Fake subjectivities: Interpassivity from (neuro)psychologization to digitalization.

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Interpassivity and (neuro)psychologization

"The theory of interpassivity has at this point presented us with an unanticipated benefit in terms of a solution to a fundamental problem of cultural theory."[1]

Is this not a nice thing concerning theory; that it thinks in our place, that it unexpectedly gives a solution when we ourselves are stuck? And in a further turn of the screw, as I write these comments on Robert Pfaller's book *Interpassivity. The Aesthetics of Delegated Enjoyment*, I cannot but see myself caught in this dynamic of delegation and outsourcing: for, am I, myself not put to work by this theory? Am I not hired so to say by the

theory to do its work (however, arguably, with no guarantee of delivering the goods)? Of course, here one gets easily confused, what, exactly is doing the thinking? Is it active or is it passive? That is to say, thinking with theory, or, outsourcing one's thinking to theory, or, becoming oneself the tool of theory; are these not all modalities where the line between activity and passivity becomes blurred? At the very least and in this respect, Pfaller's theory of interpassivity, allows us to reconsider anew the question of being a subject of thinking and of theory.

Let us consider, if according to Pfaller, interpassivity concerns the delegation of *passivity* instead of activity and is about letting an other (or some device or apparatus) *enjoy* for us (rather than letting others *work* for us), is theory then not precisely the device to which we outsource our *Denklust* (enjoyment in thinking)?[2] That is, we let the theory enjoy the thinking to find solutions whilst we can remain comfortably stuck. Pfaller's point that there is always a second delegation (besides the delegation of pleasure) might be helpful here: Pfaller contends that while people transfer their pleasure to a representative agent, they also transfer *the belief in the illusion they have staged* to an undefined and naïve other.[3] Meaning, to begin with, when we outsource, for example, the enjoyment of reading to the photocopier, the printer or the hard disk (as we copy, print or save all the texts we would like to read), we ourselves would never confuse the act of reading with the operation of the device, that is, we ourselves would never believe in the illusion that the device has done the reading for us. Here Pfaller's *naïve observer* reveals itself: it is only for this agent that the whole set-up (the whole staging involved in interpassivity) would be satisfying. As the naïve observer cannot read intentions, Pfaller writes, he is satisfied with just an appearance *as if* (for example, politeness).[4] Pfaller speaks in the respect of a special sort of illusions as "not merely illusions that certain people have never believed in, but apparently illusions that no one has ever believed in."[5] Here, most interestingly, he contrasts the *naïve other* to the Freudian Super Ego: while the latter is the instance that presumes to know your intentions (and can punish you for merely having them), the first can only judge from appearances. Does this then not mean that the outsourcing of thinking to theory is about positioning some naive

observer who would think that theory does its job – do we not ourselves necessarily have the illusion that with our little theory we have settled the important matters at stake? *Google Scholar* might be such a naïve observer, counting for example our publications and citations, not differentiating whether we are being cited positively or negatively (e.g. 'De Vos has it completely wrong!' would still positively augment my citation indexes).

But here we might try to move from our own particular perspective – being humanities scholars – to the perspective of the subject as such: the so-called layperson, who, one can argue, is itself also a *subject of theory.* That is, if for Jacques Lacan the subject of psychoanalysis is the modern subject and he defines the latter as *the subject of the sciences*,[6] are we not justified in taking this to the letter? For, is it not clear that the modern subject no longer understands itself, the others and the world from the all-compassing vantage point of an all-seeing and all-comprehending God (a perspective which the human mortal never can share), but, rather, from the more limited position of science and its theoretical vantage point? Everything the modern subject does, from cooking, eating, sleeping, having sex, raising children, gardening and so on, I would claim, is informed by, embedded in, and structured by science. More importantly, in all this the layperson is well aware, at least in a nut-shell, of the theories involved to makes these things happen: for, do we not all know what the academic experts say about how to cook, eat, sleep, have sex, raise our children and do the gardening? Our life-world is no longer the sublunary overviewed by a *super-egotic* God (all-seeing and all-knowing our desires and little pleasures), rather, we have come to live in an academified habitat realized by the more limited gaze of the modern sciences: the *naïve observer*-gaze renouncing any access to the *thing as such* (the Kantian *Ding-an-sich*) and limiting itself to appearances by dealing with them in a pragmatic and evidence-based way.

Hence, does thus the question become something else: *what is theory for the modern subject and what is the modern subject for theory*? It can be expected that that the psy-sciences – in broad terms, the sciences dealing with subjectivity itself— play a central role here. The first

thing then to observe is that the dicta of the psy-sciences effect a redoubling: "*look, this is what you are*" constructs an externalised image of yourself, a (neuro)psychological golem or homunculus, for you to look upon. What we seem to witness here is the birth of a kind of extra persona to which we can outsource our everyday existence within an interpassive schema, that is to say, we outsource not *what we are*, but, most importantly, *what we are said to be* according to science. Consider for example how toddlers in so-called Circle Time sessions at school are asked how they feel, upon which they are offered four masks portraying a happy, sad, angry or scared face. In short: let the mask express the appropriate feeling and thus *do* the feeling.[7] In this way the ubiquitous brain image seems to be the latest mask which carries our supposed main human traits and characteristics. But then again, we should not miss here that which we project on the brain is not inasmuch that *what we are*, but, rather, that *what we are said to be* according to science. In other words: the colours of the polychromatic brain scan we all know so well stem from the psy-sciences: that is, it is with *psychological theories* that the brain is coloured.[8] Hence the brain is but a further step in the process of outsourcing: from delegating our *being human* to our redoubled *homo psychologicus* to further transferring all this to a more concrete and allegedly more tangible issue: the brain.

