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Paradise Found

*Possibility and fulfillment
in the age of the surrogate*

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Without question, the most socially and economically significant technological event of the last quarter-century has been the invention of the surrogate. As this paper will show, never before in human history has the consumer been offered a product capable of delivering such dramatic personal change. The ramifications of the surrogate's rapid assimilation into everyday living can be witnessed in virtually every facet of culture, particularly in the United States where in the twenty years since their introduction the portion of the adult population that either owns or has operated a surrogate has risen to an astounding 92%. With surrogate technology in a constant state of refinement, there is no evidence to suggest this trend will be reversed. The improvements and transformations enjoyed by the operating public are here to stay, which leaves us with the question: What, if anything, remains to be overcome?

The sweeping changes that surrogates have affected on the American cultural landscape are due largely to the technology's secondary benefits, i.e., those benefits made apparent only after surrogates reached the marketplace and not during the conceptual and design stages.¹ It is largely because of these secondary benefits, however, that surrogates have enjoyed such widespread popularity

with the consumer. While the list of secondary benefits is exhaustive—and perhaps better served in its entirety by a format larger than this paper—there are three areas in which surrogates have transformed American society with a scope so broad and an impact so profound as to be worthy of discussion in and of themselves.

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They are race and gender relations, law enforcement and crime, and individual and public health.

I. Race and Gender Relations

In the United States, debates over race and gender equality have never been far removed from the public forum. At best these debates act as peaceful intellectual vehicles for the nurturing of the egalitarianism that has long been a hallmark of the nation, often prompting much needed legal reform.² At worst they degrade to violent protest, giving rise to such militant factions as the Black Panthers and Ku Klux Klan or culminating in disruptive displays of public upheaval akin to the New York-Philadelphia riots of 2026. No matter the tactic or strategy, however, it is an unfortunate truth that the differences between races and genders have remained largely unresolved.

The use of surrogates across demographic groups has opened a new approach to confronting inequality. Offering operators a certain measure of anonymity, surrogates render actual race and gender irrelevant and instead shift all demographic classifications to the implied race and gender of the surrogate unit being operated. The result is a cross-cultural condition of ambiguity, through which operators can remove race and gender considerations from their social interactions. When taking into account this function of ambiguity, it is logical to conclude that the proliferation of the surrogate in contemporary American culture would abolish such separatist philosophies as prejudice and stereotyping. It is interesting to note, however, that in some regards surrogates have only served to reinforce these discriminatory policies, often with interesting results.

Perhaps the most illustrative example is the treatment of gender discrimination in employer hiring practices. Paradoxically, by embracing the principles of gender stereotyping, operators can use gender-other units to increase workplace diversity and gain access to jobs they might otherwise be excluded from. A recent study of airline industry employees conducted by Pembroke College showed that those employed as skycaps, ticketing agents, and in-flight stewards were 37% more likely to operate a surrogate whose gender was consistent with the traditionally held view of their job, even if doing so required the purchasing of a gender-other unit. This trend increased dramatically for pilots, revealing 98% of female pilots questioned to be operators of gender-other units. When gender-other operators were asked about their motives, 82% cited a belief

that gender-actual units posed an impediment to being hired.³

What this shows is the replacement of stereotyping as it has been generally understood with a new, perceived stereotyping. Employers can use the demographic ambiguity offered by surrogates to uphold the staffing expectations of their customer base by allowing preconceptions to be formed not as a function of actual gender, but assumed gender. This new brand of stereotyping provides job seekers with access to careers and professional fields they might otherwise be barred from, and at the same time allows companies to maintain the business environment with which their customers are most comfortable, thereby insulating them from the adverse effects of hiring outside the bounds of tradition. Most importantly, it ensures that an applicant's skills and capabilities are the only criterion upon which an employer's hiring decisions are made, achieving a level of equality in the workplace that past strategies such as quotas and affirmative action strived for, but never fully attained.

