Friend Me if You Facebook

Generation Y and Performative Surveillance

E.J. Westlake
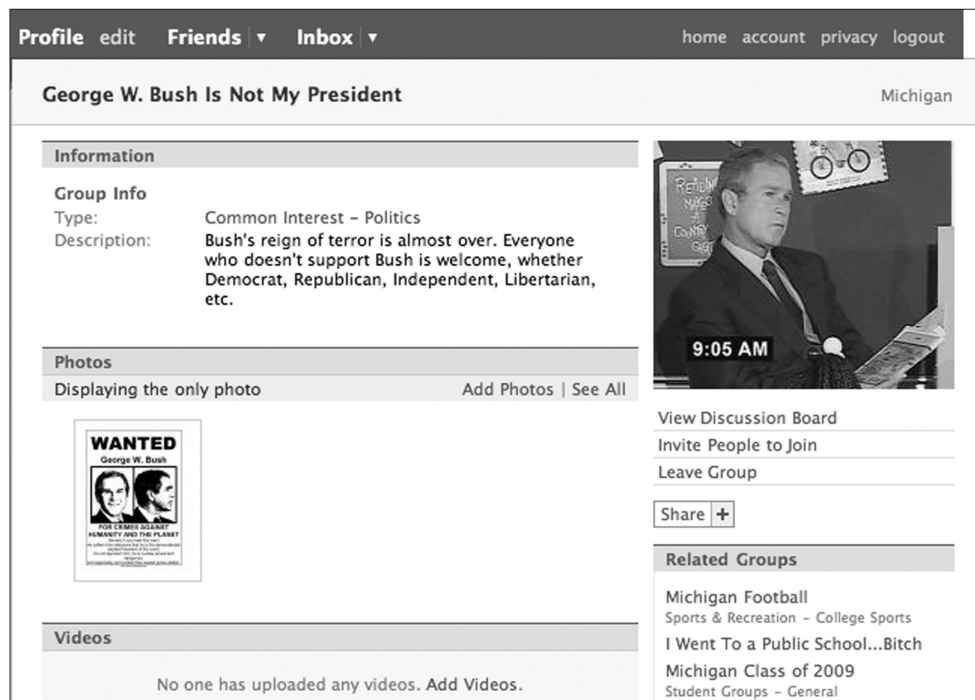
News Feed

In the summer of 2006, shortly after I returned from talking about Facebook at the International Federation for Theatre Research yearly congress held in Helsinki that year, I logged in to Facebook to find the content had been completely changed. In addition to the usual information—who had poked me, how many messages I had waiting, and the number of friend requests awaiting confirmation—I saw a flood of small reports on the Facebook activities of my Facebook friends. I read a time-stamped list of who had friended whom, who changed profile

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pictures, who had written on other people's Walls and what they wrote, and who had posted new photographs, joined or left a new group, started dating, broken up, written a public note, or altered their lists of favorite books or movies.

The sensation of encountering Facebook News Feed for the first time is hard to describe. I remember thinking that it was a bold move for Facebook, but I also remember feeling a little strange knowing that my every move (well, almost every move) would be seen by all of my Facebook friends. On the one hand, I enjoyed being able to see with one sweep of my eyes that one friend was engaged, another had posted new photographs and tagged several of our mutual friends, still another had posted something vaguely personal on a friend's Wall, and that several of my students were attending a party that weekend. However, I immediately began searching for a feature to edit my own News Feed. I wasn't sure I wanted everyone to know the comments I had posted under a friend's photographs or see what I was posting on other people's Walls. Granted, these things are publicly available, but previously one had to search for them; now News Feed announced them to anyone in my Facebook social circle. To my relief, I discovered that I could delete certain items under the Mini Feed that was on my profile, but the new feature certainly made me more conscious of the way I behaved on Facebook—the way I *performed*— particularly since many in my audience would be my students.

Soon, the protests began. Within hours of News Feed's launch, Facebook users began writing the founder, Mark Zuckerberg. Invitations and News Feed items decrying the new feature began to appear as soon as I logged in. Users formed groups such as "Students Against Facebook News Feed," and smaller ones like "Anyone Else Find This Whole 'Facebook News Feed' Thing A Little Creepy?" and the satirically expressed sentiment that conventional stalking will be made obsolete with "How Can I Stalk People When There Is News Feed?"

One user posted the lyrics to Sting's 1983 "Every Breath You Take":

Every breath you take,
Every move you make,
Every bond you break,
Every step you take,
I'll be watching you.

The user clearly felt monitored in a way that made him uncomfortable, a sentiment reflected by other users. Some were worried about stalking: "It makes stalking way too easy […] it scares me!" and "Facebook was creepy enough before […] this is definitely crossing some sort of line." Others were just annoyed at the flood of minutiae they faced when they logged in: "The new Facebook was supposed to 'let us know a little about what is going on in our world' but it just shows us who has been bored recently," posted a user. While some counter-groups in support of News Feed formed (one user posted: "If you didn't want people to know, why do it on Facebook?"), "Students against Facebook News Feed" grew to a half a million members in a matter of days. Some even noted the irony that they had heard about the group through none other than News Feed itself.

Within 24 hours, Zuckerberg posted a notice to all Facebook users: "Calm down. Breathe. We hear you." "Students against Facebook News Feed" proclaimed victory. Facebook was continually changing the landscape of social networking, but this change, from the standpoint of a significant percentage of the users, had gone too far.

To understand the broader implications of the furor over News Feed, we need to take a step back and review the history of Facebook and its initial purpose, and examine the social issues

Figure 1. (previous page) Profile for the University of Michigan-based Facebook group "George W. Bush Is Not My President."

Face Books before Facebook

Many Ivy League schools distribute paper "face books" that contain photographs and limited personal information on classmates to incoming freshmen. In February of 2004, Harvard University computer science major Mark Zuckerberg took this means for students to get to know each other a step further by launching Facebook.com from his dorm room. As a teenager, Zuckerberg was already an innovative programmer: he wrote a computer version of the board game Risk and software for mp3 players. To develop Facebook, he enlisted the help of his friends Dustin Moskovitz and Adam D'Angelo (who still work on the Facebook corporate team) and a year and a half later dropped out of Harvard and moved the quickly growing enterprise to Palo Alto, California. Facebook generates most of its evenue from advertisements for companies—from the University of Phoenix to Alltel to CareerBuilding.com. Users can also purchase "flyers" for a small fee to advertise local events or announce birthdays or graduations. Most recently, Facebook added a virtual gift shop, where users can buy "gifts," or icons, to post on another user's "Wall" for $1.00.

specific to its Generation Y users. The global, online world of Facebook reflects the local, "on ground" life of its specific users. As the Facebook website notes: "Facebook develops technologies that facilitate the spread of information through social networks allowing people to share information online the same way they do in the real world."[1] This tension between specificity and generality, and local and global, affects the ways in which communities of users perform their identities, both in cyberspace and in the material world. It reflects the changing social landscape of the information age.

Because Facebook was founded as a way to enhance face-to-face contact on university campuses, it has virtual and physical life unique on the internet. Contrary to prevailing attitudes of Baby Boomers and Generation X-ers that Generation Y is somehow socially and politically disengaged because of technology, the opposite is true.[2] Studies show, in fact, that while young people spend more time on the computer (Fox and Madden 2006), they are more connected than ever in large part because technology facilitates contact in ways unfathomable even 10 years ago (Boase 2006). The gloomy scenario of a Baudrillardian dystopian life of the hyperreal has largely become irrelevant as the members of Generation Y perform (that is, modify their behavior for a specific imagined audience) on the web to build community and to communicate in ways that will forever alter, for better or worse, the ways in which people relate in person.

