

Cyberpunk Cinderella ?

Rob Shields

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Contextual Illness and Subjectivation

This is not a "social science" paper in the traditional sense, but a theoretical essay in which a number of research hypotheses are developed ([1](#)). In the name of demonstrating the potential of its argument, the paper is deliberately provocative. Therefore, let us begin with a fairy tale. The folk tale *Cinderella* is an allegory of the problem of identity, and more precisely it is an allegory of the problem of identity in different contexts. It turns on the difficulty of recognizing and verifying the identity of a body met earlier but in another social-spatial context. In the extra-ordinary context of a masked-ball Cinderella leaves behind one identity and role in everyday life to transform herself into a memorable, but unrecognized, person. Yet, this is not speculative postmodern theory. The folk tale comes to us in various versions from pre-modern sources dating back to the sixteenth century ([2](#)), and therefore neatly transcends any division of the postmodern from the modern to address a more fundamental dilemma.

The story bears repeating : set in simplistic terms that appear feudal to most, Cinderella is the story of a girl, adopted into a family and oppressed by her step-sisters. Cinderella lives with the cinders. She is relegated to the servile task of maintaining the household fire - a doubled-edged description, for this locates Cinderella, and not her stepmother, as the de facto "mistress" of the home, the matron of the hearth and the functioning of the domestic. We could say that this story is about matriarchy and power. Denied the chance to participate in the most important local event, a masked ball given in the honor of the Prince, Cinderella, is left weeping in "her usual place beside the fire" (as the European versions usually note, the abjection of Cinderella being central to the story). However, a "fairy god-mother" magically appears to miraculously transform Cinderella into "a beautiful Princess" - beautiful bodies, heterosexual love and youth are central to the story. She arrives at the ball in a coach, magically created from a pumpkin, driven by footmen, magically created from mice. She upstages the invited guests and captures the Prince's heart. But, Cinderella forgets the fairy-godmother's one injunction that the entire disguise will revert back, and Cinderella's gown will return to rags at "the stroke of midnight". On hearing bells beginning to toll midnight she dashes out of the ball in such haste that she loses a shoe, leaving behind a mystified Prince. This very small-sized "glass slipper" is later the key to relocating the petite Cinderella in her less-than magical, everyday role next to the fire. The Prince has all the young women on the Kingdom try on the shoe - for this folk tale is also about obsession, patriarchy, and the desirability of social status - but it only fits Cinderella who is consequently reunited with the amazed Prince. In a truly paradigmatic resolution of all the tale's tensions in favor of the status quo, "rags-to-riches" Cinderella marries the Prince and they "live happily ever after".

We might observe that the Prince's ball is "liminal" but not carnivalesque : it is a time and space outside of everyday life in which usual identities are suspended. Entering the masked ball, one crosses a symbolic threshold, or *limen*, into a festive social context in which everyday social norms are suspended. In both liminal and carnivalesque situations, the "impossible" can happen. But the Ball is liminal because, unlike Bakhtin's carnivalesque, social norms are not completely inverted or reversed, only some restrictions are lifted. Only Cinderella's identity is actually inverted : the "lowest of the low" becomes a "pageant queen" for a specified duration. Unlike Bakhtin's discussion of the carnival tradition of Medieval feast days and celebrations, there is

no mocking of the official order or of authorized identities. Neither the Prince nor the sisters are parodied. Cinderella is merely "flipped" into their social situation or "scene" to triumph on their terms.

Regimes of Value

Held argues that cultural changes associated with "globalization" alter the balance of the costs and benefits of identification strategies. My interest is in examining the case of individuals who experience increased - even crippling - costs which prevent them from stabilizing and reproducing an identity within the diverse situations of everyday life (Shields 1992a, Held 1996). This is a problem of the local economy of identities (although the word "economy" is used in its broadest sense cf. Lefebvre 1991 Ch.2). It appears that certain identities and statuses which were valued, which were worth struggling to achieve, and which were even worth sacrificing one's integrity to gain the rewards that they brought, are now much more costly to individuals. This cost can be understood as the labour-value of personal identity-work or subjectivation. Just as certain identities have been prized - over-valued - in the past, so other identities have been under-valued. Such valuations run the range of scales from economic policy to the tactics of individuals who attempt to self-actualize their own and locally-valued identities and paths through the life course. *Cinderella* juggles two extreme, opposed, identities : the low "Cinderella of the hearth" and the high "Princess of the ball".

If Cinderella is the folk tale of this investigation, there is second, folk tale told by professional theorists : the contemporary moment has been argued to bear the symptoms of a rupture with modernity. In part this argument is a totalization of coincident but not necessarily coterminous or even linked changes and processes (3). One of the central debates in the postmodern conjecture has been over the potential of changes in temporality and spatiality to effect socio-economic changes. Not only has this been a debate over the directions of causality, but over the interconnection between cognitive changes or outlook, practices of everyday life, and economic flows. The social sciences found themselves in an unprecedented era of confusion as they attempted to confront the complexity of changes in cultures linked as never before into interdependent (and even common) economic systems.

