequately as a single unified entity. Rather than there being One True Self, variations of which are inherently false, contemporary scholars have come to see the self as flexible and multiple, taking different incarnations in different situations.[22]

In *The Church of Facebook*, Jesse Rice discusses how the "polling and trolling" of social media often prevent their practitioners from being "fully present in the moment," a state of being central to Ignatius Loyola.[23] Rice uses Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well as an instance of "intentional living," a non-judgmental encounter in which Christ prods the woman to take stock of her present situation and chart a different course. As Fr. John Staudenmaier, S. J., observes, "The *Spiritual Exercise* teaches a method for discerning when to stick and when to change, about small and large matters."[24] He also features the benefits of these exercises in paying attention to one's affectivity as a means of identifying both the satisfying and unsatisfying elements of one's current mode of existence as a step toward change. Similarly, Rice offers a variety of measures Facebookers can take to "unstick" themselves from negative modes of behavior and to make their experience therein more authentic. He advises us to "take a quick personal inventory" of our habits; to avoid checking into Facebook the first thing in the morning and the last thing at night (those very times that Ignatius would urge us to do some "spiritual stretching"); to practice "mindful and authentic facebooking (for example, examining one's profile and asking if it is "true" to one's real nature); and, finally, to adopt only one or two friends a month.[25] Similarly, in his "Ten Touchstones for Discernment," Dean Brackley points out the need to "observe, read, remember, question, interpret, think, and dialogue" in the process of discernment and personal transformation.[26] As a means to such discernment and transformation, students might be asked to respond to such questions as those below as a means of identifying and weeding out any "ill-ordered affections" they might have vis-à-vis their Facebook experience:

> How often do your grades or schoolwork suffer because of the amount of time you spend online?
>
> How often do you fear that life without the Internet would be boring, empty, and joyless?
>
> How often do you lose sleep due to late-night Internet use?
>
> How often do you feel depressed, moody, or nervous when you are offline, [a feeling] which goes away once you are back online?[27]

Armed with tools and methods of analysis supplied by social media critics like Aboujaoude and Rice, students can be encouraged to operate like cultural anthropologists in performing field studies of Facebook, examining and taking inventory of both others' and their own practices in the social media environment. Such fieldwork, however, is complicated in the Postmodern Era, where the boundary between the real and the simulated is often blurred, disorienting those with even the best of GPS systems!

Friending and Authenticity

EDUARDO You and Erica split up?

MARK How did you know that?

EDUARDO It's on your blog.

MARK Yeah.

EDUARDO Are you alright?

MARK I need you.

EDUARDO I'm here for you.

MARK No, I need the algorithm you use to rank chess players.

EDUARDO Are you okay?

In a telling dialogue, Mark's Brazilian roommate and, later, the co-founder of Facebook, enters their dorm room while Mark is feverishly hacking away at Facemash. Rather than seek consolation and emotional support from Eduardo over his breaking up with Erica, Mark requests an algorithm! This utilitarian view of friendship is often the hallmark of relationships created on Facebook. In "Why Can't We Be Virtual Friends?" Craig Condella marks a distinction between the friending found in Facebook and the off-line form: "Whereas friending is an almost instantaneous process that often presupposes a pre-existing friendship, becoming friends is a decidedly longer process which culminates in friendship."[28] Condella proceeds to apply Aristotle's three forms of friendship: those of pleasure, utility, and "the highest sorts of friendships united by something like virtue or a shared sense of the good."[29] Our non-discerning Zuckerberg acknowledges only Eduardo's utility, as in the above scene.

Inquiring whether or not Aristotle would be "a fan of Facebook?" Condella argues no, that true friendship should be grounded in real-life encounters. In similar fashion, Jim Manney, in a posting on *dotMagis: the blog of Ignatian Spirituality.com*, asks "What Would Ignatius Think of Social Media?"[30] Like Condella, he finds that social media draw people away from "real life" experience: "If by staying in contact with me, you are not being fully present to those in your daily life now, you will be missing out on the presence of God in them, and they will miss out on experiencing it in you." Even *Hamlet*'s foolish Polonius has the good sense to offer his departing son the following advice:

> Those friends thou hast, and their adoption tried,
> Grapple them unto thy soul with hoops of steel,
> But do not dull thy palm with entertainment
> Of each new-hatched, unfledged courage.
>
> (Hamlet, Act 1.3: 8-11)