Efforts to circumvent demographic classifications need not be so secretive to achieve a desired effect. Case in point is the 2042 state congressional race of Albert Coe in Detroit, Michigan. Caucasian by descent, Coe operated an African-American surrogate throughout his campaign to seek election in a predominantly black congressional district. Unlike the airline industry example cited above where an assumed condition replaced the operator's true condition in the public eye, Coe's race was widely publicized throughout his campaign. Touting his choice of surrogate as an illustration of his willingness to represent the constituency according to its best interests, regardless of racial differences, Coe was able to relate to the voter in a manner that would not have been possible without a surrogate. Though opposing candidates made attempts to discredit Coe, resulting in some of the most bitterly negative campaign advertisements in recent memory, Coe won the seat and became the district's first Caucasian representative in over thirty years.⁴ Extrapolating this example further, it is not hard to envision the global impact of such a strategy in venues where racial divides often lessen the chances of productive interaction, foreign relations and international business being the two that come most immediately to mind.

II. Law Enforcement and Crime

Since their entry into American society began in the middle 2030s, surrogates have done more to reduce the crime rate and improve public safety than any other invention in this country's history. This can be credited to the fact that, while the focus of pre-surrogate legal reforms was to control crime through reactive measures such as stiffer penalties and mandatory sentencing, the post-surrogate world has become a more proactive one aimed at preventing crime rather than dealing with its aftermath. The most obvious change has been the movement from live-body to all-surrogate police forces, a practice first tested during the surrogate riots of 2039 and adopted in precincts across the nation after its success. This strategy has led to an increase in the number of law enforcement officers, while at the same time making the job of policing far less hazardous. It is more compelling, however, to consider the consequences of the surrogate presence during criminal situations, particularly in matters of violent crime. Such consideration leads to a new interpretation of perpetrator and victim.

While it is true that the majority of crimes are nonviolent—burglary, larceny, fraud—it is equally true that any discussion of crime and its control will culminate with a dialogue on violent crime, if for no other reason than it represents deviant behavior at its most brutal and devastating. It is fortunate, then, that it is with the second grouping that surrogates have achieved the most measurable results. Due to the unit/operator paradigm that substitutes the former for the latter in the natural world, crimes that once would have been considered violent are now being reclassified as little more than offenses against property.⁵ Assaults, armed robberies, violent acts of passion—all of these crimes and many more have had their physical effects negated by the absence of live victims at the scene. Just as significantly, the mental trauma often endured by victims in the aftermath of violent episodes, such as that suffered by women following a rape or sexual assault, is no longer a factor because an

operator can terminate their involvement in such events by removing the virtual reality device that links their mind to their unit's experience. Violence has been stripped of both its physical potency and its tragic legacy.

The substitution of the unit for the operator and the subsequent shift in classification from violent to property crime has had a domino effect, providing unanticipated solutions to some of the quandaries that have plagued the criminal justice system for decades. For example, overcrowding in the nation's penal institutions is virtually nonexistent today, due in large part to the fact that the majority of criminals are punished through courtroom litigation and monetary settlements. This reduction in prison populations has shifted the financial burden of punishment away from the state and federal governments that have historically shouldered it and toward the offender, who must produce compensation to injured parties for the damage they have caused. Unexpectedly, the possibility of costly litigation and a court-mandated property settlement is proving a better deterrent to crime than the threat of incarceration, as it seems would-be criminals deem financial hardship a worse penalty than imprisonment.

Just as great a deterrent to violent crime is the certainty of the eyewitness account. Experiencing the event, but not party to it, operators can offer investigators clues and testimony that would not be possible without the surrogate. The age-old criminal maxim "dead men tell no tales" has lost its veracity, as the unit/operator paradigm ensures that for every crime there will be at least one surviving witness. With the introduction of new technology that grants operators the

ability to record the data transmitted by their units, the reliability of eyewitness accounts will be strengthened, providing law enforcement with reenactments of crimes and images of perpetrators untainted by bias or memory. As research and development brings further advances, the task of apprehending

and prosecuting offenders will be made even easier, and perhaps, for the first time in history, crime truly will not pay.

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III. Individual and Public Health

For a thorough understanding of how deeply surrogate technology is changing the face of society one must look to the issues of individual and public health. Rather than detail the myriad of improvements surrogates have exacted on the American healthcare front, affecting everything from carpal tunnel syndrome to the common cold, it is instructive to focus on a single health issue, and then use the discussion as a model from which to draw conclusions about the technology's impact on the broader field.