From here the specific functioning and positing of the issue of theory and knowledge for modern subjectivity becomes clearer. We can for example, observe that the Circle Time sessions inciting toddlers to express their 'feelings' are based on a prior *theoretical induction* of the children themselves in the academic theories of emotions. That is, a closer inspection on the didactics involved reveal that the children, prior to the call to use the masks, get a *theoretical class* explaining the basic scientific insights on human emotions: they are taught the different kinds of emotions that allegedly exist and the proper ways to express them. In the same way, *neuroeducation* (the idea to use neuroscientific findings in education) cannot but pass over into neuro-education, that is, it cannot but pass over educating the pupils themselves into the latest scientific discoveries over the brain. For example, an inevitable part of the curriculum for 12 to 15 years old is the introduction into the theories of

the pubescent brain.[9] Even the use of cognitive neuroscience in the class seems to necessarily involve the induction of the pupils in how the brain learns. Is for example in the case of ADHD not the first step in the treatment the administration of *theory* to the parents, teachers and the children themselves? For example, the first lesson the "affected" teens are hailed with is that ADHD is a brain disorder:

> You may wonder why you have ADHD. (…) Having ADHD is not your fault. Research has clearly shown that ADHD runs in families (is due to genetics). ADHD is a brain-based disorder, and the symptoms shown in ADHD are linked to many specific brain areas. There is no known cure for ADHD, but we know many things that can reduce the impact that ADHD has on your everyday life.[10]

From the 'we know' the teens are *interpellated* to share this knowledge.

It will be already clear that I am here both leaning on and trying to supersede the Althusserian concept of interpellation.[11] To begin with, the first specificity of the interpellation of the neurospy-sciences is that it passes over theory and science: *hey you, look, this is the (neuro)psychological being that you are according to the latest scientific research*. Hence, the interpellation is not issued from his master's voice but rather from knowledge, or in Jacques Lacan's term, from *the discourse of the university*. In this respect, is it not strange that, given the time frame, Louis Althusser develops the concept of interpellation from the figure of the police officer to account for how ideologies engender its subjects? The 'Hey you' of the police officer – transforming the person who turns around into a subject of law and order – clearly situates the issue of ideological interpellation within, in Lacanian terminology, *the discourse of the master*. However, certainly, as Althusser develops his concept of interpellation in the heyday of May 68, would it not have made more sense to understand ideological interpellation within *the discourse of the university*? For, if we follow Lacan's interpretation of the shifts in power in that period, that timeframe can be understood as the passage from *the discourse of the master* to *the discourse of the university* as the hegemonic discourse in society.[12] So, while the classic Althusserian schema understands ideological subjectformation in terms of the interpellation by the master-signifier, it is precisely the phenomenon of

(neuro)psychologization which in an exemplary way reveals a different kind of interpellation fuelled by *the discourse of the university*. The further specificity of this interpellation is then that it engenders a subject starting from the call of 'neutral', objective and impersonal academic knowledge. The 'Hey you' of the neuropsi-discourses –omnipresent in our society from the Kindergarten, school, media, workplace to the retirement homes— hails everyone, from the toddler to the elderly, to subjectivize oneself starting from the perspective of theory. Here, in contrast to the classic Althuserian scheme, you are not called upon to identify as such with the object of the call nor are you not called upon to identify in the first place with the thing you are said to be (the *homo psychologicus* or the brain). Rather, you are hailed to adopt the position of the neuropsy-sciences themselves. That is, *look, this is the psychological being you are/look, this is the brain you are*, interpellates us to look at ourselves, the others and the world from the neurospi-expert position. We identify hence in the first place with the neuropsi-scientist and tell each other: *do you know that according to brain research...* .

Now, from this reworking of the Althusserian concept of interpellation, are we not then driven to question the optimistic undertone of Pfaller's interpassivity? That is, Pfaller writes that interpassivity is a strategy of escaping identification and consequently subjectivisation: "Interpassivity is therefore either an anti-ideological behaviour, or it is a second, and entirely different, type of ideology that does not rest on becoming a subject".[13] Let me question this starting from the issue of identification itself: does not identification always entail a minimal form of non-identification and non-subjectivization making that identification always somehow escapes itself? That is, I identify with my father, teacher, hero... on the basis of a minimal difference, a minimal other place or space from where I look at the image of what I want to be (or at the image of what I am said/supposed to be)? Hence, identification and subjectivization per definition seems ultimately to rest upon not becoming a subject, it relies on a kind of zero-level of subjectivity: one is only a subject from a place outside of it, the subject is only a subject where the subject escapes itself. This is also operative in a specific way in the issue of (neuro)psychologization: one answers the interpellative

call of the neuropsi-sciences by identifying precisely with the objective and eventually empty position of science. One subjectivizes oneself from a zero-level of subjectivity one shares with science from where one delegates in an interpassive way one's being to the *homunculus psychologicus* and/or the brain. In this particular case, the self-forgetfulness (to use Pfaller's term) involved is far from constituting an anti-ideological move as it seems to be firmly held in check by the hegemonic *discourse of the university*. Our not becoming a subject rests upon a prior submission to and identification with academia, eventually allowing little or no leeway whatsoever. Is this not a case of, to use the appropriate Althusserian expression, "ideology at its sharpest"[14]? At the very least, in the case of neuropsychologization the identification of the so-called layperson with the academic expert-positon allows the *psy-complex* to hold sway over the vast terrains of education, schooling, everyday life, work, politics... resulting that both personal and interpersonal issues can be controlled and governed in an academic and depoliticized way. Just consider how psy-experts now can be find in education, matters of law, humanitarian aid ..., up and to even in the torture chambers.[15]

