

Lessard vs. the Metaverse: Review of Instrument for Distributed Empathy Monetization by William Lessard

written by Guest Contributor | November 16, 2021



Instrument for Distributed Empathy Monetization by William Lessard
[Kernpunkt Press](#), forthcoming April 2022

As I read and reread *Instrument for Distributed Empathy Monetization* by poet, experimental writer and editor William Lessard, the market capitalization of social media company Facebook sits at just over \$900 billion. This, we are told, is a demerit. The company had been worth well over \$1 trillion before allegations that it generates profits by preying on the insecurities of young users, particularly girls. Also alleged is that the Facebook platform spreads misinformation that harms public health and politics worldwide.

In the face of all this, Facebook's leadership has announced that the company will change its name. Facebook's founder says that the proposed name change has nothing to do with the company's suffering reputation but is instead an attempt to capture the company's role in something called then "metaverse," which would be, by definition, a universe apart from our own that comments on our shared, base reality. This will be accomplished through some sort of total immersion into a corporate virtual reality.

If this seems at all problematic, then *Instrument for Distributed Empathy Monetization* is the illustrated poem that you need in your life right now. The poem is structured as an interactive corporate presentation. In the executive summary we are told, "When the Company achieved personhood, it sought empathy to emulsify its being." While Mitt Romney, running for President of the United States in 2012, made the case for corporate personhood in plain language, the idea of the profit-making enterprise as an extension of human will is as old as capitalism. It's only now, as we have achieved vast powers to warp reality, that the corporation as person has slipped from metaphor to fact.

If corporations are people, or at least consider themselves people, then they will crave relationships, as Lessard aptly described in the corporate yearning to achieve empathy. The presentation then proceeds to describe a facemask/headgear apparatus, designed for durability and the comfort for a human user.

It's not entirely clear who we are, as consumers of this marketing deck. We might be potential customers, or we might be investors. We might not even have a choice about our participation. Page six instructs us repeatedly, "Worry about them as much as they worry about you." Then we learn about the development of human feeling and character. Is this the mission of the device, or its subject of study? "to be watched is to be loved," we are assured, which is a sentiment we have built an entire global economy around.

Perhaps we are the subject of the company's study as the presentation tells us, "The Company performs personhood alongside other portfolio assets, alignments, atonements." Maybe we should resist the urge to be precious about what personhood means in our contemporary context. Is it anything more or less valuable than efficiency, service or profitability?

There is, throughout the presentation, a sense of writing by artificial intelligence. We are asked, for example, "How should we ask the bee to live inside the pill?" But this is no mere nonsense verse. The author of the presentation is clearly striving for something. Everyone adept in the analysis of corporate communications knows to pay particular attention to footnotes, where secrets are often hidden. The first footnote in this document tells us, "The Company is unaware. When asked to describe a person, they retrieve a fist of sentences from the tongue." This babble seems an admission that the company has run up against some limits of understanding the human mind. The proposed device might help it bridge its knowledge gap, through monitoring of our mind and body and through our responses to its questions.

Near the end of the presentation, we are asked to answer open-ended questions, in essay form. It starts with "Please describe experiences you have had problems with." But then quickly devolves into further nonsense queries. A sample response is meant to guide us in our work.

Like any good corporate presentation, *Instrument for Distributed Empathy Monetization* can be consumed quickly, but it also a document that can be left behind, to be perused again by people deciding what they should do with it? Should we wear the device? Should we invest in the company? Should we answer its questions or refuse?

Our decisions matter. Lessard has presented us with a corporation that desires humanity, though its purpose is not like Pinocchio's – there is no yearning to be human based on anything special about humanity. The purpose is monetization. Having achieved all that's possible through persuasive advertising and its attempts to influence our understanding of reality, the next step for the corporation is for it to become one of us. Or, maybe, to persuade us to become more like the corporation.

This is a poem for our times. Modernism and Post-modernism have faded.
Welcome to the age of monetization. Whether you read this poem in our base
reality or in the metaverse is, hopefully, purely up to you.

Michael Maiello is an author, playwright and essayist. His work has appeared
in McSweeney's, The New Yorker, Rolling Stone, Esquire and other spots. He
just started a free Substack newsletter called Middle Brow
Musings: <https://middlebrowmusings.substack.com/p/why-middlebrow>