

Toward a Theory of the Dubject: Doubling and Spacing the Self in Canadian Media Culture

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Electronic storage devices function as an extension of our own memory. They are capable of storing our thoughts.

JUDGE DEAN PREGESON

One of the things our grandchildren will find quaintest about us is that we distinguish the digital from the real.

WILLIAM GIBSON

In David Cronenberg's 1983 cult film *Videodrome*, an early scene, which stages a television interview, signals that the going is about to get deeply weird when one of the three interview guests is wheeled onto the set as a television set. Joining the film's protagonist (Max Renn, played by James Woods) and love interest

(Nicki Brand, played by Debbie Harry) is a TV set showing a close-up of Professor Brian O'Blivion, a "media prophet" who, with his first lines in this interview scene, identifies himself as a nearly transparent parody of Marshall McLuhan. To the TV interviewer's first question, Dr. O'Blivion responds that "the television screen has become the retina of the mind's eye" and, as though to explain this cryptic claim, then says: "That's why I refuse to appear on television, except on television." Parked centre stage on the set, between the interviewer and the protagonists, O'Blivion looks uncannily from one speaker to another as though he were present on the set. Throughout the film, O'Blivion only ever appears on a TV screen. In a subsequent scene, which marks the film's decisive departure from realism into surrealism, the protagonist watches a taped recording of O'Blivion in which he starts addressing the viewer directly, as the TV set on which he appears begins to take on a monstrous life of its own. Towards the film's end, we learn that O'Blivion has died before the film's diegetic time — before the interview — and has "lived" for some time only as a private library of videotapes. "This is him," O'Blivion's daughter-turned-curator explains to Renn. "This is all that's left. . . . He made thousands of them, sometimes three or four [tapes] a day. I keep him alive as best I can. . . . He became convinced that public life on television was more real than private life in the flesh. He wasn't afraid to let his body die." As a bank of videotapes occupying some uncanny kind of afterlife, Brian O'Blivion embodies, in fictional form, a kind of radically remediated and redistributed subjectivity — an uploaded, transmitted, and somehow still interactive subjectivity: a *dubjectivity*.

In recent articles on social media ("Ipsographing the Dubject") and Canadian cinema ("*Frankenstein*"), I have suggested the figure of the *dubject* as a postmodern form of mediatized and remediated subjectivity, assembled through technologies

of mechanical reproduction and distributed through networks of electronic distribution that blur the boundaries between performance and recording, consumer and commodity, the organic self and its technological others. The dsubject is 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* (in the deconstructive sense of the term) by its different and distributed embodiments in recordings and representations. The dsubject is a kind of subject whose *corporeally* embodied self-consciousness and experience of self are less accompanied than displaced, even deterritorialized, by *mediated* embodiments and iterations of oneself. 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. What’s more, such processes of *dubjection* seem specifically prominent in — and contingent on — cultural and economic conditions peculiar to Canada and its place in contemporary globalization. Examples of dsubject formation on this account abound in Canadian culture, not only in fictional representations like that of O’Blivion in *Videodrome* but also, more strangely, in reality, as will be suggested with reference to specific Canadian cultural producers and creative practitioners. It must be said, at this point, that one of the effects of a theory of the dsubject may be to blur the distinction between fiction and reality even more than poststructuralist and postmodern theories of representation already have. I do not take the specificity of the Canadian contexts that inform this theorization to entail any claim to national exclusivity or priority for it. That *dub* is integral to the proposed theory points to just one of its globalized, diasporic involvements. This preliminary inquiry merely suggests that certain Canadian contexts and

experiences have contributed to a certain tradition in practices of representation and mediation that signal some potentially wider — and weirder — implications for everyday life in the overdeveloped, technologically overdriven, and hypermediated Western world today.

Accordingly, the present essay explores more extensively this preliminary theory of *dubjectivity* by considering the example of *Videodrome*'s O'Blivion and a selection of other Canadian cultural texts: the linguistic-turn allegory of Tony Burgess's novel *Pontypool Changes Everything* and its film version *Pontypool*; the remote-signing invention of Margaret Atwood; and the recording career of virtuoso pianist Glenn Gould. Taken together, these cases and texts illustrate the contextual, discursive, performative, and productive parameters of a theory for rethinking the category and constitution of the subject in the postmodern network society, of which Canada represents as exemplary a provisional site for concrete analysis as any other overdeveloped Western state and to which it also brings its own peculiar, postcolonial culture of technological nationalism, or rather technological *transnationalism*.

At the intersection of "the technological imaginary" (Genosko xxxvi) and "the transnational matrix" of globalization (Moylan 184), the problematic of technological transnationalism proposes a revision of the "technological nationalism" that Maurice Charland theorized in his eponymous 1986 article (206). Canadian postmodernist Arthur Kroker took up the term in *Technology and the Canadian Mind* (10), hailing it as "the essence of the Canadian state and . . . the Canadian identity" (10), an effect of Canada's geo-historical position, "between . . . the 'technological imperative' in American empire and the classical origins of the technological dynamo in European history" (7). However, Kroker left his keywords largely unexamined: he held *Canada*, *technology*, and *nation* to be self-evident. But as a rudimentary model

of Canadian postcoloniality, “technological nationalism” may be reconsidered now as a kind of *transnationalism*, thus evoking the transgression and transcendence of national borders (Clingman 129) but also the transplanting and transforming of national forms (Balibar viii, 176). Grounded by postcolonial contexts like cultural imperialism and neoliberal hegemony that overdetermine Canadian citizenship and sovereignty, the figure of the dsubject articulates a complex problematic of identity and belonging in the context of cultural globalization.