Is it possible that the advanced capitalist, so-called globalized societies are being unevenly ushered into a new " *regime of value*" (Shields 1992a : 100) ? Such a regime or mode is merely a frozen snapshot of a fluid process which contains within itself the seeds of its demise and transformation into yet another configuration. In short, the universals against which everyday events and flows are valued are being challenged. In both everyday life and the theories of social interaction, the result has been a resurgence of interest in ethical and relational thought as people have attempted to revalue, from the bottom-up, so to speak, the social situations in which they find themselves in the course of daily life (Maffesoli 1996; Levinas 1981). This is more than an interest in practical ethics -a replay of Aristotelian debates on the good and fair. This interest concerns valuations. Ethical valuations are not simply idiosyncratic but couched in the reference points and experiences - the ethos - of collective life. Through ethical universals people coordinate their perceptions and outlooks and, by implication, their valuations. The problem of value thus unites the economic with the normative, the moral-political with the ethical-aesthetic. At the level of policy and political economy a new stress has been placed on developing methods of evaluation and qualitative "audits" and new ways of establishing "value-for-money", a debate which transforms accounting into the newest theoretical field. Needless to say, this is not an all or nothing transformation, but has an uneven geography, a disordered history and a fragmented sociology.

The Subjects of Modernity

Cinderella prefigures the problem of identity in everyday life and in cyberspaces such as the Internet and virtual reality programmes. We might interpret this to imply that identity has long been problematic. However, I will argue that it is even more fraught in many current contexts where identity and individuation is acknowledged to be a cultural construction of persons within social situations, rather than a natural attribute of human bodies. If

identity is a less than perfectly predictable outcome of socialization and struggles for individual status, it becomes a point of conflict and anxiety (Langman 1992: 51), especially when social groups are unable to conceal the arbitrary elements of identity which are usually obscured by hegemonic ideologies in the name of stabilizing and reproducing the dominant order. This process is generally viewed from the macro-level under terms such as "socialization" but it, of course, has micro-sociological aspects (for example, group belonging) and also has individual aspects discussed under social-psychological terms such as "self-actualization". It is helpful to develop a more complete overview of the interaction of these different "identification strategies" under the term "*subjectivation*".

Modes of subjectivation are the cultural "templates" by which subjects are socialized, personified in different ways ranging from unique individuals to character types and pre-ordained figures. In the case of subjectivity, one tends to forget that the modern individuality so beloved of intellectuals from the Enlightenment onward is an abstracted ideal-type. Raymond Williams once said that supposedly universal and timeless notions such as the "individual".

... belong to a phase of history which was both creatively preceded and creatively succeeded... it is a characteristic of any major cultural phase that it takes its local and traceable positions as universal. This, which Modernism saw so clearly in the past which it was rejecting, remains true for itself (Williams 1985 : 24).

The concept of the "individual" refers to a unique personal identity, achieved and maintained over an entire life (4).

Of course, only the most privileged ever lived with the material wealth necessary to psychologically and socially outfit and actualize themselves with one single identity. Most had to accept the vicissitudes of fate. The turn-of-the-twentieth-century bourgeois male may have managed, rigidly cloaking himself in the identity of a profession or function in the labour force and denying all appeals to alternative self-conceptions based on, for example, his changing roles in different social situations, such as home, work and leisure. By contrast, contemporary sociality reveals subjects with more flexibility to their identities - they possess a whole range of inter-related identifications which they treat as a resource, a storehouse of tactical masks, rather than worrying about the slightest deviation from a singular, individual, identity. Yet, a stable identity is alluring. Once the issue of identity becomes complex, one must develop tactics of identification in order to live in one's skin with more alacrity. Identifications are both more fluid and thus daring, as well as more risky, difficult to actualize and sustain. Therefore it becomes a site of struggle which is political, ethical (in the sense of arising from the ethos of a grassroots social situation) and "aesthetic" in the sense of relational (Maffesoli 1996). An ethical aesthetic dominates the political orientations and demarcates the range of social responsibility felt by "tribe" members to insiders and qualified outsiders.

Why is identity something worth being nostalgic about ? Deleuze and Guattari as well as Maffesoli have noted that the obsession for stable, singular and unified identities has driven Europeans, and their cultural inheritors (North Americans on the one hand and Pol Pot's Marxism on the other), to an historically unprecedented half millennium of global warfare and genocide. A clue is given in the painstaking attempt at creating and telling the story of a coherent biography to and for oneself and others. Mementos, souvenirs, scrap books, baby albums, pin boards and displays of trivia held in place by ornamental magnets on the front of kitchen refrigerators hint at the importance of narratives of the self in the on-going struggle of subjectivation. Stewart (1993 : 139) comments that, "while the personal memento is of little material worth, often arising, for example, amid the salvage crafts such as quilt-making and embroidery, it is of great worth to its possessor. Because of its connection to biography and its place in constituting the notion of the individual life, the memento becomes emblematic of the worth of that life and of the self's capacity to generate worthiness" - or, value. Identity carries the "hallmark" of self-valuation. This process is made much more difficult when the lost, once-institutionalized, coherence of life in modernist states must be replaced with a rediscovered coherence in the realms of domesticity,

leisure and everyday life in general - areas of life that has been for so long dismissed and under-valued by sociologists as much as by society.

