

Epilogue

*To end this book on hyperconnectivity, we would like to present a short story written by the futurist **Hernán Ortiz**, who visualizes the life in a hyperconnected future.*

The Lost Art of Taking Time Off

I found the best coffee in the world while flying to the city of Cartagena. It popped-up on page # 7 of the travel magazine tucked into the rear seat pocket. My taste piercing unveiled a rich flavor with medium acidity and notes of chocolate and ripe fruits. My olfactory piercing wafted out a nutty-caramel aroma. The ad managed to shoo me out of the discomfort of being sandwiched between two overweight executives, and just for one moment, I had a sense of inner peace.

When you get used to multisensory advertising (the coconut-scented beaches, the vanilla-smelling cars, the champagne-fragranced jewelery) you just want to leave them behind by turning pages until you reach the juicy content. Only skilfully designed advertising claims to have accomplished the amazing feat of capturing people's attention. With the certification of authentic in-person experience—the kind you could n't translate to a multisensory digital format—Café Castillo, located in the walled city, promised to be one of the remaining places in the world that are worth traveling to.

As part of my job in the multisensory marketing industry, I've grown skeptical of such statements. If it were not for my psychbot, who squared away everything related to my vacation (restricting access to my inbox and IMs, picking up the destination, booking the tickets and hotel), I wouldn't be so keen on visiting an in-person coffee shop. I would have allowed my budgetbot to turn on my own coffeemaker, but I doubt he would have shown up. My psychbot often blocks him out of the system, given priority to my happiness instead of wealth accumulation. Again and again, my psychbot has proven that her decisions are more sensible than mine. Increasing her monthly budget (which is why she was able to buy the tickets without consulting me) has had a noteworthy effect on my mood, something that can be verified by the decreased blood cortisol levels found in my medical record.

My psychbot also increased the frequency of the samples my gloves sensors send to analyze the chemicals in my sweat.

One of the best decisions taken by my psychbot was purchasing a clonebot, a simulation that smells like me, moves like me, and thinks almost like me, thanks to the computer modeling of my behavioral patterns. According to my psychbot, the relationship I had with my mother was directly related to my emotional issues. My mom expected at least five minutes of remote interaction. Five minutes. That might be the difference between having or not having a job. My mom did not understand the challenges of living in a hyperconnected 24/7 availability world.

Clonebot was programmed to establish a connection with my mom every other day, greet her with a warm hug, and listen to her monologue of health issues. The simulation, through generic conversation, made my mom think that she was talking with me when in reality she was talking to a digital copy of me. Clonebot simulated liking the food she cooked by telling her it was delicious in multiple, software-generated ways. He even asked sometimes for the 3D food printer recipe to pretend to have it for dinner. It was a win-win situation because after my psychbot talked with my mom's doctorbot she found out her cortisol levels were back to normal.

Finding sexual partners is one of the few activities I decided to invest my time on. I had refined the search algorithm of my wingbot to only find women who are as busy as me, with no emotional attachments and sexually liberated. The interface highlighted a woman sitting four rows ahead of me. I swirled my index finger to look at every angle of her 3D representation. She was definitely in the attractive range, calculated by my wingbot based on pupil dilation, heart rate variability, and breathing patterns. While I was checking her out, I accessed the options that were available only to users who matched her attractiveness settings, including personality traits and sensory information: body odor, skin texture, and kissing style. I took my Kissenger device out of my carry-on bag and selected the last option, by staring and blinking at it. Right next to me, one of the obese executives was kissing her lover good-bye, so I activated the "customize environment" option to conceal my fellow passengers and focused on my possible sexual partner. The seats looked empty, as if I were alone in the plane. I joined my lips with the Kissenger's silicone lips, but instead of the slow, sizzling kiss I was expecting from her, I felt her slurpy tongue flopping around my mouth like an out-of-water fish. I removed the Kissenger, stared at wingbot's exit button, and clicked with a blink. "Do you want to add this kissing style to the list of unwanted features?" asked my wingbot before shutting down. I clicked yes with a blink.

Disappointed, I looked down to the magazine on my lap. Once again, the marvelous flavor took over my tongue and nose. A Chemex coffeemaker popped-up the page, a visualization of the entire stock of the origin that was being advertised, its content accurately decreasing every time someone took a sip from their cup at the coffee shop. You could see their profile images submerged in the black liquid like stubborn bubbles, and if you stare at them, you could read their reviews on social networks. I didn't want to be biased by their opinions, so I just stared at the ad's sharing button, clicked with a blink and sent it to my co-workers, who were

finishing their daily stand-up meeting. I wanted to see their reaction, so I decided to join the call and entered the conference room.

