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# Institutions and Interpellations of the Subject, the Doubled and Spaced Self

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*L'âme est un instrument sur lequel on peut faire entendre indéfiniment des airs nouveaux, mais qui redit de lui-même et chante toujours en sourdine et sans confusion ceux qu'il a joués autrefois. C'est un cahier des feuilles phonographiques.*

Joseph Delboeuf, *Le sommeil et les rêves* (1885)

*To those who are still claiming that telecommunications are the latest form of colonization, I would like to suggest that the colonizers are always the first victims of the colonizing technology, usually because they remain resolutely unaware of the psychological impact of the technology they are using to colonize.*

Derrick de Kerckhove, *The Skin of Culture* (1995)

This essay develops the idea of the subject as a model of remediated<sup>a</sup> subjectivity. It will discuss some theoretical and institutional contexts of the subject, and then will consider digital manifestations of the subject with reference to how popular digital applications *interpellate* the user (see Althusser 1971)—that is, how they impose specific ideological and institutional conditions and limitations on applications and on users' possibilities for self-representation. This work is an attempt to think digital identity and agency in the context of postcoloniality, as a complement to the more prevalent approach to mediated identity in terms of postmodernity. This work thus builds my larger research project of applying postcolonialist critique to popular culture, particularly that of Canada's majority white settler society.

At the outset, I want to note the resonance of the keyword of this collection to which an early version of this chapter contributed: the word *nexus*. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “nexus” as the state of being connected or linked, with related meanings as network, as node, and as link. A word with such closely related but wide-reaching structural and relational meanings has found widespread uses in popular culture, some of which are noteworthy here. Nexus is the brand name for a line of Cisco data systems; the brand name for a Canada-U.S. border crossing program; and the brand name for a line of Google mobile devices that run the Android operating system. This last example of Nexus as brand is a science-fiction joke: in the canonical film *Blade Runner*, “Nexus 6” is the brand name of a line of corporate-manufactured androids, several of whom are the plot's antagonists. “Nexus 6. [...] Incept date 2016. Combat model. Optimum self-sufficiency. [...] The standard item for military clubs in the outer colonies. They were designed to copy human beings in every way except their emotions” (1982). These androids, or replicants, are distinguishable from humans through biometric indicators of empathy only detectable by a specialized test—they are at once *doppelgängers* and simulacra, superficially identical to humans, defined by their inability to relate.

These connotations—of science-fiction impostors, mobile technology, and border crossing; of doubles, devices, and jurisdictions—converge, a nexus unto themselves, in the specific site of encounter between customs official and traveler. The “impostor” or *doppelgänger* dimension here involves the popular sense

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a “Remediation” is Bolter and Grusin's (1999) term for the double movement whereby new and old media each strive for both self-effacing immediacy and “hypermediation,” a self-reflexive signalling of mediation.

of Canadians as virtually indistinguishable from Americans, a sense that is both widespread and conducive to subversive expressions of national difference (see McCutcheon, 2009a). In a 2006 case concerning a U.S. customs office's search of a traveller's digital devices, U.S. district court judge Dean Pregeson issued a ruling that describes electronic storage devices (in McLuhanesque terms) as "an extension of our own memory . . . capable of storing our thoughts" (2006). This decision provided the impetus for the "border search exception," an expansion of U.S. customs officers' powers that was conferred in 2008, and that gave officers *carte blanche* authority to search the digital devices of any and every traveller entering the U.S.A., without warrant, in the name of national security. A real-world policy with dystopian implications, the border search exception has just been overturned; in March 2013, a U.S. federal appeals court ruled against the exception, writing that "a person's digital life ought not be hijacked simply by crossing a border" (quoted in Kravets, 2013). A legal expert commentator notes how the ruling pivots on "the idea that you can hold your entire life in your laptop" (Price quoted in Kravets, 2013).

Extending minds, storing memories, holding lives in laptops: comments like these conjure the lived experience of subjectivity under neoliberal global capitalism as a redistribution of identity, a cathexis of prostheses, a certain kind of cyborg subjectivity between performance and recording, an experience that will be explored here under the name of the *dubject*. In prior articles (2009a, 2011, 2012, 2014), I have begun to formulate a theory of the *dubject*, where I posit it as

a self committed to its own recording; a subject translated from the site of the individual body to the mediated spaces of representation; a self dubbed and doubled—a *doppelgänger* self whose "live," corporeal presence becomes radically supplemented . . . by its different and distributed embodiments in recordings and representations. . . . In some cases, the trajectory of this displacement becomes a strategy of survival, a tactical retreat: from the real into simulation, from the flesh into the word.

