3. THROUGH A GLASS DARKLY

Ever since the invention of the sandal, we humans have artificially mediated our experience of reality, usually with the goal of altering that experience for the better. Shoes, jackets, armor, and the like protect us from rough ground, cold weather, and swords. We have not been content with protection but have sought to experience things in better ways than nature allows. For example, glasses sharpen our vision, but reading glasses magnify what we're trying to see while sunglasses filter out harmful rays. Glasses are a sort of primitive wearable technology for enhancing our visual experience, but they have gradually evolved from being merely wearable to being unobtrusive (contact lenses) to being implantable (phakic intraocular lenses).

Numerous devices exist to enhance raw experience. Auto-tuning hardware or software corrects our pitches as we sing karaoke off-key. Night-vision goggles enhance our sight in dim lighting.

At the forefront of this technology seems to be Google Glass, a new wearable technlogy that Google introduces on its website (http://www.google.com/glass/start/what-it-does/) with the words, "Welcome to a world through Glass." Google Glass offers a voice-activated visual experience that allows wearers, inter alia, to take snapshots, share or record live video, see GPS overlays, message others, get answers to spoken questions, and perceive written translations of words spoken by the wearer. Google Glass promises to deliver a two-way visual adventure that blends the virtual and the real, but Google controls the virtual part of that experience.

A 1960s science fiction television series, "The Outer Limits," opened every episode with the following announcement: "There is nothing wrong with your television set. Do not attempt to adjust the picture. We are controlling transmission. If we wish to make it louder, we will bring up the volume. If we wish to make it softer, we will tune it to a whisper.… For the next hour, sit quietly and we will control all that you see and hear.… You are about to participate in a great adventure. You are about to experience the awe and mystery which reaches from the inner mind to—The Outer Limits."

In the not-too-distant future, technology that is now only wearable could become implantable, zooming us right up to the precipe of "the awe and mystery" of the outer limits. We may have implantable network-based devices such as lenses and cochlea which would mediate an enormous part of our experience by controlling "all that [we] see and hear." Colors could be enhanced or muted, loud noises dampened, pitches corrected, obscenities bleeped, foreign phrases translated, "subversive" messages censored, unwanted opinions muted, unknown faces identified, searched text highlighted, street names spelled out during walks, context-sensitive ads inserted into our waking moments, sexual encounters shared with friends on social networks, and casual conversations monitored by employers or the Department of Homeland Security.

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