To understand this dynamic of the performance of self online as part of a broad range of stagings deployed by the new generation, I will examine several of Facebook's features, some controversies generated about online profiles in the early years of Facebook, and the performances of self I have observed since entering into my own local Facebook community in 2006. In general, I argue that the predominantly Generation Y Facebook community uses Facebook to define the boundaries of normative behavior through unique performances of an online self. The controversy over Facebook News Feed reveals that these fluid performances—which may look to older observers like deviant exhibitionism on the one hand and a passive acceptance of intrusive surveillance on the other—are neither deviant nor passive. They are energetic engagements with the panoptic gaze: as people offer themselves up for surveillance, they establish and reinforce social norms, but also resist being fixed as rigid, unchanging subjects.

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1. "About Facebook" (Facebook n.d.).

2. I am following Jay Tolson's (2001) definitions for Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) and Generation X-ers (born between 1965 and 1981), and J. Sean McCleneghan's (2005) for Generation Y (born between 1982 and 2001).
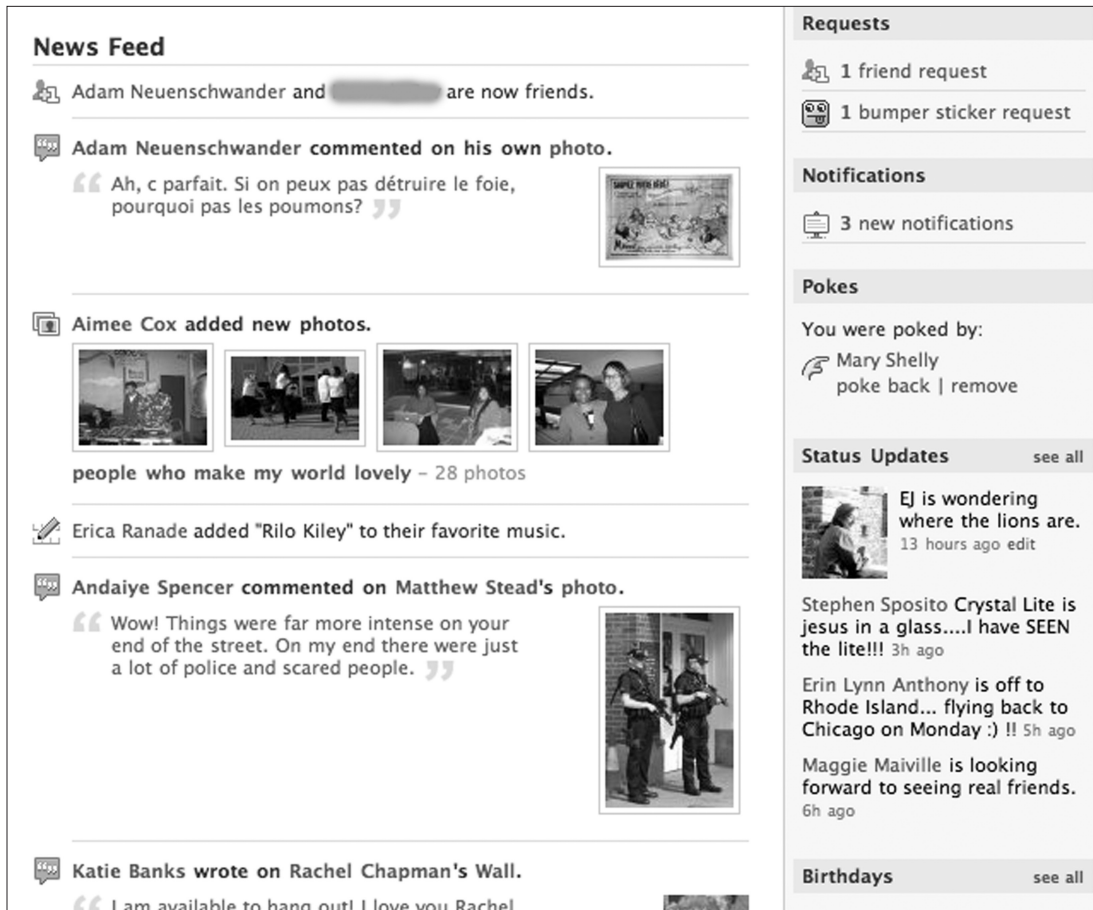
Figure 2. The Facebook home page where one can find an individually tailored News Feed, notifications of friend requests, and notification of a Facebook "Poke."

Understanding Facebook

In February 2004 Mark Zuckerberg, a Harvard undergraduate, launched Facebook.com as an online network to help Harvard students get to know each other. Many Ivy League schools distribute paper "face books" with student photographs and limited personal information to incoming freshmen, and although Zuckerberg has been quoted as saying Harvard did not have such a mechanism, communications industry commentator Andy Kessler notes in his interview with Zuckerberg that it did (2007). Originally, Zuckerberg, Chris Hughes, and Dustin Moskovitz—Facebook's administrators—restricted the network to those affiliated with educational institutions. However, in 2006 Facebook upset many in its user base by opening itself up to everyone (although users are still confined to specific, often local, networks). Facebook has become one of the fastest growing—and some will admit most addictive—pastimes in U.S. youth culture. Since it went live, Facebook.com has grown to include not only every college and university in the United States but also many universities in other countries, most United States high schools, the military, several companies, and now geographically based networks as well.

Like MySpace, an online journal that allows you to connect to friends and meet new people, Facebook recalls the "slam book" phenomenon in junior high and high schools of the 1970s, the spiral notebook that circulated within a group of friends with specific queries about opinions or

musings on particular people or topics. The slam book survives in its physical form and in online versions such as slambook.com. In similar fashion, MySpace and Facebook encourage users to share personal information, such as favorite movies and books, favorite quotes, political leanings, spring break and summer activities, and photographs. Users set up profiles and link themselves to friends and relatives to form networks. The Facebook website describes Facebook as "a social utility that helps people better understand the world around them." It goes on to proclaim that:

> Facebook is made up of many networks, each based around a company, region, or school. Join the networks that reflect your real-life communities to learn more about the people who work, live, or study around you.[3]

While MySpace, which is designed for global connectivity, has many features that allow for greater online creativity, Zuckerberg designed Facebook to allow for real-life social connections. Many artists, and musicians in particular, use MySpace as a promotional tool since it allows users to post video and audio files and change the look of the profile page. Bands especially have found MySpace to be useful for promoting their music. Also, MySpace has a blog (web log)—a regular "diary" of sorts that one encounters on a user's main page—something Facebook only approximates in its "Notes" function.

Indeed many users have profiles on both MySpace and Facebook to allow them different kinds of performances of self. And many people provide links to direct readers from one to the other. Unlike MySpace, however, most of the content and activity on Facebook is school or geographically specific. Users are required to have a school- or work-affiliated email address to register, or to remain part of a regional network, such as "Ann Arbor" or "New York City." Most user information is only visible to people within that particular school or geographic designation, and while Facebook now allows for global groups, many Facebook groups remain specific to a particular school. This local specificity supports Facebook's main purpose—to help students at the same school or nonaffiliated people in a specific locale get to know each other better—and is part of Facebook's appeal. To this end, one of Facebook's first features allowed you to list your courses, click on them, and see who else registered for that course. It created a fast way to meet classmates. While using the internet is already performative, social networking is more so. And the performance of self on Facebook always has the potential of carrying over into "real life" and vice versa.