(2012: 236–37)

So the *dubject* is an attempt to name the kind of experience George Siemens (2013) has described as "seeing bits and pieces of yourself all over the Internet"; however, this *dubject* theory also encompasses other media. My initial work on this has situated the *dubject* not only in its postmodern contexts but also in post-colonial contexts. These contexts include the "black electronic" (Davis, 2004) practices of dub and other sonic fictions (Eshun, 1998), and, more specifically,

contexts of cultural and media imperialism, which position the subject as a victim or fugitive, echoing Marshall McLuhan's ideas of electronic subjectivity as colonized victimhood: "The violence that all electric media inflict on their users is that they are instantly invaded and deprived of their physical bodies and are merged in a network of extensions of their own nervous systems" (1996: 82). My initial work has identified Canadian popular culture as an illustrative site for theorizing the subject, with reference to its fictional dramatizations in works like David Cronenberg's *Videodrome*, its theoretical iterations in writings by McLuhan, and—more strangely, perhaps, but more to the point—its historical manifestations by cultural practitioners such as Glenn Gould. In Cronenberg's *Videodrome*, the character Brian O'Blivion—a parody of McLuhan—exists only, and uncannily, on television, like Max Headroom. Gould famously forsook live performance for the recording studio; his recording of Bach now approaches interstellar space aboard Voyager 2.<sup>1</sup> On the basis of these contexts and practices, I have argued that "articulating Canada's political economy of compromised sovereignty and its history of colonization by various cultural and media empires, the incarnations and iterations of subjectivity position the individual citizen as a commodity produced by competing intellectual property claims, the consumer of media as what media themselves consume, the organic self reorganized and reproduced by its technological others" (2011: 261).

But I have realized that positing the subject as a victim of or fugitive from cultural and media imperialism means misrepresenting Canadian colonialism, by positioning white settler majority persons and productions among the *colonized*, when they more accurately represent the *colonizer*, in the political economy of Canada, as an immigration-based resource extraction colony, established through a systemic segregation and dispossession of Canada's First Nations that provided the model for South African apartheid. Canadian popular culture is dominated by the neo-imperialism of mainly U.S.-imported cultural productions and technologies, but Canadian political economy is characterized by its own neo-imperial projects of capital (see Kellogg, 2013). So the Canadian nation-state *does* provide an exemplary postcolonial context for theorizing the subject—but this is because Canada represents *both* a target of cultural and media imperialism *and* a rapacious agent of neo-imperialist capital. In the context of media imperialism, the immigrant and largely European-derived settler population of Canada occupies the position of the colonized with respect to the neo-imperial cultural industries of the U.S.A. and the U.K. But in the context of Canada's historical formation as an invading colonial arm of European state-based imperialism, a formation

that continues to structure its relationship to Canada's indigenous peoples in a manner analogous to apartheid, we must of course recognize the massive inequality that remains between the relatively privileged population colonized by media imperialism and the hugely disadvantaged population colonized by settler-invader imperialism.

As I have specified elsewhere (2012), while the focus on Canadian sites and practices of cultural production, scholarship, and social reproduction first gave rise to theorizing the dsubject, that focus does not imply that *only* Canadian sites and practices can or should be theorized as sites and practices of the dsubject; rather, these sites and practices “signal some potentially wider—and weirder—implications for everyday life in the overdeveloped, technologically overdriven, and hypermediated Western world today” (2012: 238). Accordingly, what follows will sustain a focus on Canadian sites and practices, but will also broaden in scope to consider related sites and practices across the Anglophone overdeveloped world. After all, the neo-imperial incursions, annexations, and exploitations of capitalism and its cultural industries today—including the companies and services discussed here—are not restricted to any specific nation-states, but rather take (and take for granted) the whole world as their market, their laboratory, and their labour pool.

If the dsubject represents the colonized under media imperialism, then, it also represents the colonizer, not only in Canada's postcolonial popular culture, but also in broader theoretical and institutional contexts of digital media as a neoliberal, private-public sphere that reproduces and naturalizes dominant forms of subjectivity—those of “imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” (hooks, 2000: 46). These reproductions and naturalizations of dominant identity formation become clear according to how, and by whom, and *for* whom digital identity and agency have been theorized.

If the remediation and redistribution of the self suggest a kind of survival, then to whom, specifically, is this kind of survival available? The examples I have discussed in prior work on the dsubject illustrate the predominance of imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchal normativity and thus a rather privileged demographic (notwithstanding the diverse and sometimes countercultural politics of their productions): Cronenberg's O'Blivion, and his real-world source, McLuhan; the eccentric virtuoso Gould, another icon of mainstream Canadian culture; and examples in Canadian fiction by white male writers William Gibson, Cory Doctorow, Peter Watts, and Tony Burgess. So examples of the dsubject I have found thus far constitute a parade of white, male, and relatively

affluent exemplars. In contrast, a great deal of the scholarship and theory on which my theorization of the dsubject draws has been produced by women and feminist scholars (and not specifically Canadian ones, either). As an attempt to theorize the doubling and spacing of subjectivity in media forms, as well as their possibilities for supplementing the somatically centred liberal-humanist subject with an uncanny “second life,” the dsubject relates to influential studies of digital identity, such as Turkle’s theory of the “second self” (1995), Haraway’s cyborg as a model of networked agency and resistance (1991), and N. Katherine Hayles’s posthumanism (1999), as well as to more recent work such as Angela Thomas’s work on virtual self-authorship (2007) and Emily Apter’s theory of the avatar as a coordinator of conflicted and competing psychic drives (2008). While the dsubject has commonalities with and conceptual debts to these prior theories of digital identity and “the subject in technics,” it differs more broadly from them in emphasizing not the postmodern conditions or poststructuralist models of late capitalist subjectivity (which it does recognize and build on), but, instead, its postcolonial contexts. To Anna Poletti and Julie Rak’s recent call for combining auto/biography studies and new media studies to examine digital identity (2014), I would add that a postcolonialist lens can help make intersectional sense of digital identity practices. In this light, the assemblage theory of Jasbir Puar becomes useful for historicizing the “epistemic violence” of hegemonic subject formations, and for deterritorializing identity as provisional agency, as “an encounter, an event, an accident.”