For all the friending that goes on in the "Facebook universe," Condella observes how often such activity has the feel of time wasted,

indeed, distracting from off-line friendships. In Facebook "friendships that would have otherwise long since ceased to be may be artificially buoyed by social networking."[31] He cites Cicero, who maintains friendships must by their very nature be concentrated and "confined to so narrow a sphere, that affection is ever shared by two persons only or at most by a few."[32] In an era when social status is often reflected by the number of "friends" one can accumulate on Facebook, some students claiming thousands of them, Condella makes a compelling point. His essay, along with Manney's critique can provide the instructor with a provocative jumping-off point for a discussion and self-examination on the students' part concerning the nature and quality of on-line versus off-line friendships. Selected readings found in *Facebook and Philo*sophy can lead students to take more critical, nuanced approaches toward this phenomenon (e.g., "With Friends Like These, Who Needs Enemies?" and "The Friendship that Makes No Demands"). These approaches need not be entirely negative, as Maurice Harrington suggests in "Care Ethics, Friendship, and Facebook." He asserts that "Facebook may be unwittingly engaging in a postmodern revolution of friendship." Thus, while the sheer number of "friends" in a particular Facebooker's virtual address-book may militate against authentic friendship, Harrington notes that "at any moment a superficial relationship can become a caring one."[33] Considerations of what constitutes authentic friendship can engage students in analytic, soul-searching endeavors in this regard.

A pedagogy focusing on Ignatian principles can constitute a hybrid form of the Facebook experience. The isolative nature of this experience can be tempered by the face-to-face interactions of students in the classroom. These interactions can serve as counterpoints and contrasts to the interactions that occur in the virtual realm. What does it mean to be present to someone in the virtual realm, and how does that differ from being present to someone in the real world? Students might consider a *Wall Street Journal* article entitled "Is This Man Cheating on His Wife?"[34] Here, we learn of an Internet-addicted man, Ric Hoogestraat, who creates an avatar of himself named Dutch Hoorenbeek, a much younger, more muscled, and more handsome simulation of his

real-life self. He soon enters into a relationship with Janet Spielman aka Tenaj Jackalope, all within the virtual confines of Second Life, a virtual "community" consisting of some 450,000 active participants. So all-encompassing are these simulated identities in this pixilated world that Hoogestraat becomes consumed by its realistic appearance, spending most of his waking life at the computer screen. In Second Life he runs his own businesses. (This virtual realm has its own currency, the Linden, purchased with real dollars.) For a break, he takes off with Tenaj on a motorcycle outing. His real-world wife, Sue Hoogestraat, attempts to make do with this new turn in their relationship, but it proves no easy matter: "You try to talk to someone or bring them a drink, and they'll be having sex with a cartoon." Her efforts prove to be in vain, as we find out later his marriage ends in divorce (and he ends up marrying Spielman—perhaps bridging the divide between the simulated and the real! Or, more likely, the newlyweds are merely two bodies stored in close proximity to one another, with their "real" interactions being conducted, *Matrix*-like, via computers).

Alexandra Alter indicates just how confused the relationship between self and others can become when conducted in the virtual realm:

> . . .people socializing in virtual worlds remain sensitive to subtle cues like eye contact. In one study, participants moved their avatars back if another character stood too close, even though the space violation was merely virtual, says Jeremy Bailenson, director of Stanford's Virtual Human Interaction Lab, which was created five years ago to study social behavior in virtual worlds. "Our brains are not specialized for 21st-century media," says Prof. Reeves. "There's no switch that says, 'Process this differently because it's on a screen.'"[35]

One way to make our brains "more specialized for 21st-century media" is to inquire along with Ignatius about what constitutes being "fully present in the moment." In what ways can social media make such presence possible? In what ways do they only present us with a simulated, artificial sense of that authentic present? St. Ignatius provides the relevant "infra-structure" for such an

inquiry, the killer apps that can prove, disprove, or even improve the "core values" of the technology that has become so much a part of everyday life.