The Performativity of Social Networking

The internet has changed the way we read text and the way we read each other's performances. One of the early paradigms to emerge for the internet, first with Gopher and later with the World Wide Web (WWW), was geographic. The designers of the Gopher protocol named it for the mascot of their home institution, the University of Minnesota, but also to indicate the user's ability to travel, or tunnel, from server to server to retrieve files. This paradigm also worked for the web, with users traveling among servers to view pages. The sense of travel was also reflected in the early language associated with the web ("surfing" and "information superhighway") and the early browser names (Explorer, Netscape, and Safari).

However, reading the web involves more than traveling to read text. Indeed, the web allows—even demands—reading strategies that are not linear, inviting the reader to choose the path and order of text read, as driven by the reader's own desire and cognitive processing style. This carries over into Facebook's structure, where users see how they are connected to others through mutual friends and groups. Users can also click on any of the books or movies others have listed as favorites and see who else in that network has listed them. Hyperlinks and search terms have replaced the spiral spine of the slam notebook.

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3. "About Facebook" (Facebook n.d.).

But even more than creating different strategies of reading, the web creates a writerly text. As Roland Barthes notes in *S/Z*, referring to modernist printed literature:

> Our literature is characterized by the pitiless divorce which the literary institution maintains between […] its author and its reader. This reader is thereby plunged into a kind of idleness […], instead of gaining access to the magic of the signifier, to the pleasure of writing, he is left with no more than the poor freedom either to accept or reject the text. (1974:4)

This printed text is "readerly," and can only be read. By contrast, the "writerly" text is:

> a perpetual present, upon which no consequent language (which would inevitably make it past) can be superimposed; the writerly text is *ourselves writing*, before the infinite play of the world (the world as function) is traversed, intersected, stopped, plasticized by some singular system (Ideology, Genus, Criticism) which reduced the plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, the infinity of languages. (5)

While Barthes could not have been thinking of the internet in 1970, cultural theorists such as George P. Landow (1997)[4] have successfully applied Barthes's definition of the writerly text to the ways in which the web lends itself to a participatory reading in ways much more effective than the reader's eye movement or page turning work upon the isolated physical book.

An internet reader contributes to the text in several ways, not only by connecting pages and text through links and hypertext, but often by amending or editing content. Consider the ways in which sites such as the IMDb and Wikipedia allow users to edit entries, either with comprehensive administrative supervision (IMDb) or without (Wikipedia).[5] And as the web developed throughout the 1990s, several sites began to offer free space to people who wanted to create their own web pages. Microsoft Word was upgraded to allow regular users to save documents in html, the markup language necessary to make pages intelligible and visually interesting on the web. Now anyone can create text on the internet, link it to other texts, and create forums where others can add comments, responses, and corrections.

Social networking sites such as Facebook take the concept of the personal web page and the blog further, enhancing the personal profile with tools for users to comment upon or even alter the content of fellow users' pages. In addition, Facebook adds the more current features of messaging, "poking,"[6] and News Feed, and ties them to emails that alert the user to content changes. This is perhaps the motivation behind Facebook's latest move to allow developers such as Microsoft, Warner Brothers, and even Barak Obama's presidential campaign to launch mini-applications within the Facebook platform for free, which enhances users' agency by allowing them to modify content and create an even greater volume of traffic (see Forsyth 2007).

Perhaps what makes Facebook often unintelligible to some comes down to preferred modes of communication for people of different generations. The generations of people older than current college students—known as the "silent" generation (1925–1942), the Baby "Boomers" (1945–1960), and the "thirteenth" generation (1961–1981), according to William Strauss and Neil Howe's *Generations* (1991)—do not have the same perspective on the internet as a means for social networking as the generation that is just beginning to graduate from college. In both

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4. I am indebted to George P. Landow's web page for pointing out the similarities between Barthes's concept and the internet, as well as showing me where to find the definition of "readerly" (1997).

5. While some pages are protected from user editing, some are protected only from people who have been registered for less than four days. Even with "protection," the administrative staff are volunteers from the internet community and protection is usually only the result of intense controversy over content.

6. A "poke" involves clicking on the "Poke Him/Her" option on a user's profile. The user is then notified of the poke on the "Pokes" section of the user's home page. The user can opt to "poke back."

Generations (1991) and *Millennials Rising* (2000), Strauss and Howe call this younger generation the Millennial Generation; *American Demographics* called them "Echo Boomers" (Miller 1995). The generation was dubbed "Generation Y" by marketing consultants following the media tendency to refer to the "thirteenth" generation as "Generation X" (Stanley 1995). The crucial generational difference with regard to reading Facebook turns on the need to engage with its more active forms of communication, such as messaging and other users' Walls. Otherwise, Facebook appears static. As one Generation Y user wrote: "Maybe they [people born before 1982] don't know that it's also for communication? I know some people think Facebook is just sort of a reference guide" (Shelly 2006). While older internet users are more comfortable with email or the telephone, the young people of Generation Y are at home with chatting, text messaging, and continually altering the content of their profiles (Fox and Madden 2006). For Generation Y-ers, writing, or "texting," is an act, and Facebook provides a forum for both immediate and asynchronous social interaction, creating a collaborative, interactive, and performative text.

Erving Goffman's well-established model of analyzing the performance of self (1959) applies not only to face-to-face interaction, but also to asynchronous and real-time interaction on the internet. While Goffman could not have predicted the dynamics of computer-mediated interaction, his model works because users, socialized in face-to-face interaction, are often conscious of applying the rules of such interaction to the cyber world. Indeed sociologists have already begun to consider Goffman's performance of self as it relates to the internet.[7] While certain elements that Goffman defined as part of the "front stage" performance are absent in computer-mediated interaction (visual cues such as clothing and facial expression and aural cues such as tone), they are replaced in chat and on websites by more "staged" elements such as font, photographs, music, and graphics.

Goffman defined performance as "all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers" (1959:22). This "continuous presence" can be in the form of an "unseen audience" provided the performer continues to act as if the observer were observing (81–82). Facebook users employ the static text of the profile in tandem with the more immediate and fluid text of messaging and poking to manage an image of self presented to other users. The Facebook community works as a team in performance to achieve "dramaturgical cooperation" (83) in order to affirm each other's performances and to define the local Facebook community.

After logging in to Facebook, a user will encounter the homepage, where News Feed resides. From the homepage, the user can move among any of Facebook's features, including the individual profile (fig. 3). The profile approximates the personal web page where a person can lay out the features of her or his performance. The profile contains a picture, supposedly of the individual, but sometimes of animals, drawings, superheroes, celebrities, or inanimate objects. Within the profile, users are encouraged to list favorite books, movies, television shows, and quotes. People in that individual user's network can see that person's groups, photo albums, pictures of that person tagged by other users, and anything that has been posted to the user's "Wall," a public space for messages. (Generally, a user can only see the profiles of people in their own institution.) A user may employ these tools to emphasize the characteristics that person feels best express his or her nature: that the user is funny, serious, studious, creative, fun-