At the level of personal identities, lifestyles, for example, are the articulation and performance (in the sense of living-out) of complex and changeable forms of identification which are the result of negotiation between a person, with the intense idiosyncrasy of their own biographical embeddedness in lived situations, and normative models or "templates" of subjective identity which are mediated less by traditional and local (or even national) forms of community but by images and behavioural "scripts" presented in advertisements and television. These images and scripts are the tokens of lifestyles - the analytical level at which images and even commodities and other bits of material culture achieve a systematic coherence. However, fragmentary "moments" (Lefebvre 1958) remain available as fragments : they can be appropriated by individual "bricoleurs" (Chevalier 1990) into new combinatories and hybrid lifestyles. Paradoxically, while their analytical coherence exists within the mass-mediated narratives of lifestyle advertisements, soap operas, cinematic heroes and heroines, and the tabloids which dog every movement of the actor's lives, such fragments are only - and in practical terms can only be - actualised as incomplete quotations of the lifestyles which exist almost as ideal types. Even at the moment of its extinction, lifestyle narratives in the mass media insistently assure us of our individuality and freedom, which turns out to be nothing more than "consumer choice".

For the individual, the making of distinctions and the creation of distinctiveness is an essential part of the achieved identities effected by this mode of subjectivation. The making of distinctions is a structural process of oppositions - often through linguistic means. Narrative valuations construct positive value against the "Other" of negative value. As Derrida pointed out the "truth" of this process lies in the ongoing "difference" between either term, not in one term or the other of a binary dualism. Yet, the cultures of advanced capitalist societies are increasingly represented in the strongly visual images of commodities, advertising and the material paraphernalia of globalized consumption cultures. Making linguistic distinctions is a more difficult strategy.

Nowadays, experience travels in an image circuit which is graphic and visual (5). The language of images constitutes a perceptive and expressive currency as well as a collective memory (Deleuze 1983). Such images, whether graphic, tactile, or narrated, are central to the shaping of identity : largely constituted by the perception of the self as a separate totality (the individual)... technological images have become the mirrors in which to look for an identity. Characterised by proliferation... these ready-made images are easily interchangeable... they are discardable identities. Mobile and perishable, their traits wane after a few uses (Olalquiaga 1992 : 4).

Postmodern Subjects

As part of a more general process characteristic of the "postmodern condition", a logic of identity, of oneness and the individuum, has been argued to be replaced by a tactile logic of identifications. One outcome of contemporary modes of subjectivation is the persona (Maffesoli 1990). The persona is one mode of subjectivation associated with post modernity, marked by a fluidity and changeability of "identifications", or mask-like roles which can be changed to suit the situation. Personae allow convivial interaction with different groups at different times and places. Personas are "unfurled" and mutually adjusted. The performative orientation toward the Other of these sites of social centrality and sociality draws people together one by one. Tribe-like but temporary groups and circles condense out of the homogeneity of the mass. A persona is more than a "facade of the self", it is a performative rather than essentialistic identity. Like all masks it has confirming and transformative possibilities for the subject, allowing them to "become", in this case not someone else, but themselves. The strategy of the engaged, continuously re-created and situationally-rooted persona allows one to play one's role in any given group, easing the transition from context to context. In this manner the mode of subjectivation is integrated with and even corresponds to the social situations and spaces of everyday life. Lest this appear a simple social constructivist position, it should be noted that the impact of the material body and past experience in limiting who is able to move into and out of particular social situations. Body and life history

are two parts of the material giving rise to performative competencies and the ability to "fit in" to, or even to redefine a given social situation. Such competencies are also embodied and praxiological, as much as linguistic.

Even though they are temporally variable, personae are not superficial for they extend beyond appearances and mere "acting" to engage the emotions and will of the subject fully. Within their own situation, persona are fully integrated. The challenge, however, is for each person to fashion a coherent set of personae which allow a seamless performance of self in one's own eyes as well as in others. Indeed, the "real person" has no application here : historically the individual was a contingent outcome of a historically specific and geographically limited mode of subjectivation which produced that era's only so-called "real persons". The force of the last three decades of social and psychological theory has been to question the distinction between the real self and mere images of the self. The "real self" has been supplanted by a proliferation of images that leaves no space for contrasts between a specially-valued category of the real and the lower-valued category of the representational, reproductions, copies or even superficial or fake identities (Grosz 1994). The space of believability has been expanded, intensified by video and computer simulations. Both simulacra and real-life situations are popularly considered "real" things. This is not a result of confusion but of the adroitness with which people manipulate metaphors, popular culture, folk tales and fictional works to draw on the wisdom they contain. Fiction is an integral part of reality, if only because it offers tactical alternatives to the social dead ends of everyday life.