Canadian dsubjectivity entails both a transnational spacing — the remediated “extension of our own bodies and senses” — and a technological doubling — the “lease [of] our central nervous systems to various corporations” (McLuhan, *Understanding* 99–100). The dsubject takes form in multimedia bricolage and in a redistribution of the products of that bricolage, a redistribution that is at once an infiltration and a dispossession. As a factitious, tessellated form of identity, dsubjectivity might be understood as the national mediascape’s counterpart to the state’s ethnoscape of multiculturalism, which for postcolonial critics like Neil Lazarus is “the strict ideological correlate of transnational capitalism” (223). Read as a symptom of Canada’s colonial experience of various cultural and media empires, dsubjectivity remixes the individual citizen in a manner not unlike that in which Canadian multicultural policy reimagines the national citizenry: as the commodity of a global market, a product of competing intellectual property claims, a consumer of media consumed by media.

FROM SUBJECT TO DSUBJECT

Before turning to the illustrative cases I want to discuss, some reflections on the proposed portmanteau are in order. Why remix the *subject* with *dub* as a prefix? While the category of the

subject traditionally has described an ontology of individual selfhood as “unified, self-present, self-determining, autonomous, and homogenous” (Hawthorn 180), the linguistic and cultural turns effected, in the postwar period, by humanities and social science research, in general, and by continental critical theory, in particular, have displaced that essentialist ontology of subjectivity with a socially constructed reconceptualization of the subject as “secondary, constructed (by language, or ideology, for instance), volatile, standing in its own shadow, and self-divided” (180). Judith Butler, in *The Psychic Life of Power*, undertakes an extensive theorization of the fundamentally paradoxical relationship between subjectivity and power: “Subjection consists precisely in this fundamental dependency on a discourse we never chose but that, paradoxically, initiates and sustains our agency” (2). Butler acknowledges the discursive and linguistic constitution of the subject: “Individuals come to occupy the site of the subject (the subject simultaneously emerges as a ‘site’), and they enjoy intelligibility only to the extent that they are, as it were, first established in language” (10–11). Working from psychoanalytic as well as poststructuralist theories, Butler considers the subject’s linguistic constitution and its paradoxical “modality of power” (6) as aspects of the subject’s founding division, “a splitting and reversal constitutive of the subject itself” as a site of “the reiteration of power” (15–16). Butler analyzes theories of subjection in order to ask “how we might make such a conception of the subject work as a notion of political agency in postliberatory times” (18); she works out this notion by rethinking the subject not as a formed product but as a process of becoming, “an uneasy practice of repetition and its risks, compelled yet incomplete . . . a repetition that risks life — in its current organization” (29–30). Given the recognition of self-division and repetition already integrated into the social-constructionist theory of subjectivity,

what then does this theory gain by remixing its keyword as *subjectivity*?

For one thing, it gains *gain* itself: gain understood in the technical sense it has for audio electronics, as the ability to increase or amplify a signal's power. Boosting certain signals is one of the bases of dub: as historians of DJ culture Bill Broughton and Frank Brewster summarize it, "a dub mix is essentially the bare bones of a track with the bass turned up . . . adding space to a track, [so] what is left has far more impact" (128). Just as dub is not a process of original composition but of remixing and reconfiguring extant works, a theory of the *dubject* is not attempting to invent or advance an entirely new model of social selfhood but rather to adapt, modify, and modulate the social-constructionist model: to amplify its contingency on, overdeterminations by, and articulations of media practices; to make it resonate more clearly with the media- and technoscapes of postmodern globalization; to bring a new emphasis on space as counterpoint to the social-constructionist model's "temporal" bias (Butler 30).

To mix dub into the subject is to sample for its contemporary productions one specific contingency of mediation in postwar black Atlantic music: *dub*, the "reducing" of instrumental "tracks to their basslines and rhythms" and the "foregrounding [of] certain instruments in the mix," recording studio practices that have become widely and rightly celebrated for influencing "every significant development in popular music since the 1960s" and for "laying the foundations for remix culture" (Shapiro 50–51). Erik Davis's explication of dub is worth quoting at length:

To create dub, producers and engineers manipulate preexisting tracks of music . . . strip the music down to the bare bones of rhythm and then build it up again through layers of inhuman echoes, electronic ectoplasm, cosmic rays. Good dub sounds like the recording studio itself has begun to hallucinate.

Dub arose from doubling — the common Jamaican practice of reconfiguring or “versioning” a prerecorded track into any number of new songs. Dub calls the apparent “authenticity” of roots reggae into question because dub destroys the holistic integrity of singer and song. It proclaims a primary postmodern law: there is no original, no first ground, no homeland. By mutating its repetitions of previously used material, dub adds something new and distinctly uncanny, vaporizing into a kind of *doppelgänger* music. Despite the crisp attack of its drums and the heaviness of its bass, it swoops through empty space, spectral and disembodied. Like ganja, dub opens the “inner door.” John Corbett even links the etymology of the word “dub” with *duppie* (Jamaican patois for ghost). . . . Dub music not only drums up the ghost in the machine, but gives the ghost room to dance. (“Dub, Scratch, and the Black Star”)

These definitions and interpretations of dub suggest several reasons for overdubbing the subject.