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7. As Thomas Wells Brignall III and Thomas Van Valey note, scholars "argue that although Goffman was clearly thinking only of face-to-face interactions, his description is useful as a starting point for describing an intact social bond, regardless of whether the participants are copresent or not" (2005:339). In Spencer E. Cahill's article "Toward a Sociology of the Person," he states that although both he and Goffman deal specifically with face-to-face interaction, "Person production clearly occurs through mediated, disembodied forms of interaction as well, and probably increasingly so. Yet, the face-to-face production of persons is arguably the canonical form upon which mediated forms are variations" (1998:136n3).
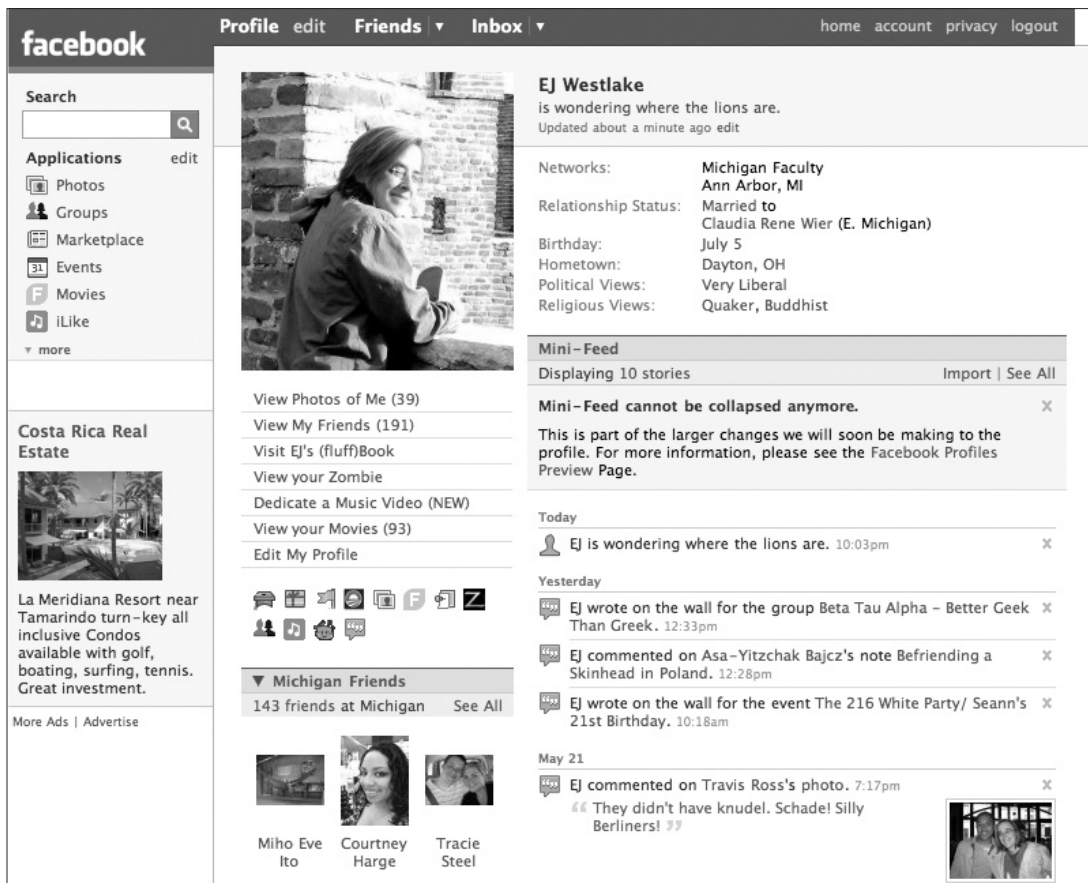
Figure 3. The author's Facebook profile.

loving, popular, deep, or committed to certain beliefs, ideas, or institutions. From there the user can invite an audience. He or she can "friend" people, that is, add people to a list of friends. If a user from one institution friends someone at another institution, the user can see that person's profile, and when one user views another profile, Facebook will list the friends the two users have in common.

The other way that users connect is the group forum. Anyone can start a Facebook group, and the groups often reflect the actual (as opposed to virtual) groups on campus. Users can form political groups such as "George W. Bush Is Not My President," groups tied to academic majors or programs such as "I Live In the Frieze," groups based on enthusiasm for sports such as "OSU Smells" or "Detroit Tigers Fans," and random groups that are just for fun such as "I Only Go To Class To See What Joe Plese is Wearing." There are also groups to pressure nonusers to set up Facebook profiles, groups that comment on the addictive potential of Facebook, groups that comment on the evolution of Facebook, and groups that comment on someone else's use of Facebook. For instance, although a user can potentially friend every other user, when a user has what the community has deemed "too many" friends, that user receives the title "Facebook whore," and a group may be formed for the purpose of commenting on that person's status as such.

Two of the more performative aspects of Facebook are the phenomenon of "poking" and the practice of creating fake profiles. Facebookers can "poke" each other (fig. 4), an option that
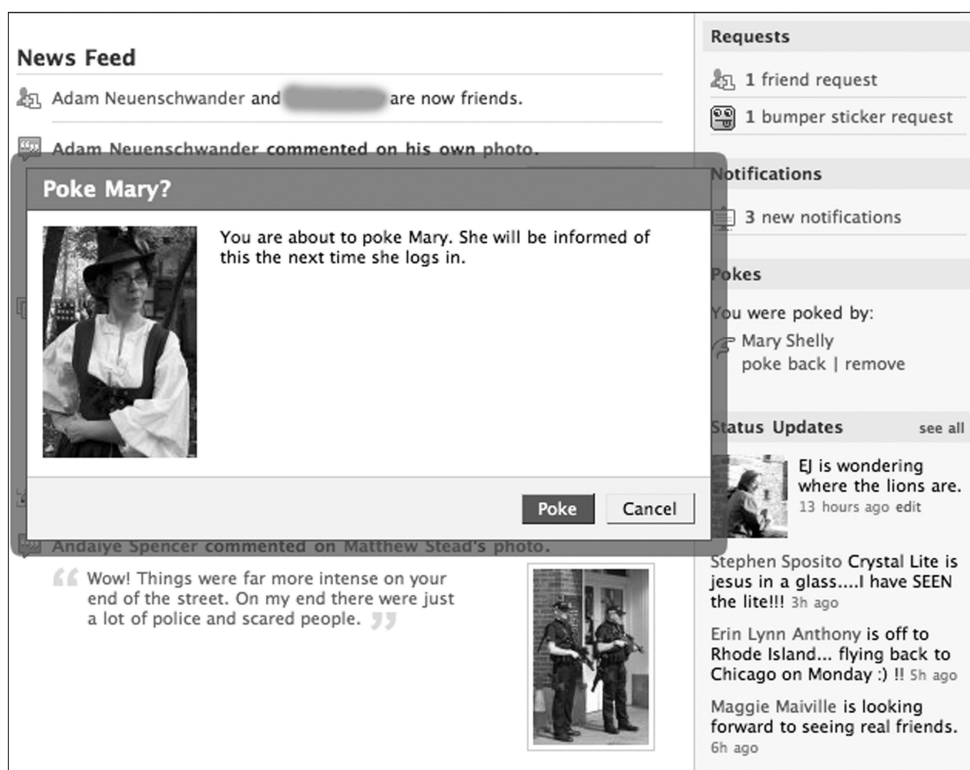
Figure 4. When one user "pokes" another user, a poke dialogue box appears for confirmation.

appears next to the names of people in a search or on a profile page. According to Facebook developers, the poke has no real intended purpose. In the help pages, under "What is a Poke?" the developers admitted: "What is a Poke? We have about as much of an idea as you do. We thought it would be fun to make a feature that had no real purpose and to see what happens from there. So mess around with it, because you're not getting an explanation from us."[8] Poked users are notified of their pokes when they first log in and land on the home page. While poking can be a way of saying "I am thinking of you," it can also communicate flirtation or playfulness; facebookers become involved in poking "wars" with other parties on Facebook. Poking can also represent a less than pleased "hey!" as I discovered when our campus's resident harmonica player poked me after I insulted his playing on a group formed specifically to talk about him.