Alongside Maffesoli's key insight of the variability of identity from situation to situation and from role to role, groups have an oppressive ability to impose a mask (persona) or role on a person and treat them on that basis. As argued above, whether the totalizing thesis is accepted or not, postmodern theory has exposed the degree to which identity has become a personal battleground for self-expression for many. People attempt to appropriate and manipulate the symbolic building-blocks and markers of identity. A person may attempt to stabilize their identity and lay claim to the historical resource of character types to do so (we could take the "rugged individual" characterized by, for example, the "Marlboro Man" advertising images). But the fractured sociality highlighted by postmodern theory tends to throw each person into a succession of small, "tribe-like" but short-term affiliations which are much more strongly marked by rituals of inclusion and exclusion than so-called modern models of sociality, such as contractual solidarity. These "tribes" or cliques impose their preferred identification on each person, marking them through roles, their own stereotyping, and with categorical identities. Sometimes these might be expressed as nicknames, but even where nicknames are not used the solidarity and subjectivation are just as strong. Perhaps it is only that because of the short-term quality of such tribes the sentimentality of nicknames cannot be allowed : the affect of, say, a longer-running group of close friends is subsumed under the functional solidarity of the group (contrast the once-popular British phenomenon of school nicknaming - a case of ritually-marked inclusion through the allocation of a new identification expressed by the nickname - with a current day weekend football team). In all cases, the unevenness of postmodernity must be recognized. The peculiar problem of personae, neo-tribalism and the undermining of identity and the institutions premised on it will not be the experience of all. There is much anecdotal evidence, but a dearth of empirical research. Academics and other professionals may indeed be little inclined to worry about the hypothesis : they appear to be amongst the worst-placed to experience such shifts personally.

Contextual Illness

In *Megalopolis* Celeste Olalquiaga also advances the thesis that contemporary identity threatens to take the form of a dissolution of the sovereign self into its context where there is no single point of view and hence a disempowering loss of agency. Her acute discussion of the new spatiality of the self can be given even greater resonance when connected with Maffesoli's thesis of the persona (above). In effect, Olalquiaga argues that the boundaries of the body and the environment are blurred as if one was a reader engrossed in a good story, or a video game player concentrating on a simulated encounter - a situation of *psychanaesthesia*, a disturbance in the relation between self and context.

Psychanaesthesia is defined as the situation where the boundaries of one's body are felt to disappear or merge with the surrounding milieu. Callois refers to this as "depersonalisation by assimilation to space" (1984 : 30 cited in Grosz 1994 : 47). The primacy of one's own perspective is replaced by the gaze of another, for whom the subject is merely a point in space and not the focal point organizing space. At its extreme, one looks at oneself from the outside, or loses one's sense of position, fading into the environment.

To these dispossessed souls, space seems to be a devouring force. Space pursues them, encircles them, digests them.... It ends by replacing them. Then the body separates itself from thought, the individual breaks the boundary of his skin and occupies the other side of his sense. He [sic] tries to look at *himself* from any point whatever in space... He is similar, not similar to something, but just *similar*. And he invents spaces of which he is "the convulsive possession" (Callois 1984 : 30 original italics).

Grosz notes that in this extreme, one renounces one's rights to occupy a perspectival point, abandoning oneself to being spatially located "by/as others".

The primacy of one's own perspective is replaced by the gaze of another, for whom the subject is merely a point in space and not the focal point organizing space. The representation of space is thus a correlate of one's ability to locate oneself as the point of reference of space : the space represented is a complement of the kind of subject who occupies it (Grosz 1994 : 47).

Fading into its tribal, lifestyle, urban, televisual and cyberspace environments, personas are masters of a type of camouflage which is very similar to a psychanaesthesia but not pathological. Thus, "identity then affixes itself to any scenario like a transitory and discardable costume" (Olalquiaga 1992 : 17).

Drawing again on the example of *Cinderella*, we might note her name or identity with the context of the hearth and its cinders. However, this disrupts the wholeness of the self, creating a feeling of un-rootedness and insecurity. In terms of established modes of subjectivation a crisis of value and self-worth might then ensue. In response, individuals are forced into an obsessive compulsive re-counting of life-historical highlights (see Lajoie 1996 : 165; Kristeva 1990 : 102-3). Via desperate tactics control, they repetitively attempt to re-secure the body, to verify the efficacy of their agency and prove to themselves their status as responsible individuals. Currently this is the content of most personal "Web Pages" which can be found on the World Wide Web network : photos of the author/owner, of pets, family and prized possessions. Why this effort of self-presentation ? Perhaps this will be the ultimate "usefulness" of the stored and re-animated images of computer CD-ROMs and the like : not reference information from state databanks but narcissistic self-representation and personal "moral support" ?

In the folk tale, it is Cinderella's task to maintain the cleanliness and order of the tiny world of the kitchen and hearth. A menial task, it is also an obsessive and repetitive task of Prometheus. Each day she must again rebuild the value and propriety of the hearth, cleaning it of ashes. But, she is not only oppressed. She offers no resistance. There is no rebellion in the story, only overcoming. Thus, when she is prevented from attending the ball, she first lapses into despair, exerting no agency of her own. The similarities with a state of clinical depression are striking.