Apter and Haraway are worth some discussion here, since my theory of the remediated, doubled, and spaced subject is informed by subject theory: the corpus of poststructuralist theories of the subject, and, more specifically, theories of what Apter calls “the subject in technics” (2008). Poststructuralism develops and destabilizes the subject’s grounding in psychoanalysis and phenomenology, theorizing the subject not as primary and self-determining but as “secondary, constructed . . . volatile, standing in its own shadow, and self-divided” (Hawthorn, 1992: 181). What Apter calls the “subject in technics,” then, routes this theory through postmodern media theory. Avital Ronnell, for instance, argues that telephony reconfigures the modern liberal subject in more poststructuralist terms: “the call transfers you to the Other. . . . Telephonics imposes the recognition of a certain irreducible precedence of the Other with respect to the self” (1991: 82). The work of Friedrich Kittler (1986/1999) exemplifies “subject in technics” theory: he historicizes the subject as a “discourse network” structured by media technologies—which Kittler shows historically to be products

of warfare. For Kittler, modern subjectivity is a kind of simulation program, both sustained and subverted by recording media, and increasingly vestigial to a nascent, globalizing regime of cybernetic, artificial intelligence: “After the storage capacities for optics, acoustics, and writing had been separated, mechanized, and extensively utilized, the central nervous system was resurrected, but as a Golem made of Golems” (170). Building on work like Kittler’s, Apter then develops “subject in technics” theory by reading the digital self-imaging practice of creating an “avatar” as a remediated coordinator of the drives that comprise the subject—the avatar as a driver of the drives.

An influential source for the subject in technics is Haraway’s theory of the cyborg: a model of radically remediated and trenchantly feminist identity and agency under globalized capitalism. Unfortunately, the canonical status of Haraway’s cyborg in critical theory has subjected it to reductive misreadings, like that of the *Cyborgology* blog editors, two Maryland doctoral students, Nathan Jurgenson and P. J. Rey, who have leveraged theory such as Haraway’s and tools such as social media and print periodicals to advance their own model of digital subjectivity, which might be called the Augmented Reality argument. In a 2012 refereed article, *Cyborgology* co-editor Jurgenson claims that “the Facebook user is the paradigmatic example of the Harawaysian ‘cyborg’” (2012b: 86). Such a claim *seriously* misunderstands Haraway’s cyborg, which makes critical use of technologies and networks to mount a queer, feminist resistance to imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy—not a blithe complicity with it, as implied by Jurgenson’s reference to the billion-dollar advertising and surveillance business that is Facebook.

Jurgenson and Rey appropriate the term “augmented reality” (first coined around 1990) to critique what they see as a pervasive but flawed premise in writing and research on the digital mediascape, a premise they call “digital dualism”: a polarized representation of digital activity that pits “real life” against the internet (and tends to champion the former over the latter). Citing examples in recent work like Nicholas Carr’s *The Shallows* (2010) and Sherry Turkle’s *Alone Together* (2012), the *Cyborgology* editors are far from alone in criticizing the reductionism of arguments that new media, as new media, are rotting brains, destroying society, or hindering youth literacy. A shrewd and short riposte to such arguments is made by Kathleen Fitzpatrick: “media theorists, confronted with a narrative about the deleterious effects of new modes of communication, have long pointed to Plato . . . new technologies are perennially imagined to be not simply the enemy of established systems but in fact a direct threat to

the essence of what it is to be human. For this reason, declarations of cultural decline always bear complexly submerged ideological motivations” (2012: 42).

In contrast to Fitzpatrick’s view of the *longue durée*, the *Cyborgology* editors ground their argument much more specifically, both in more narrowly sociological theory and in more contemporary, twenty-first-century social media and mobile devices. Jurgenson writes:

Our reality is both technological and organic, both digital and physical, all at once. We are not crossing in and out of separate digital and physical realities, a la *The Matrix*, but instead live in one reality, one that is augmented by atoms and bits. And our selves are not separated across these two spheres as some dualistic “first” and “second” self, but is instead an augmented self. A *Haraway-like cyborg self comprised of a physical body as well as our digital Profile*, acting in constant dialogue. (2011: emphases added)

Interrogating the reductive division of digital and unmediated experience has critical value, but the augmented reality argument is both problematic in its premises and symptomatic of the aforementioned reproduction of the normative subjectivity of imperialist capitalist patriarchy.<sup>2</sup> First, aside from its misprisions of Haraway, this argument nowhere addresses psychoanalytic or poststructuralist subject theory, which is directly relevant to it. Second, the argument often reads like a generation-bound manifesto, too quick to dismiss the nuances of influential authorities’ insights on the subject. Most important, this argument ignores the neoliberal political economy of the read-write web as a communications platform produced and structured by neo-imperial capital to facilitate and accelerate profit maximization, market creation, and service privatization, as well as state surveillance for the governments that now act mostly as capitalism’s hired goons (Annesley, 2001; Hedges, 2012; Schneier, 2013; van Veen, 2011). The augmented reality argument’s neglect of digital political economy makes a claim like “Facebook is real life” (Jurgenson, 2012a) problematic, even disturbing, notwithstanding its use for challenging the ideological opposition between human and technology.