More than ever, our young charges need to be aware of the challenges, opportunities, and dangers that they face today, with our increasing immersion in social media. As Erik Erikson argues, "'identity play is the work of adolescence,'" but such play has become much more complicated and problematic in the "multi-player" environments that constitute social media.[36] Even Millennials, well versed and immersed in electronic media and social networks, can have trouble getting their bearings and maintaining equilibrium in such environments. *Catfish*, an American documentary film that premiered at the Sundance Festival in 2010, provides an excellent vehicle for students wishing to explore the complicated and tangled questions of identity posed by the alternate reality offered by social media.[37] Here, a young, New York-based photographer, Yaniv (Nev) Schulman, receives a painting of a photograph he had published for a national magazine. The painter is Abby Pierce, an eight-year-old gifted child from Ishpeming, Michigan. Soon, a relationship mediated by her mother (Angela Wesselman-Pierce) develops between the two, as more paintings based on his photographs arrive. Nev's friending on Facebook soon expands to her mother, brother Alex, and Abby's talented and attractive older half-sister (Megan Faccio). A romance quickly develops between Nev and Megan, with growing cybersexual overtones. Over the course of nine months (and 1,500 posts and messages) Nev's relationship with the family grows and deepens.

When a song Megan has dedicated to him turns out to have been pirated from the Internet, Nev and his documentarian cohorts, brother Ariel (Rel) Schulman and Henry Joost, begin to be suspicious. Googling Abby's gallery in Ishpeming, they discover the building has been vacant for four years, further fueling their suspicions. They decide to travel to Michigan to unravel the mystery and find out the truth. Guided by their trusty GPS system—a constant reminder of their faith in technology to help them find their place in the world—they arrive at their destination. Negotiating his way through Angela's various

subterfuges and cover stories, Nev finally arrives at the truth: Angela is the actual painter; Abby is not the precious child she was made out to be; and Megan is a persona, one of many of Angela's alter egos based on a picture that she "borrowed" from a complete stranger's Facebook profile. A forty-something housewife, she is married to Vince Wesselman, who has severely disabled twin sons from a previous marriage. In a tearful confession to Nev, Angela speaks of the sacrifices she has chosen to make in her life, observing that the various personae she has taken up in her correspondence with Nev are "fragments of things I used to be, wanted to be, never will be."

Here, students may very well find their own powers of discernment challenged as they examine Angela's role(s) in these various scenarios. Should they focus on her as a master of deception, willing to go to any lengths to create an elaborate alternative reality based on a tissue of lies and misrepresentations? Or is she, more favorably, a frustrated housewife, having bravely taken up the task of raising two severely disabled step-children, and yet someone who found the time—God knows when!—to engage in an escapist fantasy that, Sibyl-like, offered her the possibilities of starting over again both as a child prodigy and as a multi-talented, much younger woman romantically involved with Nev? Following the latter line of thought, Allison Willmore sums her up thus:

> It's seem strange to say that, given the insane extent of the fiction Angela created, she comes across as more complicated and captivating than the filmmakers do—as, really, the warped heroine—but it's true. She lied, but she also created insightfully flattering bait for a group of urbane New Yorkers. The film can be intensely uncomfortable to watch at moments, but [the] exploitative edge inherent to the idea of "let's go confront this crazy lady" is undone by the fact that Angela's truth puts it to shame.[38]

Strangely enough, Angela's truth, once unveiled, leads Nev & Company to their own quasi-Ignatian examen as revealed in the Special Sections of the DVD accompanying the film, in which they respond to questions posed by the film's

viewers.[39] Nev is asked if he resented Angela's creating of "this living novel with Nev as the main character in it." He replies that upon meeting her, "I immediately focused on Angela. The focus became immediately on what was really there." (A notion that affirms Condella's argument that true friendships are rooted in real-life encounters.) He goes on to report: "I saw who she was and why she was doing what she did. And there wasn't any anger anymore." As Joost observes of their relationship:

> Joost: It turned out to be the thing you don't think of, which is just someone reaching out and wanting a connection with another person…and that's it…just emotion, emotional.
> Nev: And Facebook has allowed it to sort of snowball. That's right. 'Cause even Angela said "I didn't mean for it to get this big."
>
> Joost: … you can see how one little lie turns into a bigger lie. And then you have to support this huge world. And there are really only two options. You either make it more complicated or tell the truth.[40]

In the question-and-answer session that constitutes this examen, Nev honestly assesses how "we both used each other equally." She supplied for Nev a "farm fantasy," the idea of being outside and working with his hands. Nev supplied for her an urbane New York City lifestyle, fast-paced, and centered on art and culture. As his brother Rel points out, Nev existed for nine months in "a living soap opera…a *Truman Show* just for you. *The 'Schulman' Show.*" Had the two never met, the fantasy could have played out indefinitely. Acknowledging his own complicity in being "totally suckered into" this deception, Nev sums up the relationship as "something I was kind of looking for and wanting and hoping for it to be real." Indeed, the effects of this online "novel" did not immediately dissipate. Even upon meeting Angela in the flesh, Nev experienced a persistent doppelganger effect in place that made it difficult for him to separate out the "real" from the "fictional":

