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"I doubt I would be here if it weren't for social media, to be honest with you."
— Donald J. Trump (October 22, 2017)

Without question, social media has the world in thrall. The following numbers (drawn from statista.com) are of course only approximate, but as of this writing, roughly 2.4 billion people, including 2/3 of US adults, log on to Facebook each month; 1.1 billion people use Instagram; Twitter has 330 million active users; social media sites command 77% of mobile traffic in the US; people watch more than 1 billion hours of YouTube videos each day, etc. Even without Reddit, not to mention Tencent's WeChat and Weibo, such calculations are always startling. Clearly people are spending an inordinate amount of time posting, liking, commenting, sharing, viewing, scrolling, and trolling — and not without consequence. Cognition, productivity, emotional and physical health, and interpersonal relationships have all been said, anecdotally and empirically, to have been negatively affected by social media use. This then is the way we live now, in 2019: with bad habits and bad feelings. But it gets worse, for these platforms to which we give our time, our data, and ourselves turn out to be only indirectly about us as individual subjects, in spite of their manifest insistence on self-expression, self-curation, and self-presentation. Profiles, as it turns out, facilitate population management. Our data traces or life patterns — what we do, where we go, whom we contact — make us available for new techniques of sorting, targeting, and sentiment mobilization. After the Rohingya massacre, the live streaming of mass murders, Brexit, and the 2016 election, surely we all know, as Trump himself does, that social media is the means by which disinformation is spread and toxicity amplified. It is the means by which autocratic governments detect incipient affects, identify dissidents, and contain protest. Social media, in other words, is ground zero for information warfare. How many more studies, how many more accounts of malfeasance, addiction, and abuse, how many more exposés will be needed before a consensus forms around the idea that something must be done? And, if we were to agree that the status quo can no longer be tolerated, what is the appropriate scale for action: the individual or the population?

Jaron Lanier has an answer: we, his readers, should delete our social media accounts. The immediacy suggested by his title — we are enjoined to do so "right now" — is not so pressing, however, that it keeps him from modifying that injunction by the end of the book. But first he makes his case with ten brief arguments that, in turn, admonish, entreat, and cajole us: we are addicts; we are assholes; we are converts; but we are not necessarily irredeemable. We have become dumb like dogs, he suggests at the outset, too servile and too vulnerable to "stealthy control." "C'mon people!" he argues; social media is humanity's "grand mistake" and the only way to counter it is by becoming cat, autonomous and resistant to training. The analogy is a bit strained, all the more so when it shifts to wolves, pack animals, and herd behavior, but the point is made: we may

be experimental "lab animals," but we are not (yet) lobotomized monkeys." In fact, he is careful to note that "forever" is not in the title, so once we follow the prescribed six-month detox — an exercise in "self-exploration," taking risks, and getting out of a rut — we will have attained the kind of self-knowledge that will allow us to re-introduce our accounts, mindfully. It should be noted that this is to be a detox, not a fast. Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Twitter have to go, and you will need an email provider that doesn't read and store your messages, as well as browser extensions to block comments, but, as long as you are not logged in, you can still watch YouTube videos, and you can get your news online if you do so directly, without a personalized feed. Your goal: "be a cat." The answer then to all the problems with social media Lanier outlines in the book, among them the undermining of truth, the destruction of our empathetic imagination, and the exacerbation of political crises? In sum, a life hack for everyone. Green juice, but not starvation.

Herein lies the crucial distinction on which Lanier's argument is founded: the Internet, he self-reflexively argues from his position within the belly of the beast, as a so-termed tech insider, is "not the problem." Thus, we are advised, "Don't reject the internet; embrace it!" Or, again, the "overall project of the internet is not at fault. We can still enjoy the core of it." The good core, Lanier stipulates, has been contaminated by bad social media, more specifically by BUMMER companies, his somewhat-unfortunate acronym for what he elsewhere more clearly describes as a "shit