*Cyborgology* appears to be informed by Marc Prensky’s model of “digital natives” versus “digital immigrants”: formulated in 2001, Prensky’s model distinguishes between older Internet users who have to learn the Internet like a second language and younger users, those who became teenagers after 2000, who are in effect “born digital” and speak fluent Internet. One *Cyborgology* article cites



Prensky, whose influence is also seen in *Cyborgology's* "About" blurb: "We live in a cyborg society. Technology has infiltrated the most fundamental aspects of our lives: social organization, the body, even our self-concepts. This blog chronicles our new, augmented reality." The undefined but vaguely generation-bound "we," together with the blurb's focus on the "new," suggest Prensky's model as a premise for the augmented reality argument.

Prensky's "natives versus immigrants" model has itself been extensively critiqued, though not enough from postcolonial perspectives (see Bayne and Ross). One brilliant exception is Wayne Barry, who writes that "The whole lexicon of 'digital native', 'digital immigrant', 'digital savage', 'technological migrant', 'digital colonist', and 'digital refugee' is imperialistic in nature and racist by inclination."<sup>3</sup> Prensky's model privileges digital natives over immigrants, reproduces nationalist discourses of atavistic xenophobia, and appropriates the term "native" to describe Internet users who are predominantly *not* natives but settlers and their descendants, and who enjoy widespread broadband access. In contrast, approximately half of all First Nations households and schools have Internet access (Chiefs Assembly on Education 2012), and only 17 percent of First Nations communities have broadband (Canadian Council on Learning 2010).

An analysis of "Canada's digital divide" made in 2001 remains all too relevant: "Geographic or social isolation, high costs, and lack of infrastructure contribute to a 'digital divide' between First Nations peoples and other Canadians. Designed for profitable urban markets, digital networks and content that might address Native needs for education and information have not yet been fully extended to remote communities" (Bredin, 2001: 191). For Canada's native communities, the extreme poverty sustained by systemic federal underfunding (Fontaine, 2013) keeps more basic health and environmental needs more pressing: problems like cold, mould, overcrowding, and sewage fume exposure are not the exception but the norm in reservation schools—as are empty library shelves (Opikokew, 2013). These facts of postcolonial Canada make the "digital natives and immigrants" model as galling as the recent "upsettler" reaction to #IdleNoMore is plainly racist. The glaring omission of political economic critique in the augmented reality argument, in this context, becomes legible as a symptom of its basis in imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchal subjectivity. In step with what Derrida calls "white mythology" (1974: 5), the augmented reality argument universalizes and naturalizes this specific, privileged subjectivity as the ideological norm—the "average" user—not only in its proponents' own identity formations (white, male, and otherwise "WEIRD" in Henrich et al.'s 2009

formulation)<sup>b</sup> but also in its rhetoric, in the consistent and unexamined use of the plural first-person, the presumed, undefined, collective “we” who live real life online.

Hayles has satirized precisely this rhetoric in *How We Became Posthuman* (1999); explaining her book’s title, Hayles writes: “‘We,’ like ‘became,’ is meant ironically, positioning itself in opposition to the techno-ecstasies found in various magazines, such as *Mondo 2000*, which customarily speak of the transformation into the posthuman as if it were a universal human condition when in fact it affects only a small fraction of the world’s population” (6). This “we” that Hayles explicates recurs in the rhetoric of numerous digital commentators, the majority of whom represent a very “small fraction” of the population indeed. Hence the question: For whom does the dsubject offer its doublings and spacings of remediated selfhood?

We get a clearer sense of the dominant identity politics of the dsubject by considering what I might call “discourses on dsubjection”: statements and speculations on the transformation of the self through media, many of which are characterized as fantasies of “uploading consciousness” from human bodies to machines. The fantasy of “uploaded consciousness” recurs among a particular class of thinkers, who represent this fantasy according to two common and conjoined rhetorical moves: first, in the name of an ostensibly universal but ideologically specific collective, “we”—the species on whose behalf the imperialist white capitalist patriarchal subject entitles himself to speak—who will have become posthuman; and second, as an act or movement of disembodiment, a separation of digital from physical, mind from body, with all the violence of gender- and class-coded subordination it suggests. Recall, for instance, in William Gibson’s novel *Neuromancer* (1984), the starkly gender-coded contrast between the disembodied, cerebral transcendence of cyberspace and the “rotting darkness” of “meat” existence. As Amanda Fernbach writes of *Neuromancer* in 2000: “Like the fantasies played out in contemporary discourses about the internet and virtual reality, Gibson’s cyberspace allows for the disavowal of bodily differences in a fantasy that privileges the white male body. . . . The notion

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b “WEIRD” is Henrich et al.’s acronym for Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic, which of course most of the world isn’t; the WEIRD thesis challenges the global representativeness of claims for “human” psychology and society that many disciplines generalize on the basis of sampling Western, Anglophone postsecondary students.

that online personas transcend social and cultural hierarchies remains a utopian myth” (Fernbach, 2000: n.p.) Fernbach’s reflections still resonate today. The “democratizing rhetoric” that Fernbach notes includes the ideological language of universal inclusivity—ideological in its arrogation of species representativeness to a tiny, privileged fraction of the citizenry—and the similarly ideological imagery of dsubjectivity’s remediated embodiments in terms of disembodiment, the transcendence of corporeality.