However, maybe we are being a bit too carried away in our unleashing of the theory of interpassivity onto the phenomena of psychologization and neurologization. For, in his book *Interpassivity. The Aesthetics of Delegated Enjoyment* Pfaller makes a crucial remark on interpassive behaviour that we have to take into account: he argues that interpassivity allows for a selective contact with a thing in order to escape that very thing not only with regard to the enjoyment *but also with regard to belief* (the identification with an illusion).[16] Here we can return to Pfaller's interesting idea of *the naïve observer*: when a person delegates for example his or her enjoyment of watching movies to the recorder or to the hard disk, he or she does not really think that the device is doing the watching: this belief is only ascribed to a *naïve observer*, the person involved does not share it. In the same way, can we not say that while we all believe that we are our brain, this believe is only held by neuroscience and its naïve gaze? All the while we ourselves hold on to the idea that deep down inside us, at the level of our true intentions,

there is a core that science in the end cannot (or yet cannot) fathom. That is, in the same way that magic, as Pfaller explains, relies, in principle, on *not believing* in magic (what Pfallers calls "illusions without owners"[17]), do we not all look upon the findings of the neuropsy-experts with a certain scepticism and distance? Consider in this respect what philosopher Patricia Churchland argues in an interview when she asks, should we think "Gosh, the love that I feel for my child is really just neural chemistry?' Well, actually, yes, it is. But that doesn't bother me"[18]. The reason it does not bother her is then described by Churchland as follows: "Neuroscience doesn't provide a story about how to live a life". It is in the latter utterance that a certain distance comes in, a certain non-believing, a suspicion that ultimately equating the human being with its brain is not the end of the story. But of course, here the question changes again: is this a distance that challenges reductionism or that simply confirms it? That is, are we not simply, but in a very specific and somewhat reversed way, back with the post-ideological form of ideology *par excellence*: "I know very well, but nonetheless"[19]? That is, perhaps we only fully subscribe to the dictum 'we are our brain' by holding on to the suspicion that there is, on a certain level or from a certain perspective, more to us than just wetware: *nonetheless, we know very well that we are but our brain*. At the least, this seems to entail that, if magic never had believers – Pfaller writes "it always happened against better knowledge"[20] – science by contrast clearly produces its aficionados and even its zealous radicals, i.e. those who marvel to be their brain and who engage on a mission to convince the whole world. It is precisely their own non-belief that constitutes the very strength of their mission.

But if at this point, if a theory of interpassivity does not seem to allow on the emancipatory potential of the interpellative dynamics of the neuropsi-sciences, then perhaps our current changing socio-cultural and political-economic predicaments caused by digitalization actually make this conundrum obsolete. That is, the discussion whether the spear that caused the wound is also the tool to heal it (or, alternatively, whether using the tool again in this way only means further poking into the wound and aggravating it), might become superfluous as one sees oneself confronted in the meantime with other weapons such as fire

arms.[21] Here, is it not clear that the most central way in which today's interpassive subjectivity is mobilised no longer passing in the first instance over neuropsychological discourses, but, rather, is something which takes place in the terrains of digitality and virtuality, where subjectivity is given form without, at least at first sight, the involvement of mediating and interpellating discourses. That is, if in interpassivity the outsourcing and eventually the 'not doing' provides the basis for the fulfilment of desire[22], is this precisely what cyberspace is all about? We are more and more relieved of our duties as increasingly algorithms take over and take care of a good deal of our being human: now, instead of our *homunculus psychologicus* or our brain, it is our digital avatar who is living our life in our place. And perhaps something changes when interpassivity goes digital: that is, if I already questioned the potential emancipatory aspect of interpassivity within neuropsychologization, it seems that in the digital sphere the chances for preserving leeway even grow dimmer. Consider how Pfaller describes interpassivity as something opening up a kind of escape route:

> The rituals of interpassivity, its 'little gestures of disappearance', resemble acts of magic. Just as Haitians liked to spare themselves the need to kill their enemies by carefully piercing a doll, hordes of interpassivists spare themselves entire evenings in front of the television by carefully programming their recording devices.[23]

Today, however, hordes of interpassivists do spend entire evenings (and days and nights) connected to digital devices in order to spare themselves from the task of living. Moreover, is here the digital not eventually overruling entirely the 'little gestures of disappearance' that used to be made possible by the mechanism of interpassivity? For, while we outsource our being to our avatar and to the virtual, we ourselves can no longer partially retreat or disappear. Not only everything we do in the virtual is traced, datafied and profiled, but we are even called upon to entrust everything we do in our so-called 'real life' to Big Data. All sorts of technology (e.g. payment technology, traffic control, camera recognition and so on) and our portables and wearables make us increasingly fully traceable in time and space. Hence the "little gestures of disappearance"

make no sense anymore? We are doomed to be present all the time and in all kinds of ways.

Here, the naïve question could be: what will this do with the psychology of the human being? How does digital technology affect our psychology and/or our brain? However, to immediately counter this it should be clear that the theories of the neuropsy-sciences are already in play and in place in the way that we are datafied, profiled and traced. As Gillespie put it, "information providers rely on neuropsychological research in designing the algorithms".[24] Obviously, this compromises fundamentally the use of neuropsychology to understand digitalized subjectivity: the neuropsychogical theories are precisely underpinning the digitalisation of (inter)subjectivity. So instead of taking the path of trying to discern the (neuro)psychological effects of digitalization, or, more modestly, claiming that Facebook, Google and the like teach us a lot on the psychology of the human being, we should ask what (neuro)psychological models are precisely stuffed into social media and other digital platforms, we should track down the neuropsychological theories within the technologies, the algorithms and the codes. Pfaller's theory of interpassivity might be helpful here.

