International Journal of Advanced Research,
Vol. 5 Issue. 3 pp. 28-30
ISSN 2278-7275

DIFFERENCE, DIALOGUE AND NEGOTIATION:
A STUDY OF IDENTITY AND SUBJECTIVITY IN SOCIAL NETWORKS

Muhammed Asif C.K[1]

ABSTRACT

In postmodern and poststructuralist discourses subject is theortized as alread-always decentered, fragmented and partial and identity as contingent and provisional. With our increased interaction with World Wide Web, Subjectivity and Identity assume more complex metamorphic forms.This paper seeks to explore a theoretical space for "internetted subjectivity" and "digital identity" and studies how digital identity and 'real' identity interact, intersect and invert each other. Social networks like Facebook, Twitter, Google + grow as potential metaphor for the permeanent partiality and inter[netted] subjectivity in our times. Here social networks serve as a site to enquire and interrogate these concepts.

Introduction

The enquiry to understand the texture of 'I' or self is as old as human beings consciousness itself. Various philosophical stands, religious interests, historical contexts etc have produced a spectrum of concepts on subject that inform and interrogate each other. Concepts of Subjectivity, Identity and Agency have been continually prepared and repaired over time. In classical and pre-modern societies individual subject and agency were rather detered; and there was a prompt to adhere to pre-ordained patterns of truth and social structures circulated in the society. Christianity also fostered skepticism to individual's mastery over fashioning themselves. With the Renaissance spirit and the precipitated optimism of Humanism in the potential of human beings to intend and initiate, which is encapsulated in the Cartesian Cogito (" I think therefore I am"), human agency was guaranteed in the modern period. But postmodern thoughts problematized and reformulated the modern and pre-modern notions of the subject. Subject is no longer held as autonomous or solid but as fragmented, incomplete and slippery and it is thoroughly politicized.

Posthuman condition and consequent thoughts liberated human subject from the inhibiting embrace of body and physicality in favour of the virtual, the abstract and the digital. The paper tries to analyse shifts in the conceptions of subject and body as a process necessitated by the posthuman condition rather than a project initiated by the 'theory'.

Identity and Subjectivity in Social Networks

The digital and information technology is eager to translate cells to digits and body to information. Materiality is no longer held as a precondition for existence. Katherine Hayles puts

[1] Research Scholar, Department of English, University of Calicut

"... [T]he posthuman view privileges informational pattern over material instantiation, so that embodiment in a biological substrate is seen as an accident of history rather than an inevitability of life." (Hayles, 1999, p. 3)

We find ourselves in a world of metaxis- a leap from the real to the virtual and the abstract. Cyborging and Artificial Intelligence have already disturbed the myth of purity of human body and self. In a world where humans and machine rub their shoulder together, the hybridization of human and machine in the contact zone of digital and information technology demands a revisit to the theories of body, subjectivity and identity. Of this broad issue this paper tries to focus on the interaction of humans and social network sites like facebook, twitter, goolge + etc.

Web pages are branded as essentially 'postmodern' with their hypertextual, playful and slippery nature. Text in web pages is spacialized in all its multiplicities. In social network pages along with text, time is also specialized. In a facebook wall time drops from top of the page, rolls down to the bottom and hides itself to the navigable archives of memory. The span of consciousness is the dimension of the screen itself. The mouse pointer is the digital correlative of the consciousness, which can wander between the now-here and then-there. Sean Cubitt identifies the complex nature of the mouse pointer with its 'nomadic' wandering and various metamorphoses it takes.

Profile in social network sites stand as most potential metaphor for postmodern, partial subject. Every user waits at the threshold of the login area with a login identity and password. The facebook or twitter account is not fully woven by the God-like webmaster but continually constructed and reconstructed in the rapid flux of disparate bytes including, posts, tweets, comments, likes and shares of other nodes of users. A subject in the physical world exists between and among other subjects and always spills over the borders of one's autonomy. A social networked subject is no different. It floats in the Derridean universe of chronic incompleteness and *differance*. Every identity in social networks has an inherent and more naked lack, a "permanent partiality" (Haraway, 1991, p. 165) to use the phrase of Donna Haraway, which leaves inevitable holes, spaces to be tweeted and posted, posts to be commented and liked. It is the lacunary nature of this lack that invites networked subjects to supplement it. Every supplement is symptomatic of lack and which leads to desire for coherence ending up in a chain of Lack-Desire-Supplement. Individual identity is con-fused with the abundance of other elements. It is a site where a number of identities, as Barthes said about text, "blend and clash" (Barthes, 2001, p. 1468).

The world of digital identity cannot be confined to the scope of a metaphor which it always exceeds. Digital world is a new matrix where new modes of being are experimented. The question whether the virtual world is only the sensory physical world replicated in digits and

bytes need to be properly addressed. Does the identity of a user logged-in to social network page possess two unrelated identities or do they iner-act and interpret each other?

The digital subject is a fully hypertexted, database-rendered image, rewritable and highly malleable acting a host of disparate alien and other elements. The subject logged-in is no longer the digitized replica of the 'real' subject but nor is it exactly new. It disrupts the either-or model of Enlightenment: in/out, real/illusory transcendent and immanent. It is, on the other hand a hybridized space where the being of the 'real' self and the digital self enter a dialogue and two-way reaction. Sean Cubitt observes: "Recorporialisation will imply, against the thingness of the world, body, and other, their mutal interpretation and it will depend on the material in which they are mediated, including […], the mutual permission of human and machine." (Cubitt, 1998, p. 24)

References

1. Barthes, R. (2001). The Death of the Author. In V. B. Leitch, *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* (pp. 1466-1470). New York: Norton.

2. Cubitt, S. (1998). *Digital Aesthetics.* London: Sage.

3. Haraway, D. (1991). A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century. In D. J. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (pp. 149-181). New York:Routledge.

4. Hayles, N. K. (1999). *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics.* Chicago: Univeristy of Chicago Press.