1. *Articulating embodiment.* That two of these definitions share, in their trope of the “bare bones,” an emphasis on articulation, in its anatomical and expressive senses, should help to prevent the argument here from being misread as a “continuation of the rationalist dream of disembodied mind” (Penny, qtd. in Bolter and Grusin 252). The practices that constitute dubjection as discussed here could all too easily be taken to reinforce the Cartesian, masculinist division of mind and body. Instead, following studies of new media and subjectivity by thinkers like Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, Sherry Turkle, and Donna Haraway, I want to recognize the quite formidable materiality of both subject formation and its mediations, processes commonly assumed to be immaterial. “To say, for example, that the self is expressed in its email affiliations,” write Bolter and Grusin, “is not to say that the self is disembodied but that it is embodied in a particular mediated form” (234). For Haraway,

the miniaturization and outsourcing of electronic technology mystify its materiality and make it mobile; moreover, such technology is, fundamentally and fatally, “about consciousness — or its simulation” (153). Even Marshall McLuhan’s media theory, on which these more recent thinkers found their own work, posits the materiality of media practices, for example in the tactile titular pun of his popular 1967 book, the *Medium Is the Massage*. Dub’s origins in dance music production and the bodily affecting preponderance of bass in its methods help the proposed portmanteau to articulate both the materiality and mediation of embodiment even as the theory problematizes and defamiliarizes what we mean by materiality, mediation, and embodiment. “Feminist theory recognizes the body as both a medium and an element in the interplay of contemporary media,” write Bolter and Grusin. “The interaction of technology and the body today comes . . . through the ways in which visual and verbal media present the body and participate in the definition of the self” (254).

2. *Doubling*. “Dub arose from doubling . . . ‘versioning’ a prerecorded track”; and dub’s media act as a medium, channeling the black Atlantic *hauntology* of duppies, ghosts, spectres, uncanny doubles (Derrida, *Spectres* 161; Brand 49). The doubling of subjectivities in the context of media is, of course, very different than the racialized doubling of consciousness theorized by black diasporic intellectuals like Dubois, Fanon, Brand, and Gilroy. What duality and double consciousness, while very differently contextualized, *may* share is a sense of the connection between deracination and representation, the difference of repetition, the internalized and projected distinction between an internal and a projected self.

In *Videodrome*, O’Blivion’s remediated appearances and oracular statements exemplify the uncanny doubling conjured by

the *subject*. The term *remediation*, which I have borrowed from Bolter and Grusin, itself inscribes a doubling movement that makes it most suitable to the present discussion. Remediation is their term for the “double logic” by which new and old media alike strive, simultaneously, for both transparent immediacy and “hypermediation,” a preoccupation with media forms (reminiscent of McLuhan’s maxim that the content of new media is old media: theatre as the “content” of film, for example, and film as the content of television [19]). Bolter and Grusin’s claim that “we are that which the film or television camera is trained on, and at the same time we are the camera itself” (231) echoes O’Blivion’s own claim that “the television screen has become the retina of the mind’s eye.” O’Blivion embodies the uncanny double, the *doppelgänger* character of the subject. Is he alive or dead? Good guy or bad guy? Present or absent? Corporeal or cathode? Inspired or insane? Public or private? Real or imagined? Himself or someone else? Both or neither? Only a few of these questions receive any answer in the scene that presents the “real” O’Blivion, embodied as the tape library, and these answers are at best speculative and provisional; the other questions contribute to the radical ambiguity of the whole film. Moreover, O’Blivion’s role as an explanatory “father-figure” (Beard 143) is doubled; he shares this role with the CEO Barry Convex, whose corporate profiteering contrasts O’Blivion’s public-interest projects. What’s more, O’Blivion’s character is a *roman à clef* fictional double for Marshall McLuhan, who had died some three years before the film’s release (though not of the brain tumour from which he *and* his fictional counterpart both suffered). And still more: O’Blivion’s every appearance in *Videodrome* doubles the form of the film itself, *mediatizing* its cinematic frame by inserting a second, video frame within it; the film often exploits this formal doubling for *mise en abyme* effects that heighten its disorienting efforts. *Mediatization* is

not the same as remediation, although it is related: in Philip Auslander's adapted use of this term (which he borrows from Baudrillard), it describes performance practices that incorporate other media: "'mediatized performance' is performance that is circulated on television, as audio or video recordings, and in other forms based in technologies of reproduction" (5). As we will see with reference to the other Canadian texts and producers sampled below, the experience of uncanny doubling — of being shadowed or haunted by one's remediated double — becomes a recurring preoccupation and thus a defining dimension of dubjection.