Digitalization and interpassivity

At the last World Economic Forum at Davos George Soros launched an attack against Facebook and Google, calling them "a menace to society".[25] Soros sees the menace not only on a societal level, that is, as a threat to democracy and the integrity of elections, but also on a personal level, that is, social media deceive their users by manipulating their attention and deliberately engineer addiction to the services they provide. This, Soros adds, can be very harmful, particularly for adolescents. In this psychologizing understanding of digitalization Soros joined others commentators, some of them Silicon Valley entrepreneurs themselves.[26] Marc Benioff, American internet entrepreneur, author and philanthropist (dixit Wikipedia), for example, argued that Facebook should be regulated like a cigarette company because of its addictive

and harmful effects. Roger McNamee, an early investor in Facebook, described both it and Google as threats to public health. And even more clearly, one of Facebook's founding chairmen Sean Parker described the operational principle of Facebook as to "hack people's psychology to hook them", adding to this the outcry "God only knows what it's doing to our children's brains".[27]

If these attacks could incite slogans such as *save our psychology* or *save our brains from Facebook* and the like, the theory of interpassivity might help to view this from a different angle. Let me begin by referring to Jacques Lacan and more in particular to a passage which is also for Pfaller a key to understanding interpassivity. In his seminar *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* Lacan argued the following concerning the function of the Chorus in Greek tragedy:

> Your emotions are taken charge of by the healthy order displayed on the stage. The Chorus takes care of them. The emotional commentary is done for you … Therefore, you don't have to worry; even if you don't feel anything, the Chorus will feel in your stead. Why after all can one not imagine that the effect on you may be achieved, at least a small dose of it, even if you didn't tremble that much?[28]

The central insight here is that the emotions and the psychology only see light in the outsourcing of itself. The human being does not do emotions, neither it does the trembling: that is what the Chorus is for. Hence, it would be a mistake to consider our psychology as a prior given which is then outsourced to or via a device. Our psychology is always elsewhere, so the idea that it is under threat of being manipulated or even expropriated by technology, as Soros and the other commentators have it, misses the logic of interpassivity which is most centrally involved here. For Soros and the others there is something *beyond* and also *before* datafication: that is, some kind of essentialist humanity, arguably definable in neuropsychological terms. This is where Soros and co-plead for the regulation of social media and internet technologies: to reclaim our psychology, to safeguard some kind of a prior *agalma* of the human being. Against this essentially philanthropist[29] move to a psychoanalytic critique can show, aided by the theory of interpassivity,

that it is precisely this fantasy, that the human being's essence can be positively defined (in psychological and brain-related terms), that fuels datafication and allows for the commodification of subjectivity. To go fast here, the issue is not our psychology being hacked by technology, but, rather, of us being hooked into a technology via attributing us with a psychology. That is, as we are denied our essentially psychology-free default position as described by Lacan, we are designated our digital and virtual avatars that are attributed with a psychology and with feelings which we, as a kind of puppet master, are supposed to set in motion.

Am I here not sketching *(neuro)psychologization 2.0*, decisively different from the *(neuro)psychologization 1.0* described earlier? That is, if (neuro)psychologization 1.0 relied on the scientific interpellation, involving an identification primordially with the expert position, in (neuro)psychologization 2.0, in contrast, interpellation can be simply bypassed: we are no longer hailed to look upon ourselves as the *homo (neuro)psychologicus* as this (neuro)psychologization is done, a priori, by the digital environment itself and in the design of our avatars. Hence, have we not finally outsourced (neuro)psychologization itself to technology? Or, to put it in more Foucauldian terms, we no longer have to auto-govern ourselves: the governance once outsourced to our psychological selves and brains can now be handed over to our avatars and smart environments. Is then the end of the subject of ideology, the end of interpellation tout-court? Think in this respect of the didactics of Circle Time I mentioned earlier in which school children are interpellated each morning in a psychologized way: "*How Do You Feel Today?*" Take a look on the "Emotions Chart"![30] It is clear that the presence of the children invoked in this way, differs significantly from the taking attendances in earlier times where education was above all centred on discipline and knowledge: in those times uttering a simple 'present' sufficed to answer the calling of names. However, when in psychologized times your required presence became a psychological one (as you had to report your psycho-emotional state within the required format), in digital times an interpellative call is even no longer necessary. Not only your presence and your whereabouts can be electronically verified (some schools already use tracking technology and ditto devices, so taking attendances

is no longer necessary), but even "real-time mood-tracking devices" (smart cameras allegedly able to detect human emotions) can be used to assess your emotional state so as to adapt your learning content for that day (or perhaps arrange a meeting with the school psychologist).[31] At the least, while the psychologized and neurologized subject was interpellated via inducing it into academic theories, the digitalized subject is not necessarily called upon to share the theoretical outlook. That is, as the prospect of using these "real-time mood-tracking devices" shows, data gathering and handling can function perfectly without a knowing subject. Social media prompt us to like this, to be sorry for that, to buy this… without us having to know the coded rationale behind all that. Hence, in contrast to the psychologist and the neuroscientist, Big Data does not care whether one knows or not: we do not need to be educated in theories about what is driving us: data-technology and algorithms work silently in the background simply drive, guide and steer our behaviour. It suffices to prescript our avatars and preconfigure our digital environments with the help of psychological models.

