



I Don't Exist: Aesthetics of Virtual Expropriation

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Existing in virtual global networks poses questions on how subjects can maintain agency within them. The shift of digital networks into compartmentalized locked-in platforms facilitates the metamorphosis of subjects into the category of users. The ever-growing absence of a buffer zone between online and offline representation means that online highjacks become increasingly problematic. Currently, there is a rise in emerging efforts to transition bureaucratic citizenship into new modes of digital identity, such as the ID2020 project and other governmental projects seeking to implement digital ID in countries like Australia and Canada, or the digital ID proposed by the World Economic Forum. This shift, in some cases from a centralized state as guarantor to a decentralized allocation of identity allows easy verifiability and access to a multiplicity of services and personal data but also poses questions concerning these systems. This research aims to look at the different models of digital identity that are being developed, thinking about their implications. Researching in an art context, the goal is to develop a speculative project related with digital ID and expropriation, reflecting upon the assetisation of identity. The goal is to think through different theories to explore agency within virtual global networks distributed in planetary-scale assemblages of subjects and technological infrastructures.

Keywords digitalID,
expropriation, speculative
aesthetics, network,
planetaryity, agency

Context

This research began when my website was stolen by a company that turned it into a porn and casino directory. After looking at the various links and their IP addresses, I listed a number of different servers on various geo-locations. The globe is in everyone's computers, but no one lives inside them, creating an impression that the globe is something that can be controlled (Spivak, 2012). Interpol (n.d.) declared an historical rise in cybercrime, growing identity theft scenarios and the circulation of deepfake images (Schick, 2020) destabilizing traditional representation paradigms allow the rise of a new paradigm of volatile identity and reputation (Rosamond, 2019). These new conditions operate within planetary scale computation that defies the traditional logics of nation-state sovereignty (Bratton, 2016). The question now is to think how the homogenizing logic of globalization can be rethought via the concept of planetarity (chakrabarty,2009), a process of subjectivation where the subject considers itself planetary, instead of only continental or national. Similarly to what happened when looking at the different geo locations inside my expropriated website, the confrontation with the planet is something familiar and close and simultaneously strange and distant.

The World Economic Forum (2022) proposed a digital identity system that aims to monitor online behavior, purchases, and biometric data that, like the Chinese social credit system (Kunreich, 2018) determines citizens' access to various services. Other efforts to transition bureaucratic citizenship into new modes of digital identity, such as the ID2020 project that seeks to create an alliance between private corporations and the United Nations to develop digital identity on the grounds that proving one's identity is a fundamental and universal human right, a project backed up by private corporations such as Microsoft and the Rockefeller Foundation. In the past six years, the Australian government has invested \$450 million AUD in a national Digital ID system in order to lead the digital economy by 2030 (Macon,2022). In Canada there are concerns regarding the introduction of digital ID programs with citizens raising civil liberties and privacy issues but these criticisms are being labeled as misinformation (Rankovic,2022). With the growing efforts of both corporate and state actors to hold the monopoly of identity verifiability, the challenge is to trace the ideologies and private interests behind these different approaches and possible outcomes.

Goals and research questions

The goal of this research is to think about the rise of digital identity and the aesthetics surrounding events of identity expropriation. The research will explore networked subjectivity and agency and possibilities of engagement and resistance. Some of the initial research questions are:

- × What are the different modes of digital identity arising?
- × What are the implications of bureaucratic identity (something previously done by a centralized state) being controlled by private entities located in a distributed network?
- × What could be the implications of identity theft scenarios in a digital identity context?
- × What strategies could be employed to resist totalizing scenarios? Could it be useful to create an aesthetic buffer zone between online and offline existence?
- × How do new modes of subjectivity and agency emerge in networked planetary-scale events?

These are some initial starting queries, however, during the research process some other questions might arise that are worth further development that might gear the research into other directions.

Approach

Identity theft allows putting the human into perspective, going from the micro to the macro, rethinking subjects not as a centrality but as enmeshed in a process of complex material relations. I aim to look at theories of chaos to think through control, agency, planet and machines (Plant, 1998) and also research on cybernetics and the relation of animal-machines conceptualized by Nobert Wiener (1948), critically thinking this relation between human and non-human entities in a way to dive into the concept of post-human becoming (Braidotti, 2002). The approach is to use an artistic research to engage with these topics by producing a video-essay that allows exploring the advent of digital identity to think through different modes of allocating and assetizing identity, thinking through current implementations and speculative scenarios.

Methodology

Since this work is being developed in a Fine Arts context, the goal is to use this position to explore the advent of digital identity and cases identity expropriation, thinking through different art practices that address parallel issues, also questioning how an artwork can engage with these topics. I aim to look at artists and theorists that work with speculative fiction or play with the idea of online identity, laying out possibilities of different scenarios and strategies. The

research would consist in gathering elements to create an art project, exploring these themes in a non-linear, expansive manner, adding different positions and events. My own subjective experience of having my website hijacked by a company located in Macau, China, that turned it into a porn and casino directory could also be introduced to explore the issues relating to identity expropriation and online reputation volatility.

Contributions

The expected contributions of this research is to produce an art project unfolding many of the processes of online identity expropriation and the advent of digital ID. With this, I hope to collapse different fields of thought to propose an aesthetic experience which fosters a critical understanding of these matters, promoting new modes of thinking about agency and subjectivity in a paradigm of virtual networks distributed in planetary-scale technological infrastructures, also opening up the research processes to online and offline communities in a way to foster possible events and collaborations.

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