By 2030, the tobacco industry boasted a consumer base larger than at any other time in its existence. Along with the record profits enjoyed by the industry's leading producers came an increase in the incidence of tobacco-related illnesses, placing measurable strain on a healthcare infrastructure struggling to cope with the legacy of addiction and abuse. Patients suffering from such ailments as emphysema, heart disease, and lung and throat cancers entered hospitals and medical offices at a rate faster than staff, research, and funding could offer treatment.

Regrettably, for many of those patients the die had already been cast, but for future generations there came a panacea. Surrogates provided a solution by rendering the problem irrelevant. Capable of delivering a distilled experience consisting solely of stimuli, surrogates transmit sensory data via the virtual reality link to the operator's brain where the appropriate response is elicited. Using the act of smoking as an example, as an operator's brain directs their unit to inhale tobacco smoke, the sensory input associated with the experience (taste, sight, and smell sensations, as well as momentary euphoria and satisfaction of the oral fixation) are returned to the operator's brain to be interpreted as stimuli. All other physiological effects (lung damage, constriction of the arteries, increased risk of applicable cancers) become inconsequential, as it is only the mind that experiences the act and not the body.

The results have been substantial. As statistics are beginning to show, while the past ten years have seen a steady climb in the number of smokers in America, the number of newly reported cases of smoking-related illnesses has declined. By stepping between the operator and the physical world, surrogates have broken the causal connection that exists between smoking and disease, allowing both big tobacco and healthcare to

benefit from the common ground afforded by the technology.⁶ Given the cumulative nature of these illnesses and their propensity to increase in severity and number over time, it can only be assumed that the trend will continue, and that with each new generation born into this culture of experience without consequence will come a greater disparity between the number of people who smoke and the number who suffer.

Having already considered the issue of smoking, drug and alcohol use and their adverse effects are the health crises one most immediately recognizes as affected, and it is true that surrogates have made these formerly hazardous activities safe for operators.⁷ The true breadth of the technology's impact on individual and public health becomes apparent, however, when the paradigm is applied across an even wider spectrum. Debilitating conditions such as arthritis, fibromyalgia, and muscular dystrophy have been curtailed in their effect, allowing the afflicted to live normal lives through surrogate bodies. Communicable diseases are particularly susceptible to the technology's influence, though we will not enjoy the greatest rewards until surrogates have saturated the international marketplace to the degree that they have domestically. While all of the health concerns discussed above are high-profile in nature, it would be remiss to ignore the more garden-variety accidents, ailments, and injuries suffered by millions every day, the reduction of which translates into an improved quality of life for all.

Notes

¹ Dr. Michael Kreider, a member of the original surrogate creative team, had this to say about the early days of design: "When we were in the labs developing the software and production standards, our goal was to provide the physically handicapped with a prosthetic means to overcome their disabilities. It wasn't until surrogates reached the public and we saw who was buying them and what they were being used for that we began to understand the wider range of possibilities and how restrictive our intentions had been." (Nathan Horowitz, "Interview With a Pioneer," *Popular Robotics*, February 2047, p. 62).

² The Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution and the Supreme Court decision in *Brown vs. Board of Education* are two examples of such reform.

³ It is important to note that employers, in accordance with the full disclosure laws that govern application processes, are aware of each applicant's true gender, but view the willingness to work in gender-other scenarios as a positive sign that the applicant prioritizes the employer's public image above their own.

⁴ For a complete account of Coe's landmark campaign see John Wharton's "Under the Skin: Politics and the Dawn of the Anyman."

⁵ This argument applies to crimes committed outside the home. As critics are quick to point out, surrogates have had a lesser effect on curbing the incidence of violent crime inside the home. Acts of domestic violence are no less devastating for their location, it is certain, but the impact of the technology on violent crimes committed outside the home is significant and merits its own discussion.

⁶ Indeed, the formerly antithetical aims of big tobacco and healthcare have now brought the industries together and resulted in several joint ventures, including an advertising campaign that admonishes would-be tobacco users to "Smoke responsibly: Operating surrogates = optimum health."

⁷ It is also worth noting that surrogates, for reasons discussed in Part II of this essay, have virtually eliminated tragedies such as DUI fatalities and drug-related murders, revealing the extent to which the application of the technology in a single area can impact seemingly unrelated fields