Does this not mean that interpassivity is mobilised within digitalization in a totally different way than before the essentialisation of technology? To answer this, let us first return to how interpassivity functioned within (neuro)psychologization 1.0. While (neuro)psychologization 1.0 called into being an interpassive psychologised subject (letting the redoubled *homo [neuro]psychologicus* doing the being), one could argue that, on the other hand, (neuro)psychologization was always already a denouncing of interpassivity itself, perhaps first and foremost of older forms of interpassivity. Think in this respect of Slavoj Žižek's example of the hired mourners which in certain societies are engaged to do the mourning and grieving at the funeral: they allow the relatives of the deceased to be at ease and to bother not if they actually do not feel that much so that they can deal with more mundane matters such as the dividing of the heritage.[32] Are it not these kinds of interpassive outsourcing of emotions which are under attack in the era of psychologization? That is, in psychologized times we are precisely called upon to express our feelings, we are not allowed to deny them, we are urged to let them flow

and deal with them (in the appropriate way of course). One could compare this with the reformationist religious movements mentioned by Pfaller as these denounce the supposedly empty rituals of traditional religious practices.[33] Reformationists thus oppose the interpassive modus of believing (the outsourcing of believing via for example monotonous praying or other rituals actions or artefacts) and urge the believer to do the believing for him or herself. Is in the same way the psychological interpellation not interpellating us in the first place to fall together with our emotions, to not deny them or outsource them? Of course, the paradox is that this only leads to a secondary interpassivity, where the emotions are eventually located with the homo [neuro]psychologicus we are said to be. Precisely this primary call to vouch for our psychological states, is easily traceable with social media such as Facebook, urging us to express our emotions and to share them with our friends. But there too one can eventually discern the validity of Pfallers contention that the leaps of reform in religion do not succeed in dispelling interpassivity but only render the interpassive dimension of religion more and more invisible.[34] That is, in the social media's call to coincide with our feelings only new and more hidden forms of interpassivity are prepared. Think how for a lot of people Facebook is something which one opens once a day (as if it were a ritual) in order to disperse some likes, share a post or two, report this or that and then to log off and return to the daily businesses. Hence, there is no subject involved: one simply lets his or her avatar lead its little life along the pre-configured paths.

Is the conclusion here that digitalisation after all brings not that much new, as it still allows for a non-engaged, non subjectivized subject (if I am allowed to put it this way)? So, the task of critical theory would still be to render the invisible visible, that is, to show what is hidden in plain sight: the interpassive character of digitalized subjecitivity. However, and here I am compelled to make a decisive turn in my argument: perhaps the heightened invisibility of interpassivity 2.0 does signify a new turn in the realm of subject formations, due to its enhanced capability to pre-structure our environment and life world (pre-psychologizing our avatars and social interactions) and its bypassing of the classic academic interpellation). That is, besides the already hinted-at capability

of digitalisation to our presence in so-called 'real life' into its reach (making us fully traceable in time and space), perhaps the more decisive issue is that it is able to even pull our very *absence* into its economy. For, if in the understanding of Pfaller interpassivity entailed little pockets of non-subjectivation and allowed for a minimal leeway, is digitalization not able, for the first time, to truly control and thus exploit this very aspect of *not being there* itself? So perhaps, instead of merely arguing that in interpassivity 2.0 one cannot anymore disappear or leave the scene, it would be more concise to contend that it is precisely this very non-presence which is fed back into the system itself. Put differently, if the interpassivity of the religious ritual made possible that the religious subject can go away,[35] the digitalized subject's going away is contained by the web and the internet itself. Ultimately, not being on Facebook actually necessitates one to have a Facebook account.

Perhaps this allows to understand the recent changed policies of Facebook: this is what Mark Zuckerberg announced:

> The research shows that when we use social media to connect with people we care about, it can be good for our well-being. We can feel more connected and less lonely, and that correlates with long term measures of happiness and health. On the other hand, passively reading articles or watching videos – even if they're entertaining or informative -- may not be as good.[36]

Zuckerberg seemingly wants to activate us into mere passive enjoyment or an intake of knowledge? Not good! We have to engage with others, apparently for our own psychological well-being. However, again, we should read through this psychologizing and objectifying philanthropist move and discern how Zuckerberg is trying to secure his business model. Is in the first place his attack on passivity not also an attack on interpassivity? What Zuckerberg wants to counter is that the subject recedes and then takes leave by letting your account and your algorithms cater you with news, movies and video's and enjoying all this in your place? This is not good for Zuckerberg! Not good perhaps for the simple reason that merely interpassive behaviour which allows the subject to disappear does not provide Facebook with much useful data

to be commodified. Hence, wanting to address this, Zuckerberg, in all his sovereignty, makes it clear:

> Based on this, we're making a major change to how we build Facebook. I'm changing the goal I give our product teams from focusing on helping you find relevant content to helping you have more meaningful social interactions.[37]

Hence, the business model of Facebook is not about delivering content to be consumed interpassively, but to incite you by way of your Facebook avatar to produce "more meaningful social interactions". Does this not show that, concerning the digitalization of subjectivity, there is still a minimal interpellation involved? That is, you are continually called back to Facebook, your interpassive going away and you're not having "meaningful social interactions" must be countered by Facebook in order to lead you back to the system. However, does this not mean in the end that digitality as such does allow for little absences, little moments of non-subjectivity which social media corporations then try to neutralise and bring back into their economy? But, perhaps we are missing something here: are we not too rapidly assuming that it is the "meaningful social interactions" which are datafied and commodified by social media businesses? For if it is the case, as I have argued, that social media and the like are a priori stuffed with socio-psychological models, then, for sure, the mere reproduction of that psychology by the users cannot really produce something new and engender a surplus value. So, the issue of leading the vanishing and wandering subject back to the platform in order to produce the psycho-social data might be not really the issue at stake. Perhaps, Pfaller's elaboration on a redoubled pleasure in interpassivity might help us to see thing still in other way:

> The mischievous pleasure, which appears in some cases of interpassivity, such as that described by Žižek, seems to rest on the dual character of this withdrawal: having escaped both enjoying and the illusion of enjoyment, and having delegated both to someone else, seems to be enormous fun. First, one withdraws from the enjoyment, then from the illusion of it – and apparently that produces new, even greater enjoyment.[38]

Thus, on social media and similar platforms, I myself do not have to perform the required standard socio-psychological role: my avatar does all the prescribed enjoying of life and the enjoying of social interactions. Hence, as a result, the extra pleasure: the surplus enjoyment realized is the pleasure of being no-body. Is it not precisely this fun, the fun of having left the building, that is cashed in by digital capitalism of which Facebook is a prime example? Digital capitalism does not feed on our outsourced 'fake subjectivities'; it does not feed on the pre-coded and the preconfigured psychology which can be endlessly digitally reproduced, rather, it is the surplus enjoyment of our interpassive outsourcing that digital exploitation eventually extracts from us.