McLuhan’s media theory exemplifies these rhetorical moves. In 1971, McLuhan alludes to both television and incipient computing in his statement that “what is very little understood about the electronic age is that it angelizes man, disembodies him. Turns him into software” (1996: 79). The gender category “man” here, together with the epochal imagery of the “electronic age,” serves to universalize the experience of remediation. McLuhan later elaborates on this idea of disembodied remediation in a 1978 article: “when you are ‘on the telephone’ or ‘on the air,’ you do not have a physical body. In these media, the sender is sent and is instantaneously present everywhere. The disembodied user extends to all those who are recipients of electric information” (1996: 80). Derrick de Kerckhove (McLuhan’s successor as the director of University of Toronto’s Centre for Culture and Technology) also uses this rhetoric to express ideas of doubling and spacing the self in telecommunications and virtual reality. “In the simulation and extensions of our nervous systems,” he writes, “we personally figure as nodal entities, travelling back and forth on electric current patterns” (1995: 186).<sup>4</sup> The author Douglas Coupland provides a sardonic version in his 2006 novel *JPod*: “Remember how, back in 1990, if you used a cellphone in public you looked like a total asshole? *We’re all* assholes now” (2006: 270, emphasis added). As seen in statements like these, the universalization and disembodiment of digital identity couple in a consummation devoutly to be wished—by a very specifically gender- and class-bound tradition of thinkers. Disembodiment is the ideological fantasy that structures the estranged embodiments of the dsubject; universalization is the ideological fantasy that authorizes its restriction to privileged agents of imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy.

We also see these rhetorical moves in read-write web services that invite users to generate content, and, in the process, solicit this arguable “self-commodification” —from a relatively privileged “target” demographic—as a relatively privileged and non-exploitative kind of commodification, as Andrew Feenberg discusses earlier in this volume (see also Hesmondhalgh, 2010). The commodification of the self—the transformation of subject to dsubject—is a valued object of

Terms Of Service (TOS) licensing because the users who generate content constitute a conspicuously privileged demographic: “The social demographics of UGC platform visitors bespeak an average user who is highly educated, well connected and well paid . . . UGC users—whether active creators or passive spectators—form an attractive demographic to advertisers” (van Dijck 2009, 47).

In this context, for all the symptomatic articulations of hegemonic, colonizer privilege in his projections of “electronic man,” McLuhan, like Toronto poet Christopher Dewdney with his premillennial speculations on “transhumanism” (1998), can at least be credited with gesturing to the political economic implications of this transformation’s corporate structuring. While television is his new medium of choice, McLuhan writes of new media’s public-private convergence and conflict was very suggestive for the Internet, in his statement that “we have leased our central nervous systems to various corporations” (1964/2003: 100). McLuhan tended to use “corporate” in its non-business sense as a synonym for “collective,” but a statement like this indicates a grasp of political economy otherwise muted in (or absent from) his work. Dewdney, for his part, pays more attention to the business contexts of the Internet. He tempers his extrapolations from virtual reality to virtually unrecognizable futures—in which “the term ‘identity’ may not even apply” (1998: 191)—with projections of a growing role for corporations. “If consciousness should, ultimately, prove to be uploadable,” he writes, “corporations will hold patents on the software that will embrace our minds” (1998: 178). Pursuing the corporate copyright implications further, he speculates on the “possib[ility] for recipient individuals to acquire copyrighted living simulations of a portion of a gifted individual’s brain, as licensed by the manufacturer”—but asks whether “becoming, even partially, a corporate cognitive product may be an identity threshold that humans will not wish to cross” (1998: 179). From McLuhan’s perspective to those of social media TOS agreements, this threshold may be one that “we”—a specific, privileged class of subjects—have already crossed.

A theory of the subject, as outlined here, might suggest that corporations already do hold such patents (and fight over them), and that the uploading of consciousness is not only what they trade on but what they actively structure, solicit, and stimulate—for profit-maximizing purposes, and also for meeting the surveillance demands of the state governments that under neoliberalism now serve more as clients and enablers of corporate interests than as stewards of public interest. If digitization is about replacing labour with capital, then what is the digitization of the self? Especially in private sites that only simulate public

space? The subject's digital redistributions of identity effectively disperse citizens across domestic and alien jurisdictions: Canadians using U.S.-based services such as Google, Facebook, Dropbox, and Twitter, for instance, store the content they upload to these services in U.S.-housed data centres, where they are vulnerable to Patriot Act search provisions. Enacting dubjection entails supplying work and product (content) for corporate and state powers; dubjecting one's self in the digital nexus, each click and keystroke generating data for unknown private interests to analyze, the user becomes a participant in his or her own oppression and exploitation—while also finding ways to leverage agency from these tools for opposition and praxis, as shown by Wikileaks and the organizing affordances of social media.