One significant category of clinical depression appears to be linked to a lack of success in the face of the strict criteria of performance imposed by an ego which, behind its bulwarks is both judge, jury and executioner, develops into an abiding, profound and all encompassing sense of failure and shame. Without doubt this is reinforced by a propensity to neural hormone balances (for example serotonin) and a tendency to dissatisfaction and even unhappiness. But the tendency to self-criticism is itself related to the construction of the individual around narrative strategies of evaluation and distinction : "one is not whom one should be". Here is the much neglected psychopathology of the sociologist's "anomie". To lower one's standards is to abandon the

construction of the self around this hypostatized "ought". In shame and self-loathing one focussed on the lost dream of the successful (performant) individual. Shame and despair comes to stand-in for identity which exists only in the past tense as a recollected failure in the face of which the query, "Why ?" is a further confirmation of the futility of the will and of the puniness of the self. In this overdose of emotionality, agency appears more and more evanescent : decision and action become almost impossible. This appears to be an almost totally reactive state. The tools to resist or channel such feelings are weakened with the loss of will. Because this is a grand battle for self-identity, all other projects and responsibilities pale in comparison. Social sanctions for setting aside legitimated life-projects, such as careers and families, only contributes further to reinforcing the prison of shame. In a reverse of psychanaesthesia, the world implodes into the body and into the circularity of a logic of self-reproach which appears to be an inevitable outcome of the individualizing mode of subjectivation.

If one recalls that the argument put forth above is that it becomes increasingly difficult to achieve and then perform or actualize the unique identity and status of the individual, then increasing numbers of "failed individuals" are bound to appear, along with a decreasing number of heroic "successful individuals" and an increasing number of "personas". These last cope with the shift of costs and benefits in the struggle of subjectivation as an individual by an outflanking manoeuvre, which denies the reality of individualism, in its modernist, Freudian, sense.

Modes of subjectivation are central to the processes of everyday life not only because they make up key aspects of the process glossed by sociology as "socialization". If the balance of costs and benefits have changed for different modes of subjectivation, for some, the traumatic costs have increased far beyond the self-actualizing benefits of a particular subjectivity and mode of subjectivation. Unlike socialization, subjectivation is an on-going part of everyday life in which the stakes are, quite simply, self-preservation. Bodies are the sites of this battle, the last refuge of identity and wholeness. The increasing rate of suicide underscores the importance of subjectivation as a point of struggle.

The stakes are clearer in the context of the near epidemic proportions of vaguely defined "mental illnesses" in capitalist, highly differentiated societies. On the one hand, these illnesses are famous for being diagnosable according to medical models but are not curable. They cover a range of symptoms but do not have physiological causes. Their causative factors include stress, trauma, social pressure, anomie, alienation and family history. There have been attempts to reduce them to the psychological and physiological presentation of hormonal or chemical imbalances, genetic pathologies or viral agents. However, some provocation or causative element of environmental and social context remains in almost every case. Such illnesses are not only predictable in probabilistic terms through ethnic and genealogical regularities but are correlated to cultures and classes. They appear to be sociological illnesses in that they are stratified by gender, ethnicity and class. They are the pathologies of the conditions of advanced capitalist societies (Ronell 1989 : 112; Jung 1974). My hypothesis is that this is not simply the result of fads in diagnosis or a tendency on the part of professionals to diagnose specific groups as having certain types of illness. While this is historically true, in many states, there is a greater degree of professional reflexivity concerning diagnosis and a recognition that diagnoses include models of treatment (Smith 1990 : 41).

These are as much "*contextual illnesses*", to coin a phrase, as they are based on diagnostic fads. Their detection is based on a person's inability to function, or "cope", in everyday life. They result from the disruption of modes of subjectivation and they extend beyond work, school or home to embrace the whole of a subject's life, presenting themselves as environmental, "contextual" illnesses across the range of social spaces of daily living. But they are more than "contextual" in the simple sense of positional (gender, ethnicity, class, geography). They are also relational, as in the case of psychanaesthesia. Beyond merely being a problem of contradictions between identity and socio-spatial positioning, they are "short-circuits" in the social norms of positioning *per se*. One not only despairs at one's predicament, one cannot find the centre of that subject that despairs : one cannot find one's own "heart".

Cyborg : Terminal Identity or Cyberpunk ?

If we endorse the out-flanking manoeuvre and dispense with the individual, what are the possible outcomes ? The mode of subjectivation which gives rise to the persona, has been discussed by Haraway under the title of the cyborg (1991). Haraway's cyborg - half-human, half-machine - was proposed as a metaphor for this condition. Conceived as a new form of hybrid social body, the cyborg less clearly articulates the mode of subjectivation - Terminal Identity - that is implied. Haraway argues that this new hybrid may be empowering, freeing discourse from the limits of tradition and ossified categories. The "technologisation of everyday life", causes a, "disruption of hierarchy and boundaries" (Olalquiaga 1992 : 15-16) that potentially enables new cultural practices such as those espoused by socialist feminism.