To illustrate is let me cite here the transcript of a famous PlayStation TV Commercial: 'Double Life' (1999):

> For years, I've lived a double life. In the day, I do my job—I ride the bus, roll up my sleeves with the hoi-polloi ... but at night, I live a life of exhilaration ... of missed heartbeats and adrenalin ... and, if the truth be known ... a life of dubious virtue. ... I won't deny I've been engaged in violence, even indulged in it. ... I've maimed and killed adversaries, and not merely in self-defense. ... I've exhibited disregard for life ... limb ... and property ... and savored every moment. ... You may not think it, to look of me ... but I have commanded armies ... and conquered worlds. ... And though, in achieving these things ... I've set morality aside ... I have no regrets. ... For though I've led a double life, at least I can say ... I have lived.[39]

Hence, the minimal interpellation involved in the digitalization of subjectivity, might be understood in yet another way: you are called to fake and to feign (to have a double life) because you joyously know what the human being really wants, desires or craves.[40] The PlayStation commercial thus does not show the exploitation of our true psychological, neurobiological make-up (e.g. our innate and evolutionary determined thirst for murder and transgression), but rather, *it cashes in the self-evident of our theoretical beliefs of what it is to be human*. So, what I have called the classic academic interpellation in which the subject is called upon to identify with the expert position to look at the *homo neuropsychologicus* he or she is said to be, is precisely what is

put to work in digitality. That is, the identification with the academic gaze (the identification with the non-subjective objective point of view) is in a second movement fed into the system itself. The enjoyment exploited by PlayStation, and in digitality as such, is not primitive, transgressive enjoyment, it is the "even greater enjoyment" that sees light when the human being takes a step back and interpassively engage in its little gestures of disappearance.

Conclusion

Ray Kurzweil, American author, computer scientist, inventor and futurist (according to Wikipedia), argued that it will soon be possible to upload the brain to a supercomputer.[41] Of course, it is clear that, if one were in fact able to successfully upload a person or a subject, this uploaded entity would be doomed from the very start. That is to say, connected to the internet, the brain would become megalomaniacal and absorb all available knowledge: it would expand in uncontrollable ways, infinitely metamorphosise, become all the things in the world, if not, for that matter, become the world itself and thus dissolve as such. Perhaps we can understand this within the theory of interpassivity: in the same way as in religious rituals the religious subject can go away, here, once the uploading/outsourcing is done, the initiator can leave the scene and it is precisely this I would argue, would lead the uploaded personality to wither away in informational entropy.[42]

One could connect this to another thought well-known experiment, that is, the movie series *The Matrix*. The baseline of the story is that as machines and technology have become autonomous they tap electricity and energy from the human beings for their survival. The humans are held prisoners in a kind of embryonic water-filled cradles and are connected to a supercomputer which generates a virtual reality, this is the Matrix, meant to keep the humans alive so that energy can harvested from them. This is how one of the machines relates the history of the Matrix:

> Did you know that the first Matrix was designed to be a perfect
> human world where none suffered, where everyone would be

happy? It was a disaster. No one would accept the program. Entire crops were lost. Some believed that we lacked the programming language to describe your "perfect world". But I believe that, as a species human beings define their reality through misery and suffering. So the perfect world was a dream that your primitive cerebrum kept trying to wake up from. – Agent Smith to Morpheus[43]

Can we not say that the first Matrix established a fully scripted scene informed by the mainstream (socio)psychological theories? Along these lines, one could argue that it was in the first place *the avatars* withered away –in the same way that Kurzweil's uploaded personalities would come to a halt— as the virtual world came to a stand-still as a result of the endless circular repetition and reproduction of the established socio-psychological codes and algorithms. Hence, what becomes clear in both The Matrix and the fantasy of Kurzweil –and also in the latest move of Mark Zuckerberg as described above – is that digitality needs to involve a minimal form of interpassivity, and as already mentioned, a minimal form of interpellation establishing a zero-level of subjectivity; something on the outside, to be then drawn in. Only then a surplus enjoyment can be created which not only secures the further digital flow but can also be harvested. This is why the Matrix needs its renegades, its awakeners, its Morpheus, its Neo, its Oracle. Those who allegedly escape are eventually the backbone of the second Matrix, they make the Matrix function. The outside drawn in, or what Lacan calls, "extimity"[44], is what stalls informational entropy. Now here we need to ask the final and crucial question: could this function, would digitality really be able to fully draw interpassivity into its jurisdiction? That is, would it be possible to algorithmically stage and code the very interpassive and subjectless subject? This, I claim, is eventually the same question Pfaller poses:

> Can my representing agent also let him or herself be represented by someone (or something) else? And for whom does that new agent then experience the pleasure – for the other agent or for me?[45]

Thus, is this not the question: is interpassive delegation possible *ad infinitum*? And further: can it be thus redoubled endlessly within itself? And, from here, could this *perpetuum mobile* be held in check, contained symbolically, or, in terms more appropriate for our discussion, could it be digitalized and thus commodofied? Of course, here we are slowly moving to the question, would the sophisticated Pfallerian and psychoanalytic conception of the human being as interpassive be codable and algoritmitizable? Or, differently still: would it be possible to base the second Matrix on a psychoanalytic conception of the subject instead of the mainstream psychological model it was first informed by?