While Facebook administrators have forbidden the custom of creating fake profiles, Facebookers perform fake identities such as William Shatner or Sir Isaac Newton, create fake profiles of faculty, and fabricate fictitious profiles for pre-existing fictional characters, pets, or wholly invented personas. People who create fake profiles will often maintain them, responding to people who friend them and joining groups. I was surprised to find that my niece had friended Franz Boas at Kent State (fig. 5); I have encountered fake profiles of faculty. In fact, students were often surprised to find out that I was really me and not just a performed me, since faculty weren't known to Facebook in the earlier months of its evolution. The issue of fake profiles continues to be a contentious issue within the Facebook community.

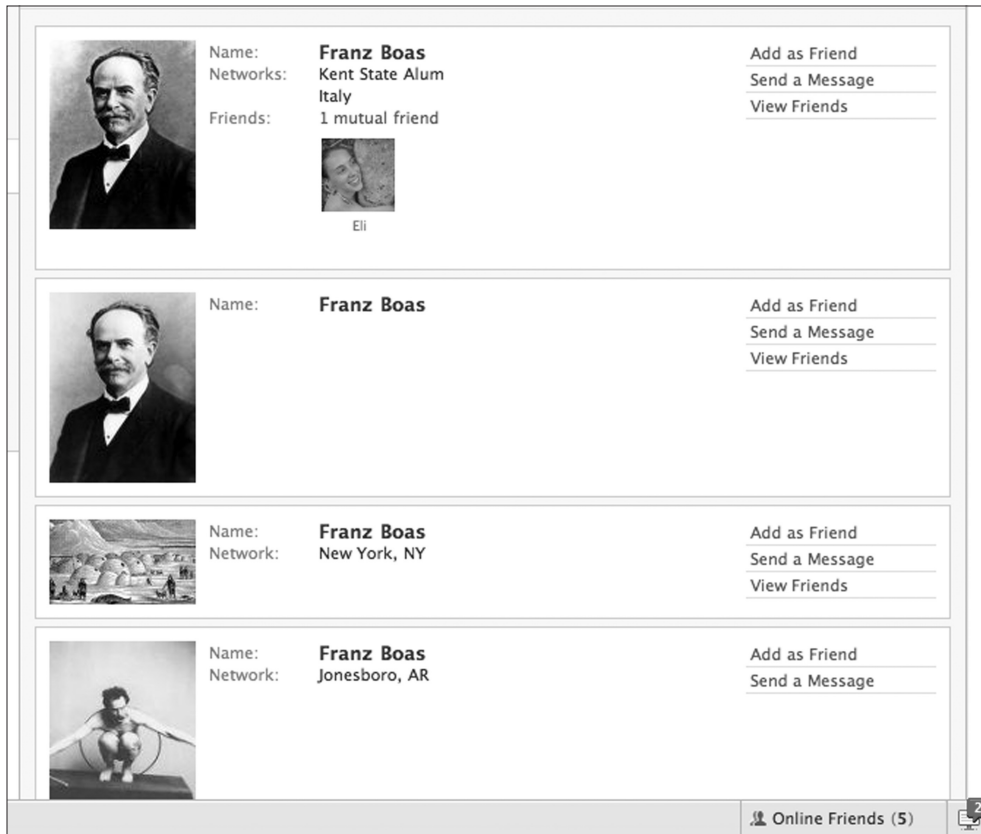8. "Messages and Pokes" (Facebook n.d.).

Figure 5. A search for "Franz Boas" turns up several users performing the fictional identity of the anthropologist, including the "Facebook friend" of the author's niece.

Facebook has created its own subculture and language. There are preferences for calling it just "Facebook" or "The Facebook" and variations of using Facebook as a verb or a noun. Typically, students ask each other: "Do you Facebook?" or "Are you on Facebook?" or "Why don't you friend me?" Students get together to "Facebook" or to "go Facebooking." But many sociologists worry that the increased internet use by Generation Y will result in their lacking the socialization needed to function in society. For example, Thomas Wells Brignall III and Thomas Van Valey fear that:

> If individuals move to use online forms of interaction as the primary way to communicate, the rules of online communication will begin to compete with and perhaps dominate those of face-to-face social interactions. For contemporary adults, this should not be problematic. They should have sufficient face-to-face interaction skills for them to move among the different modes of communication. However, this may not be the case with some cyberkids who have not properly developed their face-to-face interaction skills. Consequently, they may have problems when engaging in real face-to-face interactions. (2005:341)

While some sociologists fear that computer-mediated communication may shape a generation that is not properly socialized, recent research suggests that computer-mediated contact does not replace more traditional modes of interaction. A study conducted as part of the Pew Internet and American Life Project notes that their own findings were consistent with those of

other studies: "The internet does not reduce in-person or telephone contact, or any other form of social activity; it replaces only sleeping or TV watching" (Boase 2006:22).

One Facebook user reported to me: "Facebook is addicting, and sometimes I find myself looking at random profiles when I have a million constructive things to do." Another posted: "Facebook is like crack, I check it every damn day even if I know there is absolutely no good reason to."[9] However, a quick gloss of Facebook's features suggests that Facebook is not a substitute for social interaction. In fact, Facebook's "events" feature allows users to inform each other about face-to-face gatherings with amazing success. Students find Facebook to be effective for promoting performances, parties, and political causes within their social networks. Users then use the photo album feature to document the gathering. Facebook's local specificity enhances face-to-face interaction. This is consistent with the Pew study, which noted that: "The findings suggest media multiplexity: people who communicate frequently use multiple media to do so. The more contact by one medium, the more contact by others" (Boase 2006:23). In other words, people who use email more often are more likely to have more face-to-face contact (iv).

Facebook also connects users isolated from their social network. As one user, who lives in rural Michigan and commutes over an hour to attend Saginaw Valley State, noted: "I'm stuck in the middle of nowhere, it's like my lifeline."

Fears over proper socialization are moot for another reason. The rules of social interaction are continuously shifting. Generation Y, as large a demographic as the Baby Boomers, will take what older generations view as a social disadvantage and create new norms for performances of self, and these norms are as likely to be established online as they are in face-to-face interaction.

Baby Boomers and many Generation X-ers have difficulty understanding the public nature of the online performance of self. For this reason, they fail to see the normative nature of these forms of social networking. Boomer journalist Robert J. Samuelson derided Generation Y's desire to perform through social networking sites:

> Call it the ExhibitioNet. It turns out that the internet has unleashed the greatest outburst of mass exhibitionism in human history. Everyone may not be entitled, as Andy Warhol once suggested, to 15 minutes of fame. But everyone is entitled to strive for 15 minutes— or 30, 90 or much more. We have blogs, "social networking" sites (MySpace, Facebook, YouTube and all their rivals). Everything about these sites is a scream for attention. Look at me. Listen to me. Laugh with me—or at me. (Samuelson 2006:A25)

Quoting Thoreau's famous line that most live lives of "quiet desperation," Samuelson groans: "Thanks to technology, that's no longer necessary. People can now lead lives of noisy and ostentatious desperation" (A25).