Both an organic and a technological body, the fictional cyborg represents the ultimate spatial transgression... Possessing the best of both worlds, cyborgs combine human attributes with the perfection of a technological anatomy, signifying a final breakdown of the boundaries between spirit and matter... where everything is conceived in terms of organization (Olalquiaga 1992 : 13).

Bukatman (1993), refers to a new mode of subjectivation focussed at the edge of more traditional conceptions of identity, such as the individual. This "Terminal Identity" lies at the interface of the body and the video screen or computer terminal. It is grafted or inscribed on the surface of the old selfhood of the individuum. Bukatman traces the growing popular belief that an extreme type of individuality can merge with new virtual technologies in a manner which retains elements of modernity's "unique individual" and the humanism of the Enlightenment yet adds elements of identity derived from the corporate identity of net-surfers, the sociality (however alienated) of cyberpunks, and the sense of participation in a collectivity of the logged-on participants in cyberspace. This corporatism and the quality of the collective on-line community has been much derided by academics, politicians and journalistic commentators as alienated, anomie, anti-social, anti-human, a danger to the public sphere and above all an illusory sense of togetherness. These are undeniable risks. Yet, what is important is that new modes of collectivity and community have been imagined in literary works, in the still-projective theories of cyberspace, and by the heterogeneous voices of the Internet's ".alt groups", chat and MUD discussion fora (Argyle 1996; Bromberg 1996). An example is the work of the latest in along line of Canadian technological visionaries stretching back through McLuhan and Innis, to William Gibson who coined the term "cyberspace". Stone argues that his highly influential novel, *Neuromancer*.

... reached the technologically literate and socially disaffected who were searching for social forms that could transform the fragmented anomie that characterized life in Silieon Valley and all electronic industrial ghettos. In a single stroke, Gibson's powerful vision provided for them the imaginal public sphere and refigured discursive community that established the grounding for a new kind of social interaction... *Neuromancer*... is a massive intertextual presence not only in other literature production of the 1980s, but in technical publications, conference topics, hardware design, and scientific and technological discourses in the large (Stone 1992a : 95).

In his work, Ken Hillis builds on Stone's argument that *Neuromancer* filled a need for the VR and information technology workers in North America who lacked any sense of community. They are organized as a labour force employed on short-term projects and dislocated from proximate, face-to-face communities (Stone 1992a :99) (6).

In delivering to this spatially-fragmented community -- defined as much by e-mail, bulletin board services (BBS's), and the Internet as by any face-to-face geography -- a plausible future, based on the dynamics within which researchers themselves were located, the novel gave voice to a virtual community identity which was in turn to suggest broad new avenues of research (Willis 1996 : 87).

In short, Gibson's vision of "cyberspace" provided an organizing image and cognitive mapping in which

researchers, entrepreneurs, hackers and weekend net-surfers could recognize themselves as a community on the model of an imaginary city (Willis 1996; Stone 1992a : 99; Fitting 1991 : 311).

Cinderella at the Cyber-Ball

Two literary innovations which directly concern subjectivation are noted in *Neuromancer*. First, point of view, or "pov" is a surrogate for the individual subject logged on or "jacked-in" to Gibson's "cyberspace". Identity is reduced to the gaze (a supremely Lacanian epiphany). In *Neuromancer* and in popular imaginings of virtual realities of the near future, the individual subject "moves through the screen to become the 'pov', leaving behind the body as an unoccupied shell. In cyberspace, point of view does not emanate from the character rather the pov literally is the character" (Hayles 1993 : 83). Second, "cyberspace" provides a milieu akin to a social situation (Bech forthcoming Shields 1996b) which is a data landscape in which the "pov" can take place. Awareness is joined to data, the latter are thereby humanized, subjectivity computerized, "allowing them to join in a symbiotic union" (Hayles 1993 : 84; Hillis 1996) of virtual reality peopled by virtual bodies. The pleasure of the interface, in Lacanian terms, results from the computer's offer to lead us into a microelectronic imaginary where our bodies are obliterated and our consciousness integrated into the matrix (Springer 1991 : 306).

Both pov and the milieu of cyberspace are informational representations. If the Cartesian world view posited a subjective ego in confrontation with an objective material world, the "Gibsonian" world view of cyberspace posits a representation as identity which is an integrated element of the representation which is the "net" or cyberspace. Both pov and cyberspace are products of the matrix of equations. Those are the true "womb" (matrix) from which the Terminal Identity art if S world is born (Plant 1996 Lajoie 1996 : 162). Willis (1996 : 88) cites Terence McKenna who subtly reappropriates the notion of narrative :

A world of visible language is a world where the individual doesn't really exist in the same way that the print-created world sanctions what we call "point of view". That's really what an ego is : it's a consistently defined point of view within a context of narrative. Well, if you replace the idea that life is a narrative with the idea that life is a vision, then you displace the linear progression of events (from Rushkoff 1994 : 58).