Clearly, psychoanalysis is not a psychology. Lacan, as well know, refrained from a psychological approach of subjectivity, he for example did not define the subject as such, but opted for defining the contours of the subject. He thus argued that "the signifier is that what represents the subject for another signifier"[46]. This is Lacan's matheme: S1 - $ - S2. The subject is but a position: divided over two signifiers, it is itself but a zero-level of subjectivity. Now consider in this with respect to the software-developer Dave Winer's contention: "Connect persons to data objects to persons. That's the social today."[47] Which could be written as: *person(s) – code – person(s)*. Is this not precisely the opposite of the notation of the Lacanian subject as a divided subject? In the *person-code-person* series, the person is no longer split; he or she is pinned down, he or she is datafied. Or, as Alexander Galloway puts it regarding cybernetics: "cybernetics refashions the world as a system and refashions the subject as an agent".[48] Hence, the interpellation of Winer's 'connection' does not envision to give rise to a subject, but, rather, incites agents to produce data. But although this datafication seems to prepare the commodification of subjectivity, is this not, as argued, the situation which eventually will come to a halt, as it fails to engage the zero-level of subjectivity which is arguably the motor of surplus-subjectivity? That is, the data one produces upon the digital interpellation cannot but repeat the preconfigured data stemming from the models of the human being that were coded into the system. This repetition of sterile data, arguably, cannot but lead the system to a staggering halt. Here we return to a daring question: would it be possible to code the second Matrix starting

from the non-psychology of psychoanalysis and avoid the databubble from bursting as it would inevitably succumb under its own weight? Bring in the psychoanalysts to guard us against informational entropy (and save the business model of social media)?

But perhaps, in the same way that according to Pfaller, theory cannot tell art what to think –it can only tell art what it does not need to think[49] – a psychoanalytic critique also cannot tell how avatars how their environments should be designed. If psychoanalysis is basically a critique on psychology (see Lacan's awry definition of subjectivity above), it cannot cater for a new, alternative psychology. Consequently, if for example the problem with the neurosciences is that they cannot but rely on a prior psychology (which they try to trace in the brain), psychoanalysis cannot cater for an alternative psychology to be used: psychoanalysis can only tell neuroscience *what it does not need in order to think*. So, when it comes to designing digitality, again psychoanalysis cannot tell how to design the digital subject or its lifeworld: it can only deliver a critique, it can only tell *what does not need to be thought*, it can only lay bare the problematic psychological models underpinning the design of digital technologies.

Of course, this is troublesome. Think of Dutch media philosopher Geert Lovink as well as the reformationist critiques of George Soros and co, who at a given point argues for the nationalisation of Facebook.[50] But does this not beg the question, how would these public, non-commercial social media be designed? For example, would it retain emoticons? Would it still prompt users to express their feelings? Would it ask for 'likes'? Would it remind you to post something, or remind you of interesting stories you missed when you were offline for a while? Moreover, what algorithms would be used to put news or posts in your feed? In short, besides which images of society and of the human being would be in vigor? So how would the designers proceed after being briefed by psychoanalysis on what it does not need to think? Would an option be to try to create minimalized neutral spaces, for example, to ensure democracy and individuality? Of course, there one would be rapidly engaging the common image of the human being and its human rights, and as well known, this does not lead us to uncontested grounds.

Hence the exclamation "another world is possible" today seems to be confronted with the riddle, "would another digitality be possible?", one that would be able to account for both that "society does not exist" and "subjectivity does not exist"?

At the very least, if this entails that a neutral position is not possible, and thus a partisan and political stance cannot be avoided, then from the side of psychoanalysis the bottom line should be that "subjectivity will not be digitalized". Even though there is this other Lacanian notation concerning the subject, namely that of the fantasy, which at first sight would give software developers hope. Lacan's matheme of the fantasy situates the split subject *vis-à-vis* the *objet a*: $ ◊ a. This is of course connected to the previous mentioned notation of subjectivity as it brings in the *object a* as both cause and object of desire. As Lacan understands the fantasy in the Freudian tradition as a little scenario underpinning once symptomatology and hence one's subjectivity (as a rule in the form of a little sentence, e.g. Freud's "a child has been beaten"[51]), it is hard not to understand it as an algorithm.[52] However, the crucial element in the matheme is the *object a*, which I would argue, as cause and object of desire, is in the end a non-assimilable object: it is not just merely an unknown x that could be fed into computation. It is, rather, a singular object, which, although Lacan has assigned it "the status of an algebraic sign",[53] is not merely a formal factor as it is defined as the remnant left behind by the introduction of the Symbolic in the Real. Hence, situated at the side of the Real one could attribute the *objet a* a materiality, albeit a peculiar materiality.[54] As signalling the void, *objet a* has itself no substantial consistence, however, as object and cause of desire it remains on the side of the analogue, not to be digitalized or virtualized. *Object a* hence cannot be fed back into the system: *objet a* will not be digitalized. Today's digitality pretends to be able to do this, it dreams of that, and we know how powerful in this day and age illusions are when they go virtual. It is the partisan task of critique to say that digitality should not need to think that it can digitalize the *objet a*.

[1] Robert Pfaller, *Interpassivity: The Aesthetics of Delegated Enjoyment* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 7.

[2] Think of the Freudian idea that pleasure in thinking is to be related to infantile sexuality, and more in particular, to the sexual enigmas the child is confronted with (what is the sexual difference between male and female, where do the children come from…) and which incites the infant to engage in thinking and formulating theories. See: Sigmund Freud, "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality. Se, 7: 123-243.," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud: Vol. Vii*, ed. J. Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1905d)..

[3] Pfaller, 7.

[4] Ibid., 51.

[5] Ibid., 6.

