

Multiple Selves and the Internet Age

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This essay examines the claim common in accounts of the digital culture that we are witnessing the appearance of a new form of multiple or decentered identity. I argue that we should be wary of accepting these claims, as they are mostly unsubstantiated. In particular, I closely examine the claims and arguments presented in two extended discussions of the multiple self in the age of the Internet, Rosanne Stone's account of identity in *The War of Desire and Technology at the Close of the Mechanical Age* and Mark Poster's discussion of the mode of information in *The Mode of Information* and *The Second Media Age*. While these works present us with intriguing insights into an emerging postmodern, digital culture, they fail to support their key claims. I begin by briefly considering the kinds of claims commonly made about the nature of self-identity in the age of the Internet. Following this, I examine Stone's and Poster's arguments suggesting that we have entered a new historical age that transforms our understanding of agency and presents a radical challenge to modernist notions of the self. In the final section I critique the background assumptions that these arguments rely on and briefly contrast it with an alternative approach to thinking about the multiple self.

I

While it is difficult to pinpoint what exactly is being claimed in discussions about the digital culture and self-identity, it is clear that there has been a sustained interest from both critics and proponents of the new digital age in the impact of new forms of technology on our self-understanding and self-conception. From a number of different quarters, embracing a divergent set of theoretical presuppositions, in both trade books and academic texts from university presses, in news magazines and daily newspapers, comes the claim that our interactions with technology, especially digital technology, is leading to a significant transformation of the self. That transformation is often put in the context of a paradigm-shift from the modernist, centered, self to a postmodernist, decentered, self. Examples of this claim are not hard to come by.

Mark Slouka's *War of the Worlds* and Sven Birkert's *The Gutenberg Elegies* both take the computer to task for leading to a decline in key aspects of Western culture. Chapter two of Slouka's text, titled "Springtime for Schizophrenia: The Assault on Identity," argues that cyberspace and the kinds of role-playing possible on networked computers makes it possible to engage in a kind of identity play not previously possible. Once the boundaries are taken away from the physical world and we are able to roam freely through the virtual one, there will be no constraints on our developing egos and we will be led to a situation in which our avatars take on more and more substance. Birkerts, too, suggests that our on-line assignations will eventually lead to a transformation in the self. In a common rhetorical trope in this literature, Birkerts distinguishes between reading in a print culture and scanning a screen in an electronic culture. Where reading a book fosters depth, individuality, and the emergence of a private self, scanning the screen

is antithetical to inwardness, solitude, singleness of focus and attention. “Being online and having the subjective experience of depth, of existential coherence, are mutually exclusive situations....electricity and inwardness are fundamentally discordant” (Birkerts 1994, 219).

In *Virtual Communities*, Howard Rheingold argues that computer-mediated communication (cmc) can change us on three levels, including on the level of the individual human being. Rheingold argues that cmc media seem to dissolve boundaries of identity (Rheingold 1993, 147). Drawing on the work of Elizabeth Reid and Kenneth Gergen, Rheingold suggests that our perceptions, thoughts, and personalities are affected by the ways we use cmc. “MUDs are living laboratories for studying the first-level impacts of virtual communities—the impacts on our psyches, on our thoughts and feelings as individuals” (Rheingold 1993, 146). In a series of influential and widely anthologized essays, Reid, argues that MUDs are tantamount to identity workshops encouraging a flexibility in self-presentation. “The [MUD] player is the most problematic of all virtual entities, for his or her virtual manifestation has no constant identity. MUD characters need not be of any fixed gender or appearance, but may evolve, mutate, morph over time and at the whim of their creator....The player does not constitute a fixed reference point in the MUD universe” (Reid 1994). Social psychologist Kenneth Gergen has termed this phenomenon of the self occupying multiple perspectives “the saturated self.” According to Gergen, communications technologies saturate us with the various voices of humankind and lead to a self that is without foundations, an incoherent, fragmentary self in which the notion of authentic self-identity is lost. Gergen writes, “There is a populating of the self, reflecting the infusion of partial identities through

social saturation. And there is the onset of a multiphrenic condition, in which one begins to experience the vertigo of unlimited multiplicity” (Gergen 1991, 49). Similar claims are made in Sherry Turkle’s *Life on the Screen*, Walter Truett Anderson’s *The Future of the Self*, and in the work of Jay David Bolter.

I have briefly cited these accounts to suggest the widespread nature of the belief that our increasingly technology-mediated lives will lead to transformed understandings of the self and subjectivity. But while this belief might be widespread, it is not at all clear nor are the reasons in support of it apparent. It is not clear, for instance, in what manner the self is being transformed nor what the nature of that transformed self will be. Various adjectives are adduced, including decentered, multiple, fragmented, heterogeneous, as if they were equivalent. The nature of the causal role that technology plays in this transformation is not clear. Nor is it clear the extent of these transformations. In the next section, I turn to two of the more extended and developed scholarly discussions of these transformations we are said to be witnessing in order to address some of these issues.