The multiple ways in which O'Blivion enacts diegetic doublings and embodies formal doublings dramatize the uncanny qualities of dub processes and their significance for a theory of dubjection. The "versioning" of dub is not the making of an identical duplication but "adding space": simultaneously reducing ("stripping down") and rebuilding or, in a word, deconstructing. *Supplementing*. The deconstructive supplement differentiates, defers, *displaces* that to which it is attached; as theorized by Jacques Derrida, the supplement not only *adds to* but *replaces* that which it supplements (*Grammatology* 145). In this way, the supplement poses a lethal threat. As Avital Ronnell summarizes Derrida's history of writing itself as the "degraded" and deadly supplement of speech: "Writing is not nontechnological, obviously . . . it's already on the side of death and technology" (59). The uncanny quality of doubling obtains in precisely this, its supplementary movement between life and death, a movement that disrupts and confounds this basic ontological division. Commentators on various forms of recording media have noted their dangerous supplementarity: Simon Reynolds writes of "sampladelic" music like dub that it constitutes a composite sonic "chimera" (45); similarly, of celluloid film, William Nestruck writes that it "animates" its

subjects into an uncanny afterlife (294–96). In *Videodrome*, not only does O’Blivion destabilize the border between life and death, but engenders his own supplement in the protagonist Renn, who, in the last scene, appears to translate his own self into the uncanny space of the TV screen, in the act of destroying his own corporeal body.

3. *Spacing*: The deferrals and displacements of the supplement bridge the doubling and spacing characteristics of dub. That its doublings are “uncanny,” as Davis says, is bound up with its confusions between life and death, as well as its spatializing and *spacey* effects (as Davis notes about “giving the ghost room to dance”). Something of spacing is latent in the word *uncanny* itself, an English supplement to the German *unheimlich*, un-home-like: different and distant from home. A theory of dubjectivity thus resonates with — and appropriates the problematic premises of — McLuhan’s argument that the environment of new media, which for him television exemplified (as *Videodrome* parodies), is predominantly an “acoustic space”:

McLuhan believed that electronic media were subverting visual space by introducing “acoustic space:” a psychological, social and perceptual mode that eroded visual space’s logical clarity and Cartesian subjectivity, returning us electronically to a kind of premodern experience — what he once called, with characteristic sloppiness, “the Africa within.” (Davis, “Roots and Wires”)

Davis brings McLuhan into unlikely dialogue with the black Atlantic theory of Paul Gilroy, and a theory of dubjection, I suppose, extends this improbable discussion. As Richard Cavell has argued (xiii), McLuhan directed his major research questions to contexts of space, of surroundings, of environment; hence, for instance, his retroactive positioning as a founder of the field

of “media ecology.” Through his “translation . . . entirely into the video world” (Beard 132), O’Blivion occupies a simultaneously indeterminate space — from where (and/or when) is he broadcasting? — and a closely confined space — the cathode-ray small screen. The revelatory scene that exposes O’Blivion’s fate as a video library is set in a high-ceilinged room, through which the camera pans across shelves full of tapes, suggesting the professor’s encyclopedic knowledge, the extent of his media obsession, and the more expansive space into which he has *dubjected* himself. Again aping McLuhan, O’Blivion’s indeterminate redistribution problematizes the spatial dimension of electronic remediation as a globalized space: O’Blivion inhabits the “strange new world” in which “television is reality and reality is less than television,” a world evocative of McLuhan’s “global village.”

Dub is a “space craft” (Perry, qtd. in Toop 114) in that its reduction of an instrumental track to drum and bass opens sonic, conceptual, and affective space: space for a vocalist to occupy with lyrics, toasts, or rap; space for different instrumentals and sound effects; and, more abstractly, cognitive and contemplative space, as privileged in Rastafarian religious practice. (Angela McRobbie marvels at “how much thinking there is in black music,” citing black British critics like Gilroy and Kodwo Eshun who have articulated its “investment of artistry, politics, history, and literary voice” [43]). Dubjection translates this principle of spacing into practices of distribution: the dispersals, displacements, and deterritorializations of the remediated self among the myriad globalized networks of electronic media. And these distributions achieve global (and even, technically, extra-terrestrial) reach in the affordances of electronic and digital information and communication technologies. Differentiating between *virtual* and *networked* subjectivities, Bolter and Grusin describe the latter as “made up both of that self that is doing

the networking and the various selves that are presented on the network” (Bolter and Grusin 233).

As a remediated remix of the poststructuralist theory of subjectivity, the dubject articulates and reorganizes its embodiments, amplifies and proliferates its doubling effects, and extends and redirects its spacing movements. In the figure of the dubject converge several curious contexts — the cut-and-mix principles of black Atlantic music, continental theory, Canadian media culture, and the technoscapes of postmodern globalization — and it engages other theoretical and literary contexts, such as science fiction, Afro-Futurism, diaspora studies, science and technology studies, gender theory, and post-humanism, which the present essay gives me scope only to flag for further investigation.

O’Blivion finds numerous doubles, antecedents, and avatars in fantastic and speculative cultural production generally, and Canadian science fiction specifically. From the Gothic tradition of Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and Stevenson’s *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, the *doppelgänger* figure transforms, in modern and postmodern science fiction, into the figure of a digitized, downloadable consciousness. Bolter and Grusin track this figure through “virtual reality” films like *Strange Days* (1995) and *Johnny Mnemonic* (1995), in which “a character casts his or her mind into the computer, usually to have it trapped there or to exchange or merge it with other minds” (247). Similar films include *Tron* (1982), *The Matrix* (1999), and the television programs *Battlestar Galactica* (2004–9) and *Max Headroom* (1987–88).