[6] Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 2007).

[7] Jan De Vos, *Psychologisation in Times of Globalisation* (London: Routledge, 2012).

[8] *The Metamorphoses of the Brain. Neurologization and Its Discontents* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

[9] Ibid.

[10] http://www.chadd.org/Understanding-ADHD/For-Parents-Caregivers/Teens/ADHD-Information-for-Teens.aspx

[11] L. Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (London: New Left Books, 1971).

[12] Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire, Livre Xvii: L'envers De La Psychanalyse 1969-1970*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Seuil, 1991).

[13] Pfaller, 8.

[14] Althusser.

[15] De Vos, *Psychologisation in Times of Globalisation; Psychologization and the Subject of Late Modernity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

[16] Robert Pfaller, *Interpassivity. The Aesthetics of Delegated Enjoyment* (Edinburgh: University Press, 2017), 7-8.

[17] *On the Pleasure Principle in Culture. Illusions without Owners* (London: Verso, 2014).

[18] Patricia Smith Churchland, "The Benefits of Realising You're Just a Brain (Interview by Graham Lawton)," *New Scientist*, no. 2945 (2013).

[19] Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), 18.

[20] Pfaller, *Interpassivity. The Aesthetics of Delegated Enjoyment*, 9.

[21] Is it not so that the question of the emancipatory potentials of the printed word was overtaken by the issues posed by the new technologies of mechanical reproduction such as photography and moving images?

[22] Pfaller, *Interpassivity. The Aesthetics of Delegated Enjoyment*, 14.

[23] Ibid., 8.

[24] Tarleton Gillespie, "The Relevance of Algorithms," in *Media Technologies: Essays on Communication, Materiality, and Society*, ed. Tarleton Gillespie, Pablo J. Boczkowski, and Kirsten A. Foot (London: MIT, 2014).

[25] George Soros, "Remarks Delivered at the World Economic Forum," (2018), https://www.georgesoros.com/2018/01/25/remarks-delivered-at-the-world-economic-forum/.

[26] Olivia Solon, "George Soros: Facebook and Google a Menace to Society," *The Guardian* (2018), https://www.theguardian.com/business/2018/jan/25/george-soros-facebook-and-google-are-a-menace-to-society.

[27] Lance Ulanoff, "Sean Parker Made Billions Off of Facebook. Today He Basically Called It Evil.," *Mashable* (2017), https://mashable.com/2017/11/09/sean-parker-slams-facebook/#gVnUWCGJ1mqc.

[28] Jacques Lacan, *Seminar Vii, the Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959–1960*, ed. J.A. Miller, trans. D. Porter (London: Routledge, 1992), 247.

[29] This is the strange paradox of the superrich, those elevated beyond the conundrums of daily human existence, that see themselves as the saviours of our common humanness.

[30] See for example: https://www.twinkl.co.uk/resource/esl-how-do-you-feel-today-emotions-chart-t-s-1056

[31] As decribed in: B Williamson, "Psychological Surveillance and Psycho-Informatics in the Classroom," *Code acts in education* (2017), https://codeactsineducation.wordpress.com/2017/01/17/psycho-surveillance-classroom/.

[32] Slavoj Žižek, *How to Read Lacan* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006), 26.

[33] Pfaller, *Interpassivity. The Aesthetics of Delegated Enjoyment*, 63.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid., 62.

[36] Mark Zuckerberg, "One of Our Big Focus Areas for 2018," (2018), https://www.facebook.com/zuck/posts/10104413015393571.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Pfaller, *On the Pleasure Principle in Culture. Illusions without Owners*, 18.

[39] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Bqq38WZctA; transcript on: http://www.adweek.com/creativity/has-any-commercial-had-a-better-cast-of-characters-than-this-legendary-playstation-ad/

[40] Here one could discern the logic of perversion: the pervert is he or she claiming to possess a knowledge on *jouissance* and who confronts the other with this in order to incite the latter's division.

[41] Ray Kurzweil, "Live Forever—Uploading the Human Brain... Closer Than You Think," *Psychology Today* (2000), http://www.psychologytoday.com/articles/200001/live-forever; *The Singularity Is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology* (New York: Viking, 2005).

[42] Of course, here I understand entropy in opposition to Norbert Wiener's well-known position: for Wiener the increase of information is stalling entropy. See: Norbert Wiener,

The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society (London: Free Association Books, 1989[1950]). The fate I ascribe to Kurzweil's uploaded personalities would point to the possibility of an entropy related to the increase of information itself.

[43] https://www.quotes.net/mquote/60289

[44] Lacan, *Ecrits: The First Complete Edition in English*.

[45] Pfaller, *Interpassivity. The Aesthetics of Delegated Enjoyment*, 33.

[46] Lacan, *Ecrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, 713.

[47] Cited in: Geert Lovink, "What Is the Social in Social Media?," *e-flux journal* 40, no. 12 (2012).

[48] Alexander R Galloway, "The Cybernetic Hypothesis," *differences* 25, no. 1 (2014): 113.

[49] Pfaller, *Interpassivity. The Aesthetics of Delegated Enjoyment*, 92.

[50] Geert Lovink, "What Is the Social in Social Media," in *E-flux Journal* (2012).

[51] Sigmund Freud, "A Child Is Being Beaten. A Contribution to the Study of the Origin of Sexual Perversions " in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud: Vol. Xvii*, ed. J. Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, [1919]1955).

[52] Lacan himself uses the world algorithm, e.g. Lacan, *Ecrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, 487.

[53] Cited in: Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (London/New York: Routledge, 1996), 128.

[54] Jan De Vos, "Which Materialism? Questioning the Matrix of Psychology, Neurology, Psychoanalysis and Ideology Critique," *Theory & psychology* 24, no. 1 (2014).

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