Samuelson and people like him fail to comprehend that Generation Y's proficiency with the internet and other new technologies make them comfortable using these means in tandem with their face-to-face performances. Generation Y has been saturated with messages from media, making them simultaneously skeptical of information and able to package themselves in ways that mimic those messages. Generation Y people have a desire to connect, to join social networks, and to strengthen social bonds in ways that seem foreign to the more individualistic Boomer and X-er generations.[10] To that end, Generation Y-ers are willing to offer themselves up for surveillance through performance and to act as the mechanism of surveillance in a way that takes Bentham's/Foucault's panoptic gaze to the micro-levels of social interaction.

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9. User responses, unless otherwise noted, were collected informally with the promise of anonymity through a Facebook event called "Tell Me Your Facebook Story," and anonymously through a "Survey Monkey" survey, both conducted in 2006.

10. See the 2007 Pew Report on "Generation Next" for closeness of family ties (18–19) and the use of social networking sites for connecting face-to-face (15).

Surveillance

Facebook and MySpace made headlines in 2005 and 2006 for two reasons: they had raised issues about internet predators, and had caused concern about the availability of information for state surveillance. MySpace is more global; it doesn't have the kinds of boundaries that Facebook imposes on its users—it is open to anyone. So when several children were stalked by predators using MySpace, concerns were raised about the dangers of online user profiles (see for example Kornblum [2005] and Schrobsdorff [2006]). Facebook users have reported to me that they find the openness of the MySpace environment unsettling:

> I'm also on MySpace, which i used mostly for the kids i know who don't go to college. It's sort of creepy tho because of randoms. I had this guy who worked with a musical theatre/cabaret record label randomly message me because he saw me on [another user's] friends [list] and thought I 'looked fun.' It was true I had a crazy bowling picture of myself as my picture—but it was kinda creepy.

The U.S. Congress has attempted to limit access to sites like MySpace and Facebook through legislation such as HR 5319, the Deleting Online Predators Act, which would require schools and libraries to make social networking sites inaccessible on their networks (Yegyazarian 2006).

At the same time, the Patriot Act has opened the door for the Federal Government to use the internet for intelligence gathering. The government has actively pursued customer records from internet providers and telecommunications companies. Telecommunications companies, in turn, have been lobbying Congress to revise the 1996 Telecommunications Act to give them ways to skirt around the principle of network neutrality, essentially allowing them to restrict content and the free flow of information.

Against the backdrop of the state's uneasy relationship with the internet, Generation Y-ers behave and perform in ways that seem to baffle their elders. Given the kind of access both the government and stalkers have to personal information available on social networking sites, one could conclude that Facebook users are both exhibiting themselves in risky ways that are open to predators and showing a clear disregard for government intrusion. As Danah Boyd notes: "Teens today grow up in a state of constant surveillance where there is no privacy. So they can't really have an idea of it being lost. The risk of the government or a corporation coming in and looking at their MySpace site is beyond their consideration" (in Berton 2006:A1). Generation Y-ers seem poised to passively allow complete surveillance. News that employers have used Facebook to investigate potential employees has caused a few Facebook users to alter the content of their profiles. However, stories of twentysomethings tearing their hair out over pictures they'd posted of drunken orgies seem somewhat overblown. Indeed, Facebook encourages moderation in online performances of self by the very nature of its geographic specificity. While researchers in a recent University of Dayton study expressed concern over the fact that 8 percent of Facebook users surveyed reported exaggerating the amount of drinking or drug use in their profiles, what they don't mention is the reverse: that an overwhelming majority of users do not exaggerate or highlight so-called deviant behavior. Writing in 1999, Joseph R. Dominick observed similar discretion in the creation of some of the first web pages:

> The internet has been criticized many times as a place where pornography and indecent material abound. This criticism, however, does not apply to personal web pages. Despite the fact that these pages were uncensored, only 4 percent contained any kind of offensive material, and this material was relatively mild, most of it consisting of profane and/or vulgar language. (1999:652)

Most information users present in online profiles depicts the lives of the actual users doing relatively mundane activities. A study by Sam Gosling at the University of Texas attests to the fact that Facebook profiles often reflect the actual personality of the users, even when users may not be aware of the personality they project (*New Scientist* 2007).

The News Feed controversy is a flashpoint for users' threshold of discomfort with the availability of personal information on the internet, as evidenced in the many postings immediately following News Feed's launch. The debate helps illuminate a potential boundary for observation. On the one hand, users were unsure that they wanted to be that visible. On the other hand, users did not feel entirely comfortable with their own role in observing others.

Another feature of Facebook's social dynamic that has been disconcerting to some is that you can link yourself by the classes in which you are enrolled. As mentioned above, students were able to list the courses they were taking. They could then click on that course and see other people who had done the same. Although this is no longer an official Facebook feature, it has been taken over by a couple of the new applications developers can launch through Facebook. Many people do this voluntarily because they are eager to connect with people from the "real life" environment of the classroom. However, many users reported to me that, while they like to learn things about their classmates ahead of time, they feel strange when someone knows about them from their profiles. Such unintended consequences cause students to feel stalked or to feel like they are stalking by virtue of the fact that they have, in the hidden environment of the internet, gained information about each other. One user responded to my survey:

> Facebook is the ultimate stalking tool. If I forget someone's name, instead of embarrassingly asking the person again, I can look it up. I've used Facebook to get screen names, phone numbers, to message people about a class, to ask people to hang out, and even to see if a friend was still dating her boyfriend.

Users have jokingly referred to Facebook as "Stalkerbook," and have formed groups such as "I See People from Facebook on the Street, but If I Speak, They Might Think I'm a Stalker." Students feel uneasy about meeting each other after having seen pictures of each other drunk or reading affectionate notes from partners on each other's Walls. Although the expressed purpose of Facebook is to help people who have real-life connections get to know each other better, people routinely refer to each other as "stalkers" for having used Facebook to find information on acquaintances and classmates.

In some rare cases, actual stalking is an issue. One user wrote: "Through Facebook my ex-boyfriend/stalker was able to find me. Good news lives on other side of state, bad news now knows where I work again. So while I have found a lot of my friends from high school, I also had a run in with that idiot." Another user reported that after his ex-girlfriend mentioned his name to a friend, this friend,

> being some kind of crazy Facebook stalker, friended me completely randomly and claimed to have no connection to me at all, and just picked me out of Facebook totally randomly. Of course, I figured her out later. BUT! We ended up talking online a whole crapload, and met a few times. I guess you could call them dates. Or going to random parties and making out.

One user even reported how Facebook facilitated his own desire to stalk someone he had met through Facebook and who then moved out of town:

> Facebook, which once I was so happy that I met this guy thru, has ruined my life. It has made me this jealous ex-boyfriend. I love/hate/am addicted to checking his profile. If I see that someone that I know or someone who is cute and gay wrote on his Wall, I get jealous—if they say something like "I had fun last night" I get SUPER jealous. Also, I check his pictures—and it really really hurt me that he was hanging out with lots of people and having a great time—I am being unreasonable, but Facebook has kind of aided me in stalking him. It is a little strange how knowing and being able to see pictures of what someone is doing can influence you.

Concerns about stalking or being stalked seem naïve in the context of social networking sites like Facebook. It seems strange to hear people talk about how disconcerting it is to meet others

already knowing certain personal details about them. But the people of Generation Y, however willing to be the agents and the objects of surveillance, have their limits. Their relationship to the gaze is not passive, but performative.