But again people sort of forget that I wasn't meeting the woman who had lied to me and deceived me and led me down this dark, twisted, nine-month relationship. I was meeting a woman I had never met before. She happened to be this creative, strangely deceitful woman who made all these characters but the characters were their own people. They were real to me still. And it was too fresh to really understand that these people didn't really exist. They were still real people and I still talk about them. And Angela was a new real person.[41]

For Nev, the Internet acts as "a leveling scale where reality and deception meet and new things sprout out of there." A "warped heroine," a hybrid "sprout" whose selfhood attained to transcendence but could not entirely escape being rooted in ordinary reality, Angela offers students a poignant spark point for discussions and debates about identity and authenticity in social media. And, as the various participants in this affair discover, there are no easy answers here.

Oddly enough, as Rel points out, there was real chemistry between Nev and Angela during their four-day stay in Ishpeming as Nev attempted to sort things out in what had become a very tangled set of relationships. Rel observes that in the course of their visit there was a "sort of an old friend chemistry" between Nev and Angela, "as if you guys had reunited but had never met, which was weird because you actually did know her very well, but through the guise of all these characters and, like you said, she is all these characters." Nev immediately recognizes the truth of this:

> Yeah, and it kind of became clear that all these characters she created were pieces of her, and I immediately sympathized with her and sort of subconsciously understood that what she was doing was in a sense what I was doing, 'cept she was on one side of it and I was on the other. We were both sort of looking for a connection and had found one with each other. And the romantic side, the friendship side, the creative artistic collaboration side, those were all real to me and still are.[42]

Asked by one questioner if an experience that did not kill them made them stronger, Rel notes that the lesson he drew from the film was that it did make them stronger; it taught them "What it means to be alive." Joost chimes in: "People who you think are negative people in life at one point turn out to be positive people. They keep you on your toes." Angela's husband Vince Pierce, in one of the film's most touching and insightful vignettes, supplies both the title and the essential core of the film:

> They used to tank cod from Alaska all the way to China. They'd keep them in vats in the ship. By the time the codfish reached China, the flesh was mush and tasteless. So this guy came up with the idea that if you put these cods in these big vats and put some catfish in with them… and the catfish will keep the cod agile. And there are those people who are catfish in life and they keep you on your toes. They keep you guessing. They keep you thinking. They keep you fresh. And I thank God for the catfish because we'd be droll, boring and dull if we didn't have somebody nipping at our fin.[43]

For Vince, Angela is the catfish. She keeps things fresh and alive.

In the interview with the filmmakers, Nev brings the conversation full circle to the issue of friendship and authenticity: "I guess what I hope most, when people watch the movie, is that they look at their real friends. Decide and understand who they are, and make an effort to really go and have a more personal and real connection to who their real friends are." Sage advice although, as Shakespeare's Theseus informs us, it is not always easy to arrive at the proper distinctions:

> …as imagination bodies forth
> The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
> Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing
> A local habitation and a name.
>
> *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Act 5.1)

For example, when Nev & Company arrive at Megan's supposed horse farm, it not only turns out to be unoccupied but they discover in the mailbox a postcard Nev sent her months earlier, undelivered and marked: "RETURN TO THIS ADDRESS FOR PROPER DISPOSITION." A contemporary *Pilgrim's Progress*, Nev's "living novel" demonstrates just how difficult arriving at a "Proper Disposition" can be, particularly in a contemporary reality in which the New Vanity Fair offers what Pierre Bourdieu labels a "Market of Symbolic Objects." Finding Ignatius' proper disposition of the soul is no easy task, especially when one's own habitus or preprogrammed mental dispositions has been scrozzled by a self-running code corrupting—or at least complicating—its accustomed functions!