In Canadian science fiction literature, we find similar figures of digital dubjection. William Gibson (who wrote the aforementioned *Johnny Mnemonic*) adapts this figure extensively. In his 1984 novel *Neuromancer*, one character is a dead computer hacker who has been “recorded” as “a construct, a

hardwired ROM cassette replicating a dead man's skills, obsessions, knee-jerk responses" (76–77). In Peter Watts's 2006 novel *Blindsight*, traditional burial rites have been superseded by a virtual Heaven, a "utopian environment" to which "Ascendants" upload their personalities for indefinite occupation (33). In Nalo Hopkinson's short story "A Habit of Waste," the main character has transplanted her personality to a new body and encounters the occupant of her old one: "Here was someone wearing my old cast-off. . . . If she couldn't afford cloning, the doctors would have just downloaded her brain into any donated discard" (para. 4). Cory Doctorow's 2003 *Down and Out in the Magic Kingdom* imagines a high-tech future in which the narrator has "seen the end of death" (8) in the advent of personal memory "backup" systems (15) that let an individual upload his or her subjectivity to a database and download it into a succession of customizable bodies.

Among these examples, Gibson's and Watts's images seem closer to the movement of duction tracked here and exemplified by O'Blivion. In Hopkinson's and Doctorow's stories, bodies are interchangeable but still indispensable "storage media" for subjects. Like those of Gibson's "construct" or Watts's "Ascendants," O'Blivion's solution is more drastic for deterritorializing the corporeal body as the privileged seat of subjectivity. The movement of duction appears to remix a subject's investments and positions — its psychic interiority and social interactions — moving the preponderance of these from that privileged, traditional site, to remediating sites of remote communication and representation. Such remixing may not necessarily entail physical death, but it problematizes what one considers life. In light of the above, let us consider in more detail some samples of Canadian media culture that flesh out the bare bones of duction articulated here.

PONTYPOOL'S ABJECT DUBJECTS

In addition to the exemplary O'Blivion, Canadian film has furnished a more recent and very different cinematic story of subjectivity: Bruce McDonald's *Pontypool*, a film adaptation of Tony Burgess's *Pontypool Changes Everything* (1998). Like *Video-drome*, it is grotesque and satirical, formally and contextually quite removed from Hollywood's more formally formulaic and ideologically conservative representations of the remediated and redistributed self (as in *Strange Days* and *The Matrix*).

Pontypool is a horror film about a small-town Ontario radio station besieged by zombies. The book on which it is based, Burgess's "autobiographical" novel, *Pontypool Changes Everything*, merits some accompanying discussion, in the context of a theory of the dsubject. Both the book and the film narrate approximately the same story of an infectious outbreak turning the populace into zombies. The outbreak starts in rural Ontario, and in the course of the story its cause eventually becomes evident as a virus *communicated by communication* — language use exposes one to infection. Burgess's story is thus a surreal, satirical allegory of the linguistic turn precipitated by structuralist and poststructuralist theories of language and subject formation. The book and film approach this story quite differently, not just in terms of their media but in terms of characterization, plot, and genre. The book shifts among numerous characters' points of view, including major characters who do not appear in the film at all; the film more or less revolves around the perspective of its protagonist Grant Mazzy, a TV personality in the book recharacterized as a radio station morning talk-show host in the film. The book moves the plot from the small town of Pontypool to the megacity Toronto; the film stays located in the Pontypool radio station and keeps most of the large-scale "zombie apocalypse" action entirely offscreen.

In terms of genre, the book assumes and insists on a doubled

formal character as both novel and autobiography. The book's first of two parts is titled "Autobiography" (9); the second, "Novel" (145). But Part One is no first-person memoir of Tony Burgess. It opens with a short, anxious first-person reflection: "I have, to this day, a very persistent certainty that hidden inside me is the revolting knowledge of days when I wasn't myself" (11). Most of Part One is a third-person narrative of one Les Reardon's struggle with and escape from zombies, which abruptly pauses to problematize autobiography: "What is an autobiography? What can fairly be said to lie within its bounds, share in its purpose?" (116). The following chapter, "Autobiography," switches to a second-person account of "your" history of homelessness, drug withdrawal, and suicidal depression. The first part's last chapter, titled "Autopsy," returns to the zombie story. Part Two opens with a chapter called "Biopsy" that explains the zombie-making virus:

The virus farmed the organisms [which] evolved to the point where they comprehended themselves as copy machines. . . . The virus, fearful of this hostile extension — mechanical reproduction — jumped from the imperilled species to the imperious one. First, it adapted itself to life inside computer memory. (147)

And thence to human hosts. The novel thus becomes the story of a virus's own subjection, as — borne on vectors of cognition, "paradigms," and language — it shuttles and mutates back and forth between human hosts and their communication media. Burgess's fictional virus replicates in the text and *as* text, through doubling and spacing, repetition and deferral. The above-quoted "Biopsy" offers a brief explanation of this virus's pathology, and names the disease: "The disease is commonly referred to as Acquired Metastructural Pediculosis. Or, AMPS" (149).