Performative Surveillance

Following Foucault's notion of discipline, the internet as a phenomenon easily falls under the panoptic gaze. The concept of a masked power such as the U.S. Government watching, or potentially watching, the content of electronic communication, operates on the bodies who perform through the internet. However, the true efficiency of the Panopticon lies not in the potential for surveillance, but in the mechanism. As Foucault notes, "Anyone may come and exercise in the central tower the functions of surveillance, and that, this being the case, he can gain a clear idea of the way in which the surveillance is practiced" (1979:207). The Panopticon works because it is dispersed:

> [...] the productive increase of power can be assured only if, on the one hand, it can be exercised continuously in the very foundations of society, in the subtlest possible way [...T]he domain of panopticism is [...] that whole lower region, that region of irregular bodies, with their details, their multiple movements, their heterogeneous forces, their spatial relations; [...] a physics of a relational and multiple power, which has its maximum intensity [...] in the bodies that can be individualized by these relations. (208)

Disciplines (pedagogy, medicine, law) establish norms through institutions (schools, clinics, courts) that are transmitted to individuals who are then punished if they choose not to follow those norms.

Users can also police Facebook deviants by reporting inappropriate photographs, fake profiles, and vulgar Wall posts. Facebook has an elaborate Code of Conduct and encourages users to click on "Report Abuse" links on every page. On both the Safety and Help pages, Facebook informs users:

> You can anonymously report offensive profile pictures and content by clicking on the "Report this Person" link located at the bottom of the profile page. You will be asked to specify the offensive content. Facebook will review your complaint and act accordingly. (Facebook "Safety")

While users can conceivably create fake profiles based on anyone, fake profiles are rigorously policed on Facebook. A fake profile based on Franz Boas or William Shatner can be easily detected within the Facebook community. Users also create fake profiles based on real individuals. When Facebook was school, military, or company specific, a fake profile based on a real individual could be detected based on the fact that you had to use an official educational institution, military, or work-related email address to join that network. If the real person attempted to establish a fake profile, it would be detected. When Facebook opened up to the general public, fake profiles based on real people became more difficult to detect. The prohibition against fake profiles is listed in both the Code of Conduct and in the Terms of Use. A user may not:

- register for more than one User account, register for a User account on behalf of an individual other than yourself, or register for a User account on behalf of any group or entity;
- impersonate any person or entity, or falsely state or otherwise misrepresent yourself, your age or your affiliation with any person or entity. (Facebook "Terms of Use")

It takes only one user reporting a fake profile for the profile to be removed. In 2006, many of the fake profiles were purged from the University of Michigan network, prompting the formation of a group dedicated to defending their fake friends, "Bring Back Fake Profiles!!"

(fig. 7). Users continue to create the fake profiles, showing a willingness on the part of the Facebook community to play with the rules established by the Facebook administrators.

However, the most significant form of regula- tion is the self-policing of the users themselves. Goffman notes that perfor- mances of self involve ideal- ization—which may prompt the user to self-police so that he or she lives up to these ideals. That is to say, "When the individual presents himself before others, his performance will tend to incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of the society, more so, in fact, than does his behavior as a whole" (1959:35). Goffman also observes the ways in which individuals will perform themselves according to prescribed roles:

> It is commonplace to say that different social groupings express in different ways such attributes as age, sex, territory, and class status, and that in each case these bare attributes are elaborated by means of a distinctive complex cultural configuration of proper ways of conduct- ing oneself. To *be* a given kind of person, then, is not merely to possess the required attributes, but also to sustain the standards of conduct and appearance that one's social grouping attaches thereto. (75)

It would follow that people perform their roles online in ways that are similar to the ways they perform their roles in face-to-face interaction, creating opportunities for users to demonstrate and police roles and perform the social values associated with those roles. In other words, Facebook is a forum for the policing and establishing of normative behavior, more than the imagined forum of deviant exhibitionism.

!!Fictional Characters are real to US!!

Information

Group Info
Type: Common Interest – Beliefs & Causes
Description: I know there are already a lot of "Save the FCs!" groups out there, but I figured: the more, the better, the more powerful our voice!!

We must all ban together to save the FCs!

*****Here are our supported groups. I highly recommend joining them!*****

Save the Fictional Characters! Global
http://facebook.com/group.php?gid=2204295451

Fictional Characters United
http://facebook.com/group.php?gid=2204616879

Facebook Deleted The Profile I Made For a Fictional Character
http://facebook.com/group.php?gid=2223928796

Facebook is killing my friends!
http://facebook.com/group.php?gid=2204644977

The Militant Fictional Characters
http://facebook.com/group.php?gid=2205001418

Zuckerberg's Cronies Killed My Fake Profile, Goddamit!
http://facebook.com/group.php?gid=2210174455

My name was so much cooler before facebook forced me to change it.
http://facebook.com/group.php?gid=2228393354

Figure 6. The global group "Fictional Characters are Real to Us," protesting the Facebook policy of not allowing the performance of fictional identities.
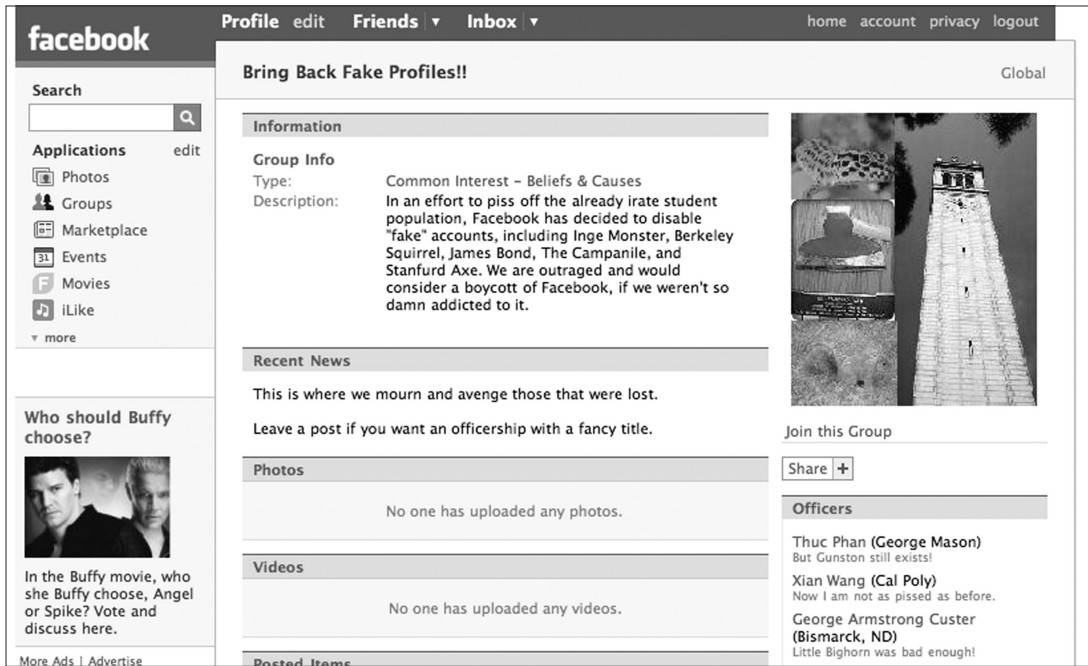
Figure 7. The global group "Bring Back Fake Profiles," protesting the Facebook policy of not allowing the performance of fictional identities.