In a sense, the documentarians' journey to Ishpeming did not expose deceit and fraud but something much more fundamental (and inspirational) about the human spirit. While their GPS system reliably directed Nev and his film crew to the very doorstep of Angela and her family's home, the map, as physicists warn us, should never be mistaken for the terrain. The simulated environments that are made possible through our evolving technological infrastructure, whether they constitute Facebook, Second Life or some other venue, pose challenges to our understandings of what constitutes human identity and the relationships we form with others. What complicates matters in the Postmodern Era is that the old rule of one body per oneself seems to have gone by the wayside. As Judy Wajcman argues in *Technofeminism*, "Complex virtual identities rupture the cultural belief that there is a single self in a single body."[44] She describes the Web as "the ideal feminine medium where women should feel at home," [excelling] "within [its] fluid systems and processes."[45] No doubt, Angela Wesselman provides a case study in technofeminist proliferations of identity. Students now have the task of negotiating Baym's "*disembodied entities*" in a multiplayer Role Playing Game (RPG) scenario increasingly indistinguishable from what they formerly knew as "real life." Technological overlays add further complications without offering needed guidance. As Howard Rheingold indicates, "'the killer apps' of tomorrow won't be hardware devices or software programs but social

practices."[46] A pedagogy emphasizing discernment and an examen of conscience, the "killer apps" supplied by the Ignatian discipline can provide the guidebook for sorting through and negotiating those social practices. ⬛

Notes

[1] "Killer Application," *Wikipedia*, accessed January 3, 2012, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Killer_app.

[2] Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa, *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses* (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 2011).

[3] Rev. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S. J., "Jesuit Education and Ignatian Pedagogy." Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities. September 2005. http://www.ajcunet.edu/Jesuit-Education-and-Ignatian-Pedagogy.

[4] Evan Carroll and John Romano, *Your Digital Afterlife: When Facebook, Flickr and Twitter Are Your Estate, What's Your Legacy?* (New York: New Riders, 2011), 4.

[5] Carroll and Romano, *Your Digital Afterlife.*

[6] *Ibid.*, 175.

[7] *The Social Network,* David Fincher, director, Sony Pictures. 2011.

[8] In all fairness, the real Mark Zuckerberg, after having viewed the film, noted that the only thing the directors got right about him was his clothing style!

[9] Elias Aboujaoude, *Virtually You: The Dangerous Powers of the E-Personality* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2011), 10.

[10] *Ibid.*, 11.

[11] Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius,* Trans., George E. Ganss, S.J. (St. Louis, MO: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1992), 21.

[12] Aboujaoude, *Virtually You*, 74.

[13] David Kilpatrick, *The Facebook: The Inside Story of the Company that Is Connecting the World* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010), 24.

[14] *Ibid.*, 40.

[15] *Ibid.*

[16] Jeremy Sarachan, "Profile Picture, Right Here, Right Now," in *Facebook and Philosophy*, ed. D. E. Wittkower (Chicago: Open Court, 2010), 55.

[17] Nancy K. Baym. *Personal Connections in the Digital Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), 110.

[18] *Ibid.*, 111.

[19] *Ibid.*, 112.

[20] Aboujaoude, *Virtually You*, 77.

[21] Baym, *Personal Connections,* 106.

[22] *Ibid.*

[23] Jesse Rice, *The Church of Facebook: How the Hyperconnected Are Redefining Community (*Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2009). Not being present in the moment can take on various expressions here. Perhaps the most famous case is that of the texting lady who was so involved in her texting while walking through the mall that she fell into the fountain. Fortunately, all that was injured was her pride, as her fall was recorded by security cameras and became an instant hit as it went viral on the Internet. See: You Tube. http://www.youtube.com /watch?v=ZXYY_ep5Nh0.

[24] Fr. John Staudenmaier, S. J., "Making Decisions for a Better Life," podcast, accessed December 15, 2011. http:// www.udmercy.edu/udmcasts/series/spiritual-exercises.htm.

[25] Rice, *Church of Facebook,* 211-216.

[26] Dean Brackley, *The Call to Discernment in Troubled Times: New Perspectives on the Transformative Wisdom of Ignatius of Loyola* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2004), 161.

[27] Adapted from K. S. Young, *Caught in the Net: How to Recognize Signs of Internet Addiction—and a Winning Strategy for Recovery,* (New York: Wiley, 1998). Cited by Aboujaoude, 297-8.

[28] Craig Condella, "Why Can't We Be Virtual Friends?" in *Facebook and Philosophy*, ed. D. E. Wittkower (Chicago: Open Court, 2010),111-21.

[29] *Ibid.*, 112.

[30] Jim Manney, *dotMagis: the blog of Ignatian Spirituality.com*. http://ignatianspirituality.com/dotmagis-blog/

[31] *Ibid.*, 120.