Burgess supplements this first overview of AMPS pathology

with a more detailed description during Mazzy's broadcast interview with a doctor, who explains that AMPS "gestates in the deep structures prior to language," as the "primal structure that organizes us as differentiated, discontinuous copies of each other":

The virus appears in a concept of itself . . . a common effect being the sensation that the present moment is a copy of itself. . . . Other early symptoms occur when the act of selecting a word becomes jammed. . . . As conditions within the personality become ultra-sensitive to their own construction, there is a kind of sped-up production of reality. This is a compensation for, or an escape from, the rending of their once invisible frames. . . . A frightening and painful type of madness ensues. (167)

This "type of madness" turns its victims "into violent zombies. Cannibals" (149). To ward off infection, Dr. Rauf advises Mazzy that "we use as little connotative language as possible." He says that "the mature virus resembles the figure of abjection" and that its self-replicating progeny — "the copy" — manifests in its host only as "a strange, full and undetectable presence" (169). Infected characters announce their affliction by repeating words and their homonyms, as though playing an absurd, grotesque game of broken telephone: "The zombies echo the voice in words they bark at the soldiers: 'Helen!' 'Hello!' 'Help!' They are agitated by the alliteration" (69). This pathologized, abject image of linguistic subject formation gives way to *subject* formation not only in the virus's remediations but in a farcical, mediatized scene at the TV station where Mazzy works:

An idea developed by Big Town TV to accommodate its AMPS viewer . . . closed coupling involves a tight repetition, a delay sample that they believe would conform to the rhythm that AMPS consume information. . . . The technology does attract viewers, who are exhilarated by the idea.

A Max Headroom who cannot be cancelled. (152)

The book proliferates dialogic and mediatised images and tropes of self and other as host and invader, individual and double, original and copy, presence and representation, living human and zombie cannibal. Images and tropes converge to parody the poststructuralist theory of the subject's linguistic formation in grotesque figures of the subject's mimetic deformation.

Like Burgess's book, McDonald's film takes numerous opportunities to represent individuals falling victim to infection as they repeat and stutter the specific words on which they get stuck, like broken records. Burgess wrote the film's screenplay, and makes a cameo appearance. The book's roving, third-person narrator describes numerous large-scale social scenes, events, and violent conflicts featuring large groups, especially masses of zombies (in nauseatingly gruesome yet eerily stylized detail). The film eschews such scenes and literally keeps the zombie hordes outside the doors of the community radio station, which occupies a refurbished church basement. Unlike Hollywood films that take the "zombie apocalypse" premise as an opportunity for spectacular effects and huge crowd scenes, the mass zombie action in *Pontypool* is mostly relayed to the characters via different media, like telephones, broadcasts, computers, and military loudspeakers outside the bunkered station. (These minimalist strategies of cinematic remediation not only "leave more to the imagination" but also indicate the film's modest, typically Canadian budget.) The film *Pontypool* replaces the book's mass spectacle with tragic character drama, in scenes where main characters succumb to the disease in grotesque performances of linguistic dub, like grisly, *noir* Max Headrooms: repeating words to vary, empty, and space out their meanings, leaving the speakers vapid zombies that rage, vomit blood, and expire.

The film changes the story's premise significantly, too. While the book explains AMP's infectious vectors as "paradigms" and "language," in the film, only speaking aloud in English exposes

one to infection and zombiehood. The main characters resort to writing and passing notes in order to communicate and survive, a remediating tactic that collapses performance and recording. In the denouement, one main character begins to succumb, repeating the word “kill” with rising anxiety and hysteria, but Mazzy helps her stave off infection by what might be called a game of word dissociation, reasoning that if getting stuck on a word is what renders one a zombie, then pre-emptively voiding that word of its meaning through a dramatized “free play of signifiers” acts as a kind of inoculation: “Kill is kiss! Kill is kiss!” (As these scenes might suggest, the film develops a more crowd-pleasing, less nihilistic plot than its print source, which spares neither Mazzy nor most of Ontario’s population.)

The changed premise also affords McDonald opportunities for satirical commentary on Canadian culture. Since English transmits the virus, Francophone soldiers are deployed, yet they too remain offscreen. We hear their amplified alerts and commands but never see them; Canada’s two solitudes remain divided — by a disease endemic to English speech. The film also remixes and remediates two typically Canadian public institutions — the community radio station that occupies a musty church basement — and turns these conflated public institutions into a private bunker for the embattled morning talk-show team. In addition to its bicultural satire, the film thus satirizes Canadian forms of privatization. Why the church agrees to lease out its basement to the station remains unexplained; that it does so suggests a response to economic pressures and cultural shifts. The film also explains less about the virus’s pathology, opening the satirical possibility that it is not English in general but the smug, “straight-talking,” and “common sense” neoliberal style of corporate talk radio, aped by this community station and its host, Mazzy, that is turning listeners into raging zombies. Despite its aesthetic and thematic

departures from zombie movie norms, *Pontypool* still visualizes the zombie as an anonymous copy of its horded counterparts, which, taken together (as they usually are), strike a mass pose of abject dubjection. The book, in contrast, individually characterizes many of the zombies encountered even in passing situations: “The AMP who is having this dream now is lying on the floor . . . sail[ing] on for the rest of his natural life striving towards his goals, different now, surely very different” (165). And, also like other horror films, *Pontypool* concentrates its dramatic plot on a gradually dwindling number of more fully realized main characters.