The Panopticon is all the more effective not because individuals are surveyed and reported to an authority, but because individuals are punished directly by others. Surveillance comes not from Big Brother watching the internet, but from users affirming or denying the performances of self they encounter on the internet. It can be socially embarrassing to have a profile that announces "you only have 3 friends at Michigan" when being friended and having comments on your Wall are signs of the social acceptance of your performance. Too few friends signifies someone who has no social network outside of Facebook, someone who does not understand the purpose of Facebook, or someone who is generally not "with it." Too many friends signifies someone who is desperate, the so-called "Facebook whore." Even the Pew Report on "Generation Next" alludes to this policing:

> A large majority of young people (72%) feel that their fellow Gen Nexters post too much personal information on the internet. Just 19% say people around their age post the right amount of personal information, while 4% say young people post too little information about themselves online. (2007:14)

As a reminder that the boundaries of a normal performance are continually enforced, I was recently surprised by students who commented on the extent of my profile after I tried a few of the new outside applications available on the new platform. The News Feed controversy reveals this tendency toward the normative performance, showing where the group of Generation Y users feel uncomfortable when the level of public exposure becomes unpredictable or excessive. Social networking users demonstrate Foucault's internalized Panopticon, the point where individuals police their own behavior based on a set of naturalized ideas about what is correct, the place where the panoptic gaze operates within the narrowest range possible.

This internalization does not, however, approximate a tacit agreement to always act as the object of surveillance. Justin Berton mused over this paradox in the *San Francisco Chronicle* when he interviewed people about what seems to be the willingness of Generation Y-ers to reveal

personal information on the internet, despite recent findings that suggest that a majority of adults under 30 dislike the idea of government eavesdropping as much as, if not more than, anyone else.[11] As Nadir Vissanjy, one young man Berton interviewed, notes:

> Our generation is open with things such as MySpace and Facebook and these other networks, so it seems like they're OK with the public knowing what you're doing, but there are some things that the government should not intrude on, such as private calls, text messaging, and e-mails. (2006:A1)

Interviewee Kristopher Tate echoed Vissanjy: "The realization that people can find you online isn't that threatening to this generation. But there's a difference between giving up information like what's on MySpace and the government listening to a phone conversation" (in Berton 2006:A1). The people of Generation Y have a limit and the News Feed controversy suggests that they respond when the line has been crossed.

To some degree, the people of Generation Y trust technology, believing they can direct their performances to their chosen audience. Users revealed this attitude during the protest over Facebook News Feed. The controversy also showed that they care about what is happening around them, and that they will mobilize to address the issues that matter to them. They are, contrary to how they appear on the surface, deeply engaged and motivated.

While voting rates among people age 18 to 24 are historically much lower than those of older groups, the U.S. census reports that from the 2000 to the 2004 election, this younger bracket had the largest increase in voting of any age group. Eleven percent more 18 to 24 year olds voted, while there was no increase for those between 55 and 74 years of age (Holder 2006:2). This indicates that as they mature, Y-ers may surpass earlier generations in political involvement.

There are other signs that Generation Y's political participation will continue to grow. Not only do Generation Y people discuss politics more than any group of incoming freshman in the last 40 years according to UCLA's American Freshman Survey (Pryor et al. 2006:3), but they seek to make social change through volunteerism (Harvard 2006:7). Strauss and Howe observe:

> A new Millennial service ethic is emerging, built around notions of collegial (rather than individual) action, support for (rather than resistance against) civic institutions, and the tangible doing of good deeds. Surveys show that five of every six Millenials believe their generation has the greatest duty to improve the environment—and that, far more than older people, Millennials would impose extra civic duties on themselves, including taxes, to achieve results. (2000:216)

However, Y-ers political involvement seems muted when it comes to public protest. Research suggests that the people of Generation Y, while decidedly more liberal than earlier generations,[12] prefer negotiation and compromise over confrontation when dealing with political issues (Pew 2007:31). They believe working through the established political process to be an effective way of solving problems (Harvard 2006:10, 13). As Strauss and Howe note in *Millennials Rising*:

> More than half of Millennial teens say the federal government can be trusted to do what is right "most" or "all of the time" (versus only a third of adults), and two-thirds believe that public officials usually tell the truth. (2000:230)

In general, Y-ers trust the institutions of government, are optimistic about the role the government can have in their lives, and believe their participation in it can effect change.

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11. The article cites a January 2006 Pew Report: "Democrats Hold Huge Issue Advantage: Americans Taking Abramoff, Alito and Domestic Spying in Stride" (Pew 2006).

12. See both the Pew Report on "Generation Next" (Pew 2007) and the Harvard Survey on Generation Y responses to the War in Iraq, racial issues, immigration, and sexuality (Harvard 2006).

Unlike older people, Generation Y-ers may not understand the purpose of public protest and are not likely to march in the streets to voice their views. But they have demonstrated that they do care, and they have demonstrated that they will take action on issues that matter to them. Some of the largest Facebook groups, including "Abolish the Patriot Act Now!" with over 30,000 members,[13] are devoted to educating each other and taking action on political issues. They also have ways of networking around issues that are not immediately visible to people who aren't part of their online social network. Indeed MoveOn.org's pioneering work with email and blogs has taught the new generation of political analysts that they can't ignore these networks. That political campaigns are launching applications in Facebook's new platform reveals that political professionals are adapting to the habits of a new generation of voters who are a deeply responsive population.

That the people of Generation Y are choosing social cohesion over privacy challenges outmoded notions of individual freedom versus state intrusion. To some degree, both "private" and "public" are revealed as social constructs that shift and change over time. Generation Y Facebook users perform themselves and offer themselves up for surveillance for their chosen audiences, opening new stages for the operation of and the resistance to hegemonic power. And while it is normative, it has subversive potential as well. The profiles are in continuous transition as the people of Generation Y perform and acknowledge their multiple selves. Indeed, one of the "rules" circulating as "Facebook etiquette" is that your profile, and your profile picture, must change regularly. The profile "status," a general announcement through which users inform other users as to their present state of mind or current activity, disappears if the user doesn't update it after a specific period of time. Users continually play with the boundaries of identity through small gestures when they employ pictures of other people, create fictitious relationships, join and drop groups, and create and friend fake profiles. Many of the new applications allow for this exploration, allowing users to be "zombies," where they have a zombie character that battles other users' zombie characters. They can create artful "graffiti" on profile Walls, adopt Facebook pets, participate in a Facebook-wide "food fight" where you receive "money" to "buy" food and can then "throw it" at other users. They can also learn their "stripper name." Along with idealization, the users enjoy playfully destabilizing and adjusting their online performances. While Facebook operates as a forum for establishing social norms, the continual reinvention of Facebook by independent developers and users creates an opening through which Generation Y can push the boundaries of their online performances of self.

Epilogue

The internet continues to be a palimpsest of the older ways of communicating, even as it is also a way of signifying through new technologies. Old circus visual gags, such as seeing how many people you can fit in a phone booth or a Volkswagon beetle, are being replaced by how many people you can fit in a Facebook group. The information age is old enough that its own history is being woven into the fabric of Facebook by a generation raised with new ways of visualizing community with groups such as "The Oregon Trail, aka I Just Tried to Ford the River and My Fucking Oxen Died" and "All Your Base Are Belong to Us," echoing the popular internet meme from the 1989 arcade game, Zero Wing. The internet is indeed a stage for performing the self, with Generation Y inviting, albeit cautiously, a certain level of surveillance. But it is surveillance driven by desire, and in that way, maybe it is resistant in ways older generations cannot begin to imagine.

As I write, my sister, a high-ranking civilian who works for the military, emails: "I'm writing a paper on how 'blogging' can be used as an intelligence source. Could you please send me any references you used for your Facebook briefing, talk, paper? And, any of your finished products might help."

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13. "Abolish the Patriot Act Now!" (Facebook n.d.).

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