[32] *Ibid.*, 121.

[33] Maurice Harrington, "Care Ethics, Friendship, and Facebook," in *Facebook and Philosophy*, ed. D. E. Wittkower (Chicago: Open Court, 2010), 143.

[34] Alexandra Alter, "Is This Man Cheating on his Wife?" *The Wall Street Journal*, August 10, 2007, http://online.wsj.com /article/SB118670164592393622.html.

[35] *Ibid.*

[36] Paraphrased by Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 179.

[37] *Catfish,* Directed by Nev Schulman, Ariel Schulman, and Henry Joost, Rogue Studios, 2010.

[38] Allison Willmore, "*Catfish*: A Virtual Romance," *IFC Fix* (January 23, 2010), http://www.ifc.com/fix/2010/01/catfish.

[39] "Secrets Revealed: Exclusive Interview with the Filmmakers."

[40] *Catfish*.

[41] *Ibid.*

[42] *Ibid.*

[43] *Ibid.*

[44] Judy Wajcman, *Technofeminism* (New York: Polity Press, 2004), 64.

[45] *Ibid.*

[46] Howard Rheingold, *Smart Mobs: The Next Social Revolution.* (New York: Perseus, 2002), quoted by Geert Lovink, *My First Recession* (New York: NAi Publishers, 2003), 9.

Bibliography

Aboujaoude, Elias. *Virtually You: The Dangerous Powers of the E-Personality.* New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2011.

Arum Richard. and Josipa Roksa. *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 2011.

Alter, Alexander. "Is This Man Cheating on His Wife?" The Wall Street Journal. August 10, 2010. http://online.wsj. com/article/SB118670164592393622.html.

Baym, Nancy K. *Personal Connections in the Digital Age*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010.

Brackley, Dean. *The Call to Discernment in Troubled Times: New Perspectives on the Transformative Wisdom of Ignatius of Loyola.* New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2004.

Carroll, Evan and John Romano. *Your Digital Afterlife: When Facebook, Flickr and Twitter Are Your Estate, What's Your Legacy?* New York: New Riders, 2011.

Catfish. Directed by Nev Schulman, Ariel Schulman, and Henry Joost. Rogue Studios. 2010.

Condella, Craig. "Why Can't We Be Virtual Friends?" In *Facebook and Philosophy,* edited by D. E. Wittkower, 111-21. Chicago: Open Court, 2010..

Harrington, Maurice. "Care Ethics, Friendship, and Facebook." In *Facebook and Philosophy,* edited by D. E. Wittkower, 135-45. Chicago: Open Court, 2010.

Ignatius of Loyola. *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius.* Translated by George E. Ganss, S.J. St. Louis, MO: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1992.

Kilpatrick, David. *The Facebook: The Inside Story of the Company That Is Connecting the World.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010.

Kolvenbach, Peter-Hans, S.J. "Jesuit Higher Education and Ignatian Pedagogy." Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities. September, 2005. http://www.ajcunet.edu/Jesuit-Education-and-Ignatian-Pedagogy.

Manney, Jim. *dotMagis: the blog of Ignatian Spirituality.com.* http://ignatianspirituality.com/dotmagis-blog/.

Rheingold, Howard. *Smart Mobs: The Next Social Revolution.* New York: Perseus, 2004.

Rice, Jesse. *The Church of Facebook: How the Hyperconnected Are Redefining Community.* Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2009.

Sarachan, Jeremy. "Profile Picture, Right Here, Right Now." In *Facebook and Philosophy,* edited by D. E. Wittkower, 51-64. Chicago: Open Court, 2010.

Staudenmaier, John, S.J. "Making Decisions for a Better Life." Podcast. Accessed December 15, 2011. http://www.udmercy.edu/udmcasts/series/spiritual-exercises.htm.

The Social Network. David Fincher, Director. Sony Pictures. 2011.

Turkle, Sherry. *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other.* New York: Basic Books, 2011.

Wajcman, Judy. *Technofeminism.* New York: Polity Press, 2004.

Wikipedia. "Killer Application." Accessed January 3, 2012. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Killer_app.

Willmore, Allison. "*Catfish*: A Virtual Romance," *IFC Fix* (January 23, 2010). http://www.ifc.com/fix/2010/01/catfish.

Young, K. S. *Caught in the Net: How to Recognize Signs of Internet Addiction—and a Winning Strategy for Recovery.* New York: Wiley, 1998.