Between the back-end analytics and the front-end interface, the doubled and spaced digital self constitutes both colonizer and colonized according to how Internet services and platforms permit certain orders of discourse, produce certain kinds of subject positions. That is, the Internet *interpellates* the user, and then also dubjects the user, independently of the user's agency or awareness, as an abstracted, analytic commodity, a self made of metadata—a self made, for the most part, unconsciously. If the user doubles and spaces him- or herself across the digital nexus, he or she can do so only according to specific and sometimes subtle premises and priorities of imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy.

Social media such as Facebook and Twitter interpellate a privileged subject, the liberal humanist-turned-consumerist subject of the neoliberal capitalist system that has innovated and popularized the read-write web (Smith and Watson, 82). A growing body of scholarship critiques the social media user as commodity (van Dijck, 2009; McNeill, 2014). In a complementary analysis of the encoding of neoliberal ideology and privilege into contemporary consumer technologies, Alice Marwick argues they solicit users' participation as entrepreneurs, as marketers of the self as brand (see also Smith and Watson, 2014: 79), and in the process they entrench intersectional socioeconomic inequalities. (For instance, when's the last time you checked the "Stocks" app on your iPhone? Right . . . I never have either.)

Recent articles by Rob Cover and Aimée Morrison analyze how Facebook hails and coaxes users to post and share—that is, how it *interpellates* users. Cover analyzes the creation and maintenance of a user's profile: "the management of the profile . . . is an act of self-governance, which produces embodied selves and subjects through an interpellation that 'hails' one to choose the coordinates of

identityhood” (2014: 64). Cover also notes how Facebook constrains these coordinates: “the profile-provided categories on social networking sites offer a notion of freedom to ‘choose,’ which is endemic to neoliberal thinking . . . yet they risk for some users the violence of a normative truth-regime, which excludes alternative [ways of] doing subjectivity otherwise” (65–66). “Unrecognizable selves,” as Cover observes, “demand explanation” (59). Similarly, Morrison describes the interpellations of Facebook as “coaxed affordances”: “Facebook’s status update feature makes use of designed affordances and constraints, as well as emerging cultural convention, in order to coax life narratives from its users” (2014: 119). Consequently, Facebook’s “coaxed affordances” render “some kinds of statements impossible” (123), and thanks to more recently introduced features, they tend now to identify the user’s digital profile with the user “in real life”; as Morrison observes, the recently introduced “Timeline” format “increasingly conflates . . . a user’s entire social media history . . . with that user’s entire life” (127).

Twitter lends itself to the kind of close reading Cover and Morrison give Facebook. On first visit, Twitter “welcomes” you, it invites you to “start a conversation, explore your interests, and be in the know.” You are invited to sign up or sign in (and if you don’t unclick “remember me?” to stay signed in). If you botch the sign-in, you get this pop-up query: “We gotta check . . . are you human?” This might be interpellation’s most exemplary expression: the undefined but ostensibly corporate “we” — “we” who ask on behalf of Twitter—self-deprecatingly, colloquially, innocuously ask to “check” whether the user is “human.” Ironically, the “we” who asks is not human—it is a corporately directed and programmed subroutine—but this “we” still presumes, in the phrasing of its question, to coax a human response. On a user’s page, the “coaxing affordance” is a text-entry field showing a greyed-out invitation to “Compose new Tweet . . .” *Compose*: the exhortation is to write and to craft, to communicate economically. As I have tweeted elsewhere, the constraint of brevity imposed by the interface is a clue to Twitter’s neoliberal encoding: “Twitter’s textual economy normalizes for communication the neoliberal ideology that fiscal austerity is the only way to run a public service” (2009b). By this point, the implied subject of both the “we” and the “human” in Twitter’s “check” should be legible as the imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarch of the overdeveloped world. So should the implied subjectivity of “real identity” that is increasingly demanded by digital service firms.

As Cover says, social media interpellate users doubly, according to competing demands: “the Enlightenment demand that one articulate oneself as a rational,

coherent, and intelligible subject and a decentered and fragmented subjectivity, which fulfills the demand that we express identity in fleeting ways through forms of consumption” under late capitalism (2014: 61). Social media doubly interpellate users—that is, it dubs and versions them (as the sites constantly version themselves [Morrison, 2014: 120]); social media hails users to become dubjects. Morrison further observes that while social sites interpellate users as content creators, the site affordances enable not authorship but a kind of algorithmic “auto-assemblage . . . the result of ongoing selection and appropriation of content across several modes brought together into a constellation for the purpose of self-representation” (Whitlock and Poletti quoted in Morrison, 2014: 113). In this context, processes of dubjection entail the “uploading of selves” (McNeill, 2014: 160) not only as voluntary self-representations but also as involuntary sets of data and metadata, which we might call the technological id counterpart to the ego of the user-generated content.