Lajoie pushes this further to argue, "the matrix therefore promises to do two things, one of which is to completely effect our body, and the space in which is located, and inscribe subjectivity within a computer generated phenomenal space, a space in which all desires can be fulfilled" (Lajoie 1996 : 162-163). Beyond a transcendence of the body, and the (mostly illusory) promise to fulfill any sense of lack stemming from the divorce of the Cartesian, monadic ego from its world and from others, the matrix constructs a new body which is an extension of self. Pov amounts to a virtual persona (or perhaps one of many virtual personae).

This is a third alternative, and one not without its practical problems, its risks and high stakes. The self devolves into a pov and the body blurs into its technological extensions. This recreates a sense of artificial or representational agency within the simulacra of cyberspace, which increasingly becomes a template for social situations. What sort of space does the outcome of this mode of subjectivation occupy, what materiel goes into its production, and what characteristics does it have as a resource for agency within everyday life, as well as within the virtual and official public spheres which preoccupy its political-economic critics ?

As a mask in cyberspace, pov brings new meaning to the folk tale of Cinderella, the oppressed daughter who is transformed to become the star of the Prince's masked-ball, unrecognizable even to her adoptive family. The persona and the flirtation with the Prince, the political-economic powers in the land, persists until the pov "times-out" on the stroke of midnight and she hastily "quits", loosing one shoe, even while the assembled image, costume and attendants (her pov) becomes unstitched into a bricolage of mice, vegetables and rags (7). The folk tale recounts that Cinderella is located by the Prince in her everydayness, thanks to the "glass slipper" left behind. In general, the slipper has been analysed from the point of view of the Prince as a fetish object; but it is

also important as a marker Cinderella's fluid persona.. The glass slipper is a reminder of her virtual identity, one of her two identifications - and one not mapped directly onto her body, except through the great effort of the Prince. The mapping of the "glass-slipped Princess" onto her own body, imprisoned in its everyday context, would be too costly for Cinderella alone. These costs are borne by the "fairy god-mother" and by the Prince, not Cinderella - hence her appearance of passivity. It is significant that Cinderella seeks solace in the momentary fantasy of a masquerade (or cyber-ball) but takes refuge in "her place, next to the fireplace". Hiding in the domestic, the everyday, she proves hard to for the political-economic powers to find and her identity can only be verified with a token of that other world which is impractical for actually walking in : the glass slipper lost at the cyber-ball (8). It is the everyday and not Internet that is the locus of "[Temporary Autonomous Zones](#)", and of "islands in the net" (Bey 1992).

Willis has highlighted the narrative quality of other forms of subjectivation, which have as a central project the narration of self-identity. Yet the rearticulation of the linguistic by the visual implies not only a reconfiguration of language but the supplanting of the symbolic by the imaginary and by extension the hierarchy of values and of powers - including powers over our selves and our bodies that we and others may exercise. Challenged by the proliferation of visual images, this gives way, in Bukatman's theory, to "spatialized concerns that engage our fixation with the distances, and proximities between embodied humanity and the electronic machines invented to facilitate an interpenetration between individuated subjectivity and global capital flows" (Willis 1996 : 85) "a space of accommodation to an intensely technological existence" (Bukatman 1993 : 10 cited in Hillis 1996).

Of course cyberspace, or the Internet for that matter, appears to have no spatiality at all, only distance marked as temporality in the form of connection time and lags (Robert Adrian X 1996). But it is more accurate to say that it has a triple spatiality. First, technically there is no space to the programme, only one point of execution and interaction in the compressed world of the interface and video screen. Here the promise of control responds to the hope of the obsessive. The space of the screen lacks depth and volume but exhibits an elastic, all encompassing scale and a reassuring static quality. Second, logistically, Internet and World Wide Web are a distributed packet-switching network on a global scale mapped precisely onto the nodes and vectors of global capital and information flows. Third, figuratively, Internet and other cyberspaces are imagined as a three dimensional space which can be flown or strolled through, like a mid-nineteenth century flâneur might have explored the arcades and department stores of Paris in a state of fascinated distraction (Tester 1994). Time is presented as motion-through and as speed which replaces temporality with its representation. Most writers focus on one or another of these aspects of cyberspaces. Its "social spatialization" is the combination of strategies and practices by which electronic communication and computer-mediated interaction is cast as in some way spatial. In and of itself, although the material infrastructure of cyberspace is located in specific places, and hence is spatially distributed, the spatiality of a virtual space is primarily representational : its scale can be varied depending on the needs of the programme. The spatiality of the medium itself is, if anything, that of a two dimensional computer display screen, or the haptic space and the ergonomic range of an individual with, for example, a mouse, a data glove or other pointing and feedback device. Hence its spatialization is a complex dialectical triad. In time, cyberspace vacillates in a dialectical tension between these three elements depending on its use and user.