“Aren’t you on vacation?” my boss said.

“Yes, I’m going offline soon, just wanted to share this with you really quick.” At the center of the table, the Café Castillo ad popped-up. My co-workers smelled and tasted the coffee and gave themselves time to process the experience.

“It’s a masterpiece!” my boss said, mesmerized by the Chemex coffeemaker, the real-time visualization, the bubble-clients. “I’ve never experienced such an engaging advertising.”

“Me neither. I’ll go in person to understand how they managed to simulate the flavor,” I said, right before my psychbot disconnected the call.

“You’ll go for a cup of coffee and that’s it,” my psychbot said, using her higher access level to intrude without my authorization. “You’re such a workaholic! It’s been six years since your last vacation.”

“Help me, then,” I said. “Teach me the lost art of taking time off.”

“That’s easy,” she said. “Just focus on anything other than marketing. Why don’t you feed Truffle?”

I had already automated the feeding process, but my psychbot set up a connection with the holoprojector to interact with my dog. When the connection was made, a bell alerted Truffle. She went running and wagging her tail until she placed her front paws on my holo’s chest. I felt the weight of her paws in my jacket and she found support in the holo’s magnetic interface. Through my gloves I felt the fur in her back while I petted her. After the excited greeting, Truffle sat down to wait for her food. I stared at the feeding option, clicked with a blink and the holoprojector’s hatch opened. A bowl of dog food was pushed out by the magnetic interface. Truffle ate the bowl clean before it was pulled back inside.

The magnetic interface tossed a ball, following the direction and strength I indicated with my gloves, and Truffle caught it, brought it back to my holo, and dropped it on the floor to play again. Our fetch game got interrupted by a high-priority landing notification sent by the plane. Before getting off, I stared at the coffee ad’s “directions” button and clicked with a blink.

A driverless cab waited for me at the airport to take me to the Movich hotel, located in the walled city. I dropped the bags and walked through narrow streets, following the blue line guiding me toward Café Castillo. I walked past striking colonial houses with flower-decorated balconies, many of them transformed into commercial properties. Given my unusual location, my touristbot came up with restaurant recommendations, touristic attractions and beach reviews by social media friends. ID tags all over Santo Domingo plaza helped me learn more about the place: the sixteenth century church at the center, the Fernando Botero statue Gertrudis (whose ass you’re supposed to touch for good luck, or so my boss said in a geonote), and the long-awaited Café Castillo.

The outdoor seating option reminded me of famous European cafés. While waiting in line, I made my order through the interface, paid with bitcoins and a barista looked over my head to read the order. I imagine she was looking at a 3D Chemex animation with a huge number on top indicating how many cups I

requested. The barista served the order on a cup that had been previously used by 35 people, none of them in my social network. The cup asked me if I wanted to check in. I stared at the yes option, clicked with a blink and sat outside. If my boss was still looking at the advertising, he may have noticed my disgusted face in one of the bubbles. He may have concluded that the experience did not match the one they promised me. It was just another company that had invested a large amount of money in a multisensory design that did not represent the reality of the product. While my taste piercing sweetened the burnt, ashy, sour notes, I thought we were living in a strange world where in-person experiences were surpassed by the digital. That gloomy realization brought me down to a daunting state that was interrupted by my psychbot.

“You’re thinking about marketing again,” she said. “Here’s what you have to do: inhale the salty Caribbean air, run into the ocean fully clothed, drink a cocktail in the pool. Have authentic experiences, things you only do on vacation.”

My psychbot was right, as always, but she had forgotten something on her list. I accessed the menu and killed active processes, one by one, including my clonebot.

I called my mom. When was the last time I heard her voice? I didn’t recognize that senile tremor. And her face... Jesus, why was her face so dry? Why did she have so many wrinkles?

I felt the flaccid arms of an old lady through my jacket, a stranger who had stopped smiling because she was unsure if I was really her son. I listened to her monologue about her health while sipping disguised coffee. She was brief this time: Her doctorbot gave her an estimate. She shared the taste and recipe of the soup she was cooking. I tried to make conversation about it, but the estimate was swirling around my head. I couldn’t stand to be there. I hugged her good-bye and tried to activate my clonebot, but I couldn’t. My psychbot had already removed it from the system.

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