Social media sites routinely demand “real identity” details of users to access and authenticate their accounts. This demand for “guarantors of authenticity” informs most sites’ interpellation strategies, and it relates “to the ideological formations of global capitalism” (Smith and Watson, 2014: 76–77), as a naturalization of “capitalist realism” (Fisher, 2009), of “white mythology” (Derrida, 1974), and of “the legal and capitalist structures that demand the fixity of the rights bearing subject” (Puar, 2011)—as well as a legitimization of ubiquitous digital surveillance. The growing corporate insistence that the user provide one’s “real” identity marks a dramatic reversal of the privacy and promise of the early open web. In the 1990s, the web garnered countless critical theorizations and popular celebrations for enabling a quintessentially postmodern playfulness and experimentation with digital identity. Mark Poster’s “Cyberdemocracy” (1995) makes a representative statement: “The salient characteristic of Internet community is the diminution of prevailing hierarchies of race, class, age, status and especially gender” (1995). Contrast this utopian expression of the possibilities of postmodern digital self-creation with the effects of the present Internet’s insistence on identification and verification: the horrific misogynist violence levelled against feminists like Anita Sarkeesian; the anguish and tragedy of online bullying and sexual harassment; the ugly unveiling of “upsetler” racism in reactions against #IdleNoMore; and an ever-tighter web of constant, ubiquitous surveillance, which digital security Bruce Schneier describes as a “surveillance state effective beyond Orwell’s wildest imaginings”—all made possible through users’ willing participation:

Everything we do now involves computers, and computers produce data as a natural by-product. Everything is now being saved and correlated, and many big-data companies make money by building up intimate profiles of our lives from a variety of sources. . . . Maintaining privacy on the Internet is nearly impossible. . . . Governments are happy to use the data corporations collect—occasionally demanding that they collect more and save it longer—to spy on us. And corporations are happy to buy data from governments. (Schneier, 2013)

Cognizant of the critiques of approaches to the Internet as a utopian space for postmodern self-fashioning—such as Nakamura’s critique of “identity tourism” (2014: 45)—I still like to think that tactics of defamiliarization offer critical resources for occupying a digital milieu whose demands for “real” identification serve neoliberal capital and the surveillance state. Like social media terms of service that demand authenticity, the terms regulating intellectual property (IP)—which apply both to the user’s own content and to third-party IP appropriated by the user—illustrate the tension between social media strategies of interpellation and user tactics of defamiliarization. Against these demands and terms, several feminist intellectuals, artists, and activists lead appropriations of both “realness” (Smith and Watson, 76) and IP, different practices of subjection that may point to “new ways to conceive of identity itself” (Poletti and Rak, 2014: 17). Exemplary cases of social media use that critique and subvert hegemonic subject formations of the neoliberal digital sphere—through intertextual appropriations—include the extensive YouTube work of Anita Sarkeesian to critique gender tropes in digital culture, and the self-proclaimed “pop culture piracy” of Elisa Kreisinger, whose remix work teaches and models fair use.

To take up the IP angle, and return to the example of Twitter, some “viral” Twitter accounts like @FeministHulk, @FeministTSwift, and @BrideOnAcid illustrate possibilities for critical digital *détournement*. One commonality among all three is how they exploit Twitter’s affordances for self-identification, which are much more free-form than Facebook’s presentation of profiles fixed to coordinates of age, gender, relationship, and location. Another commonality is how they deploy pseudonyms and distinctively styled voices to construct uncanny identities, at once immediately recognizable yet profoundly strange. FeministHulk and FeministTSwift both appropriate the “realness” of celebrity brand names. FeministHulk gender-bends a highly profitable and hyper-masculinist comic book character, and adopts a textual style—all caps and broken English—that both mimics the original character’s speech and puts



refreshingly progressive words in his mouth: “HULK UNWIND FROM LONG DAY OF SMASH. SIP TEA, WATCH OLD FEMINIST FREQUENCY VIDEOS, MAYBE MAKE CURRY WITH CSA SHARE. AH! BIG GREEN SELF-CARE.” FeministHulk has also propagated its own genre of Twitter parody accounts; FeministTSwift arguably counts among the FeministHulk’s belligerent and numerous progeny, taking not the Hulk label but the feminist flag to construct the user as a fan of Taylor Swift who then reconstructs herself as a feminist version of Taylor Swift: “Happy. Free. Confused. Oppressed by the patriarchy. At the same time.” FeministTSwift’s updates are almost entirely composed of lines from Taylor Swift songs, rewritten with feminist theory: “I don’t know about you / But I’m feeling 22 / cents underpaid on the dollar.”

Given the relentless lobbying and punitive litigation corporate copyright holders pursue in order to protect their content monopolies, not to mention the licensing fees they charge for song lyrics, FeministTSwift’s extensive use of Taylor Swift lyrics seems especially bold—it may constitute fair use, but user rights haven’t stopped copyright holders from pressuring users to pay for their use, or alleging trademark infringement; the same goes for FeministHulk’s use of Marvel’s lucrative comic book character (see Tushnet 2007 on fair use and gender critique).

BrideOnAcid, though, works differently, more in the style of what’s been called “Weird Twitter” (Schmidt, 2013). This account’s particular genius is to condense a narrative plot into the user name itself, implying that the feed represents a bride who has dropped acid on her wedding day. The feed is a very funny, feminist satire on weddings as a billion-dollar business and a heteronormative institution. “got my teeth whitened for the big day. kind of a waste since they all just crumbled away.” The premise of drug use provides a familiar device of alienation effects that makes everything about a wedding day powerfully strange—well, stranger than a wedding day already is. (Consider the unpredictable quality of conversations in your own activity feed by all the users you know from different circles. Ever feel like moderating comments in your feed is like moderating an open mic at a wedding reception?) BrideOnAcid appears no longer to be regularly updated, but this account’s now-archival character does not disqualify it from consideration as an exemplary subject. As Cover says, the archiving affordances of social media let users’ constructions of identity continue to signify in their absence or even death, and maybe even sustain subjectivity more robustly than offline performances. An all-too-familiar example of this, in Facebook, is the automated invitation to “friend” a user whom you know to be deceased. How is it that the recording can dictate?