The transfer of the visual pov from virtual reality and cyberspace into everyday life leads to a separation between the body which is conceived as a mechanism, and subjectivity. Cinderella, on her return from the ball, "lapses" back into her old "place by the hearth..." Cyberpunk Cinderella would have good cause to be depressed. Like a character in a video game (such as Nintendo's Super Mario Brothers), she leaps each hurdle but makes no attempt at escape from her restricted space. Instead she uses the everyday as a hideout, an "island in the net", until she is relocated and repositioned by an external agent. This might be termed a "survival mode", what an old Cree storyteller once called "making oneself comfortable like a dog finding the 'right' spot on the ground to lie down". This is the ultimate form of resistance but it is static. The risk is that, like *Cinderella*, notions such as pov are not articulated primarily in terms of agency. Cinderella is, in the end, passive. She is rescued from a

retreat into the restricted world of the self which can be read as an allegory of depression. The problem then is that notions such as the cyborg and the persona are not yet fully articulated so as to offer an complete alternative to the notion of the individual. However, this does not mean rejecting the model of the postmodern persona or the pov. Instead it is merely an indicator that we are still in the crisis period in which alternatives are incomplete. We are in the middle of an ethical and political "working-out" of the possibilities and potential of new modes of subjectivation, without closure.

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Notes :

1. I would like to thank Catharina Juul Kristensen, Erik Larsson and Celia Lury for their helpful comments.
2. Cinderella is best known in the form recorded by Perrault, in his *Histoires ou Contes du temps passé* (1697) also titled *Contes de ma mère l'Oye* (*Tales of Mother Goose*). However, forms of the folktale appear in the collection of Neapolitan folklore published by Giambattista Basile, *Il Pentamerone* (also titled, *Lo Cunto de li Cunte* 1634) and is discussed by the Brothers Grimm who were surprised to discover earlier versions on the folklore they had collected. Versions of *Cinderella* may be found in many cultures, some with and some without the feature held to be essential by European writers (see the anthology by Dundes 1988). For example, in the French version, the slipper and the Prince's search for the foot that it fits is held to be the essential element. In other cultures, the slipper appears to be merely a means to resolve the story line and is given little attention (see Kleinmann 1978; Rossi 1976). Here, *Cinderella* provides a text in which contemporary paradoxes of identity, spatiality and everyday life are illustrated. I have no interest in making claims about the folkloric intent, moral message, cultural function or "essence" of this folktale.
3. Postmodernity suffers the weakness of a hypothesis based on necessary but not sufficient causes. That is, the thesis of "postmodernity" is a reified and totalizing summation of processes which remain independent. Jameson (1984) and Huyssen (??) have sought a causal link in a shift in the balance of spatio-temporal cognition in favour of the spatial. Huysen supports this with his contrasting characteristics of the modern and the postmodern which sums the various changes up to a shift from hierarchy to spatialized, horizontal forms of cognition, identification and social organization. Others have proposed more periodicizing explanations linked to the "end of modernity" and still others have attributed "postmodernization" to a shift in the forms of capital (Harvey ??). Yet, even if it is possible to argue a common causative shift, the trajectories of the many processes one or more shifts might have set off are not parallel or coterminous. For example, popular experience in North America and Europe suggest that postmodernity appears even more unstable than modernity and continually changes its dominant qualities, never realizing the full implications which would appear to be the outcome of any single change or trend.
4. The individual has been much discussed as the key subjectivation of modernity, liberated from ascribed identities to search for a personally achieved identity. Another case, character "types", are social stereotypes such as "a drunk", "a homeless person", or "housewife". They are perceived identities, which take over the social identity of a person making it increasingly difficult for them to actualize any other self-conception or alternative expressions of subjectivity which don't correspond to the norms which make up the stereotype. They render it nearly impossible for "characters" to perform other roles or to change their identity. Examples of figures include the Pope or, historically, the titles of the nobility. These were ascribed social roles which were all-embracing enough to constitute or reconstitute a person's very identity by changing the reactions of others toward the person.
5. This can be understood as a "visual circuit" in the sense that representations tend to refer intertextually to other visual images, to the qualities of visual images (their planar quality and reception as a holistic image rather than a narrative sequence, and to the characteristics of visual media.

6. The televised image of relaxed workplaces is presented as a revolution in labour conditions with workers playing games (basketball, volleyball, throwing frisbees in the airier of the buildings of new suburban "business parks" - head offices which unite the principles of speculation in serviced building plots and rapidly-erected construction systems developed in for warehousing) attests to the "tribal" and incestuous quality of employees sociality : work-mates become one's leisure-timefriends. The reality of competitive work in artificially lit "clean rooms" under high security is less discussed.
7. Mice, or perhaps some other pointing device ? Unfortunately her carriage is said to be a pumpkin, but one could imagine... an Apple™ ! Cinderella was stuck backwith her old clothes - a product of poor weaving or poor networking ?
8. On the importance of function to footwear, see Anne Brydon's essay, "Sensible Footwear" forthcoming in Brydon, Packwood et al *Fashioning Culture* (New York : Berg).