Mazzy is the focalizing protagonist common to both book and film, and, in the latter, his role is different and more prominent than in the former; however, in both texts he is characterized predominantly as a media personality, an identification that interpellates him as an exemplary dsubject. Towards the film’s conclusion, he affirms, in a hard-boiled, triumphant tone, “I’m still here” — significantly broadcasting these words via the station booth mic and thus mediatizing and dispersing his insistence on cognitive integrity and corporeal survival.

This preliminary theorizing of dubjection has focused so far on fictional cases from cultural productions across media, but chiefly from cinema. However, we see evidence of dubjection not only among cultural productions but also among *cultural producers*. On this note, let us turn, in closing, to just a few examples of dsubjectivity as a transnational remediation of the Canadian cultural producer’s own, historical self. For if the characterizations of dsubjects in *Videodrome* and *Pontypool* suggest some of the distinctly Canadian parameters for a theory of dsubjectivity, these parameters also spotlight some paragons of dubjection among Canada’s cultural producers and luminaries.

THE INVISIBLE AND VISIBLE HAND OF ATWOOD

In her more recent science fiction novels, Margaret Atwood has shown an uncanny, unnerving sense of timing. *Oryx and Crake*, Atwood's dystopian novel of humankind's extermination via a viral pandemic plotted by a rogue geneticist, made its debut simultaneously with that of SARS. Its sequel, *The Year of the Flood*, in which the flood refers to the aforementioned disease, was released in the year of the latest influenza pandemic. Atwood toured widely to promote *Oryx and Crake* yet tellingly cancelled an appearance during the peak of the outbreak in Toronto, the North American city hit hardest by SARS. During this 2003 tour, Atwood "came up with the idea for the LongPen," a "remote autograph technology" that could provide "a less taxing way to promote her books and connect with fans" (Wolframe 13).

Atwood went on to invent and incorporate a company for the LongPen, a machine that remotely replicates someone's handwritten signature. The device literally stands in for the author at a book reading and signing event, paired with an interactive webcam or teleconferencing interface that allows the author and fan to see and talk to each other. Atwood invented the LongPen to reduce the carbon footprint, as well as the personal stress, of book tours, although it has other legal and business applications. And as researchers like Julie Rak and Phebe Wolframe have shown, the LongPen also has cultural functions and implications that make it legible here as a form of dubjection. Wolframe argues that Atwood uses the LongPen "to negotiate with the deathly specters of both celebrity and authorship" (14) and that it is, in a word, *spooky*:

The LongPen is a way to project a sort of technologically advanced version of an astral body. . . . [It] is spooky precisely because it forces the reader to question the realness of their author encounter; fans meet the author through a screen,

and their book is signed by a seemingly autonomous robot arm (24, 27).

Atwood has written and spoken about authorial celebrity as “a living death which splits the writer into public (spectral) and private (living) versions of themselves” (Rak 7). Wolframe recounts a telling anecdote in which Atwood, unable to attend a fundraising function in 1982, “created a life size ‘Peggy doll’ who attended the event in her stead. The doll had a tape recorder in its purse, which played a recording of Atwood voicing plausibly evasive statements such as ‘Oh, I wouldn’t really have time to do that’” (25). The year before Atwood invented the LongPen, she published *Negotiating with the Dead*, reflections on writing that include suggestive pretexts for the thinking that developed the device. One chapter, on the writer’s public and private roles, is titled “Duplicity: The Jekyll Hand, the Hyde Hand, and the Slippery Double” (qtd. in Wolframe 18). Atwood also advises the reader to “pay no attention to the facsimiles of the writer that appear on talk shows” (qtd. in Wolframe 25). Subsequently reflecting on public reactions to the LongPen, Atwood wryly notes the Gothic and grotesque associations attached to its “threat of the Monster Body Part” (qtd. in Wolframe 18). And yet to promote and legitimize the LongPen, Atwood describes it (in McLuhanesque terms) as “an extension of the Self, just as . . . the pen [is] of the hand” (qtd. in Wolframe 16). Her own writing on the technology evinces a tension between apprehending its uncanny effects and appreciating its instrumental affordances. Wolframe foregrounds the LongPen’s problematization of the self, of the literary work, and of their occasional conflation: “The LongPen, like many of Atwood’s other works, has a place in a historical lineage, in the world of technology, in the realm of the spooky and the speculative, and in discourses of the self” (26). Hence the LongPen’s compelling place in a theory of dsubjectivity.

“A TOTAL RETHINKING OF THE
NATURE OF INDIVIDUALITY”

As the primal scene of the LongPen’s invention, the production of *Oryx and Crake* provides an intertextual bridge to our last case study in dubjection: Toronto’s virtuoso pianist, Glenn Gould. As the novel’s narrator, Jimmy, remembers of first meeting Crake: “Crake wasn’t Crake yet, at that time: his name was Glenn. Why did it have two n’s instead of the usual spelling? ‘My dad liked music,’ was Crake’s explanation . . . ‘he named me after a dead pianist’” (84). Atwood claims that the “dreaded author tour” prompted her to conceive of the LongPen; Gould also tired quickly of touring performances and the concert-hall economy that demanded them. He was alienated by the scene: “As I look back on all those years it seems as though some other person did all that” (“Ecstasy” 331). Gould’s profession had ensconced concerts as the test and affirmation of authentic virtuosity, but Gould himself began to attack them, with reasoned and combative critique, as the antithesis of artistic achievement in an age of mechanical reproduction. Like Atwood, Gould developed an eminently dubjective solution to the problem of a demanding and exhausting live performance schedule — but a more radical solution. Whereas Atwood has introduced a supplementary, dubjective proxy for authorial performance, Gould just dropped performance altogether and retired to the recording studio and the broadcast booth:

Working to the microphone . . . is a very easy thing for me, a very natural thing. Any other kind of projection now seems very strange to me. The difference between my first *Goldberg* recording [1955] and this one [1981] shows up in such things as Variation Fifteen. . . . I can no longer recognize the person who did that. (“Ecstasy” 332)

In the mid-1960s, Gould caused a sensation when it became apparent that he was quietly abandoning live concert performances and tours, as well as speaking engagements, to focus strictly on studio production and radio broadcasting. Gould, in effect, *subjected* his public persona, abdicating the expectations of music performance and the apparatuses of cultural and commercial capital that had installed live performance as the standard for taking a musician's measure. Opposing these apparatuses as obsolete and irrelevant to art, Gould articulated a critical position on the affordances and refinements of recording, in opposition to the aura and technical deficiencies of concerts.

His major statement of this case is the 1965 CBC radio documentary he produced, "Dialogue on the Prospects of Recording": "In the electronic age the art of music will become much more viably a part of our lives. . . . The audience would be the artist and their life would be art" ("Prospects" 353). Gould's argument about mechanical reproduction is to music what Walter Benjamin's is to the visual arts (although Gould was likely unaware of Benjamin; his argument derived more explicitly from McLuhan's media theory). In the documentary, Gould argues that new electronic media represent a more private, individualized, and aesthetically satisfying future of music in contrast to the outmoded public "museums" of live performance that, for him, no longer lay claim to the optimal appreciation of music. Gould echoes Benjamin on the arbitrariness and hegemony of aura (he cites a wartime forger of Vermeer paintings, Hans van Meegeren, as a "private hero" [341]); he echoes Barthes's "death of the author" in positing the declining relevance of authorial biography — tied to concert tradition — in appreciating music; and he anticipates both scholars like Jacques Attali and DIY music practices like rap on the rise of the home listener as, increasingly, a participant

and even composer (what we now call a *prosumer*) in his or her own right. As a result, he concludes, “this whole question of individuality in the creative process . . . will be subjected to a radical reconsideration” (352), with implications for society and culture more generally: “I believe that the ultimate gift of electronic culture to art will be a total rethinking of the nature of individuality” (“Forgery” 231).

Gould’s vision of art, its purpose, and the artist’s role are inextricably mixed with his views on recording, all of which identify him as an exemplary subject. Almost as famous for his personal eccentricities as for his musical talent, Gould frequently represented himself in such self-alienating terms and radically subjected his personality and persona in his piano playing, in his recording and broadcasting, and in interviews. Reflecting on his “secret in playing the piano,” Gould said “I need to feel that these are really not my fingers . . . I have to find a way of standing outside of myself while at the same time being totally committed to what I’m doing” (“Ecstasy” 333). Gould freely admitted a *categorical* preference for mediation over presence: “I much prefer to have a conversation like this one on the telephone rather than in person. For me the presence of people is a distraction” (333). Gould also often scripted and published interviews with himself, as in the mise-en-abysmal “Glenn Gould Interviews Glenn Gould About Glenn Gould,” with its feedback loop of ironic reflections on Gould’s “radical career departure” into “a total immersion in media” (317). It is arguable, too, that Gould’s claims for the “*pluralistic* values which electronic forms assert” (“Prospects” 341; emphasis added) open his remediated doubling and spacing of his own several selves to postcolonial interpretation as an articulation of Canadian media culture and Canadian multiculturalism.

The apotheosis of Gould’s subjectivity is the Voyager 2 space probe, which carries his recording of a selection from Bach’s

Well-Tempered Clavier with other “music from Earth” on the ambassadorial phonograph sent with the probe (see “Music”). Like Atwood’s LongPen, Gould’s representative and replayable presence aboard *Voyager 2* provides a striking historical rather than fictional example of the technological-transnationalist subject of the postmodern mediascape. The satellite preserves Gould’s performance for an unimaginable posterity: an audible etching of European baroque music on a gold-plated but outdated storage device, which may not ever be played, recruited for a space mission launched by the most symbolically imperialist and “SF-capitalized” (see Fisher) institution in the USA — an interstellar mission that exited the solar system in 1989, will terminate its telemetric transmissions in 2025, and yet may one day remain the sole surviving artefact of modern human civilization.

Spinning into the farthest space yet reached by any human project, sounding the limits of representation, Gould’s historical case rivals O’Blivion’s fictional one as an exemplar of dbjectivity, this remediated remixing of subjectivity that continues to reverberate through Canadian culture. The figure of the dbject and the movement of djection suggest a heuristic device for interpreting cultural images of self and other in the hypermediated, overdeveloped world; however, the fact that the fictional dbjectivities of *Videodrome* and *Pontypool* find historical counterparts like Atwood and Gould broach the theory’s broader social applications. Articulating Canada’s political economy of compromised sovereignty and its history of colonization by various cultural and media empires, the incarnations and iterations of djection 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.

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