> *Lanier is writing in the wake of a number of important studies grappling with what is variously termed big tech, the big 5, the IT industry, or "antisocial media."*

machine." BUMMER ("Behavior of Users Modified, and Made into an Empire for Rent"), Lanier's shorthand for a business plan that seeks profit in the exploitation and manipulation of user behavior, is thus his true target. To help us to understand the line he is drawing between Facebook and Google on the one hand and Microsoft, Apple, Amazon, and, yes, LinkedIn on the other, he has devised an alphabetic mnemonic for the six components of BUMMER: A, for "Attention Acquisition leading to Asshole supremacy"; B, for "Butting into everyone's lives"; C, for "Cramming content down people's throats"; D, for "Directing people's behaviors in the sneakiest way possible"; E, for "Earning money from letting the worst assholes secretly screw with everyone else"; "F, for "Fake mobs and Faker society." In case you are thinking that this seems to be a fairly accurate description of Amazon's business practices, Lanier would counter that the difference, while admittedly debatable, is in part scalar and in part substantive. And if you are thinking that this seems insufficient and imprecise, you are not alone. Still, he does posit an intuitive litmus test for a BUMMER company that brings into sharp relief the significance of the alphabetic formula: if the platform attracts and supports Russian trolls, yes. Put another way, if you are communicating on the same platform as "Deplorable Lucy," you should delete your account.

It is not shall we say optimal to live in a world in which the US President exploits social media to command our attention, act like an asshole, cram incendiary content down our throats, and reward fake mobs. He is not of course wrong when
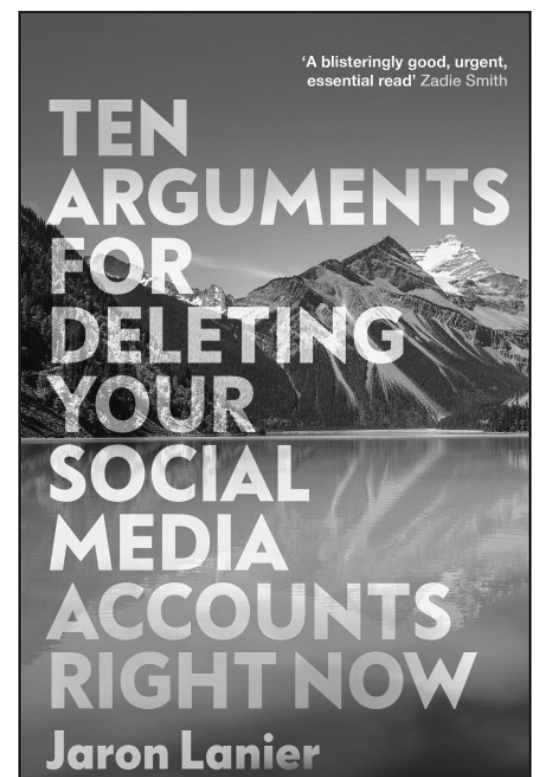
he says, "If I put it out on social media, it's like an explosion" (July 11, 2019). How though to contain the fallout or, why not, try to defuse the situation altogether? Threat assessment is the necessary first step, and in this regard Lanier is writing alongside, and in the wake of, a number of important studies grappling with what is variously termed big tech, the big 5, the IT industry, or even, as for Siva Vaidhyanathan, "antisocial media." Lanier's contribution to this discourse is synthesis, in broad terms knitting together critiques of surveillance capitalism, the attention economy, filter bubbles, tribalism, and epistemic closure, and then casting the problem in spiritual terms, as a crisis of the soul. He is by no means the first to recommend quitting social media as a solution, nor will he be the last. (Long before #deletefacebook, activists organized Quit Facebook Day and 99 Days of Freedom, and a number of media artists either performed social media "suicides" themselves or built tools to facilitate the process for others.) Whether or not such resolutely personal campaigns are adequate to the situation, however, is another matter entirely. There is clearly still an audience, and a need, for self-help books that will help disabuse people of the notion that social media is an unqualified good. But what ultimately is the role of the boycott manifesto in the BUMMER media ecology? It is 2019, and the US is looking down the barrel of another hijacked election — if now is not the time to consider how best to take meaningful action on a meso- or even macro-scale, what would it take to get us there? Still, the ill-informed Congressional and Senate committee hearings on social media, not to mention the White House's social-media summit, which granted priority to alt-right meme warriors — indeed, some of the worst practitioners of "asshole amplification technology" — do not exactly inspire confidence in policy solutions. Perhaps Lanier is not wrong to put the problem on our doorsteps. If we don't walk away, it seems, the BUMMER project will live on, unchecked. Deleting our accounts may be the least we can do.

Rita Raley researches and teaches in the Department of English at UC Santa Barbara. Her work is situated at the intersection of digital media and humanist inquiry, with a particular emphasis on language, literature, politics, and art practices. She has taught at the University of Minnesota, Rice University, and New York University, and she currently co-edits the "Electronic Mediations" book series for the University of Minnesota Press.