It is important to note that, for all the *Verfremdungseffekte* such critical and appropriative Twitter subjects achieve at the level of content, their mode of production in occupying a corporate platform like Twitter ultimately provides free labour to feed the firm's appetite for analytics, and thus bolsters its bottom line, just as well as noncritical content does. However critical the front-end content, the back-end analytics can only create a metadata subject that is a fully compliant and unprotesting puppet of neoliberal capital. This contradiction between critical user-generated content and unconscious metadata production illustrates capitalism's resilient and robust ability to capitalize on critical resistance to its own forms and norms. That said, to acknowledge that the effectiveness of resisting the dominant interpellations of social media is more symbolic than material is not to discount the significance of the symbolic as such. Such defamiliarizing demonstrations as the aforementioned Twitter users model, for sizeable Internet audiences, how these platforms' interpellations may be answered not straightforwardly but against the grain, not in the affirmative but in the interrogative. Such demonstrations critique the ideological foundations and presumptions of Internet user identity.

More than just an imposition on privacy, the corporate demand for users' "real" identities curtails freedom of expression, and reinforces a pernicious ideology of authenticity, of "common sense," of "bottom-line" realism that forms an ideological kernel of both white mythology and neo-imperialist capital. In social media's interpellations, philosopher Tobias van Veen reads "the cryptofascism of corporate perception"—orders of discourse structured and limited by corporate social media: "the technics of perception in which uncitizens engage with the social network aligns desire with socially networked consumerism. Desire is directed toward a ceaseless flow of objects and data (either LIKED or absented in response)" (2011). Van Veen's point is that social networks erase the nation-state and thus cripple democratic participation in it: since, in social networks, the nation-state "does not exist as such—which is to say as a metric of consumer desire," then its virtual nonexistence enables its material dismantling by neo-imperial capital.

According to a postcolonial view of the persistence and transformation of historical empires in neo-imperial global capital, a more extensive inquiry into subject theory, a close reading of discourses on subjection, and a cursory reading of how Internet services interpellate their users, a fuller image of the subject develops: not just colonized but colonizer, embodying and enacting the contradictions and complicities of remediated everyday life under imperialist white supremacist

capitalist patriarchy. As a model of remediated and redistributed subjectivity, the subject already occupies an uncanny dimension between authenticity and simulation, autonomy and automation, presence and haunting, public and private, user and commodity, colonizer and colonized. The theory of the subject already posits a defamiliarization of the subject, its transmutation from corporeal performativity to the different embodiments of digital representations and occupations. Amid the demands for “real” user identification, and despite the encodings of neoliberal ideology in the affordances that interpellate the users who are also their products, Internet users remain capable of producing profound alienation effects—defamiliarizations of digital identity which remind us that subjectivity, as we knew it, was always a fiction anyway. Max Headroom lives: news reporters outsource the writing of articles to code robots, but keep their authorial bylines (Dingwall and Mattar, 2013). Facebook suggests people you may know, some of whom are deceased but maintain profiles (Walker, 2011). Data miners assemble and trade the latent *doppelgängers* of Internet users’ manifest *doppelgängers* for profit, for favours, for blackmail, for tax breaks. A stellar wind needles the groove of *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, stirring Gould’s fingers. The machine doesn’t stop; it is steered by the dead and living hands of the privileged and the entitled; it is fed by the ghosts of the dead and the living.

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#### NOTES

- 1 In my 2012 chapter, I wrote that Voyager 2 left the solar system in 1989, but that claim is imprecise: while Voyager 2 is now twice as far from the sun as Pluto, it has yet to exit the heliosphere, the outermost “bubble” of the solar system where the sun’s solar wind balances against the stellar winds of other stars (NASA 2012).
- 2 The augmented reality argument is also an interesting case of open review, more than peer review: the idea was no sooner blogged about than it caught on by dint of distribution power, given its authors skilled exploitation of both social and

major print media; what it needs—and what, to its credit, its proponents openly invite—is more rigorous peer review and debate.

- 3 As an alternative to Prensky's framework, David White and Alison Le Cornu (2011) have proposed a typology of "visitors" and "residents" that both dispenses with the racist and imperialist assumptions of "natives" and "immigrants" and also allows for a continuum of movement between these positions.
- 4 Not a postcolonialist scholar, de Kerckhove refers to analyses of media imperialism in the quotation I've used as an epigraph: while his claim that "the colonizers are always the first victims of the colonizing technology" is an egregious misrepresentation of colonialism to say the least, it can also be read, more generously, in the spirit of Freire (1970/2000), for whom the dialectic of oppressor and oppressed dehumanizes both, but vests agency in the latter to educate and so liberate both oppressed and oppressor alike (1970/2000, 54).

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