II

Stone and Poster argue that we are entering a new historical situation in which communications technology challenge and transform existing definitions of the self. Stone suggests that the virtual age is giving birth to a new social space, which she refers to as the “technosocial,” in which technology is viewed as nature and has become invisible. This technosocial space gives rise to new collective structures and gives new meanings to presence, agency, identity, and the body. Cyberspace and computer networks become emblematic in the virtual age of the complex interaction between humans and machines and the kinds of interactions made possible in these new collective structures.

“The identities that emerge from these interactions—fragmented, complex, diffracted through the lenses of technology, culture, and new technocultural formations—seem to me to be, for better or worse, more visible as the critters we ourselves are in the process of becoming, here at the close of the mechanical age” (Stone 1995, 36). The intervention of these virtual technologies disrupts the warranting and authentication process of earlier technologies that tended to fix identities in place and produce unitary, monistic identities. Where earlier location technologies (Stone mentions psychological tests, census taking, phone numbers (Stone 1995, 39)) produce and maintain the bounded individual, in the mode of the technosocial, the elements once formerly suppressed in the warranting process reassert themselves, “irruptively constituting identities that are simultaneously technological and social.... This process is possible, in fact inevitable because the technosocial, the social mode of the computer nets, evokes unruly multiplicity as an integral part of social identity” (Stone 1995, 42). The technosocial creates a space for a transformative legitimization of multiplicity and undermines received social and cultural norms concerning the meaning of “person” and “body” (Stone 1995, 59).

Poster makes similar claims in regard to the mode of information, arguing that the introduction of new communications technologies has led to the emergence of a mode of signification in which new language structures, paradigms, and structures of discourse alter the way the subject processes signs into meaning (Poster 1990, 66). Poster contrasts print culture in which the stability, linearity, and isolated reception of print media constitutes the subject as a rational, autonomous ego, and the electronic culture in which language is self-referential and in which a bi-directional, decentered media provide new opportunities for a reconfigured subjectivity (Poster 1989, 139). Writing in *The Second*

Media Age, Poster explains, “My general thesis is that the mode of information enacts a radical reconfiguration of language, one which constitutes subjects outside the pattern of the rational, autonomous individual. This familiar modern subject is displaced by the mode of information in favor of one that is multiplied, disseminated and decentered, continuously interpellated as an unstable identity” (Poster 1995a, 57). Changes in communication patterns involve changes in the subject and our experiences with electronic media constitute us in different ways (Poster 1990, 11). As Poster observes, “Long or intense experience with computer-mediated electronic communication is associated with a certain fluidity of identity” (Poster 1995b, 90).

Stone and Poster imply that we are witnessing a paradigm shift in our conception of the self. While their emphases are somewhat divergent, central to both discussions is the key claim that the modernist, unified, centered self characteristic of print-based culture is being transformed by electronic media into a postmodernist, multiple, centered self. As we have seen, this claim is commonly made in the literature on the digital culture, and yet it raises a number of difficult questions. First, the claim is highly ambiguous and therefore questionable. Secondly, very little evidence is adduced in support of the claim. Permit me first to consider several ambiguities: whether the view of the modernist self being critiqued is a straw man; whether the causal connections between technology and the multiple self are clear; and whether the nature of the self in the digital culture is clear.

Discussions of the multiple self in the digital culture often take place against the background of a reified image of the self in Western culture. Stone and Poster take as their model of the modernist self one view of the self, typically a Cartesian or Kantian

view, that itself has often come in for criticism and represents only one strain in a complex history of philosophical and cultural accounts of the self in the past several hundred years. The view of the self most often critiqued by Stone and Poster is the rational, autonomous, unified, centered self as described by Descartes in his *Meditations* and other philosophical works. But Melford Spiro has argued that this putative Western self is a straw man and takes issue with the claim that this self represents the dominant tradition in Western thought and mentions a long list of theorists who have proposed alternative models, including William James and George Herbert Mead, David Hume's associationist model of the self, the psychoanalytic theories of Erik Erikson and Heinz Kohut, and the philosophical views of Karl Popper, Isaiah Berlin, and Marcia Cavell. D. W. Murray suggests that the essentialist, subjective selfhood that is often the point of critique is "outside of formal theology, a recent development, most associated with the rise of the Romanticist literary movement in the late 18th century" (Murray 1993, 9). Murray suggests that it is not at all clear that there is a single folk model of selfhood in the contemporary Western cultural system (Murray 1993, 18). Dorothy Holland and Andrew Kipnis, as well, argue that their research on American experiences of embarrassment suggests that there is heterogeneity in Western concepts of the person. All of this suggests that we lack a clear object of critique and that the contrast drawn between a modernist, centered self and a multiple, postmodern self has been overdrawn.

This last point raises questions in regard to the claim that we are witnessing a paradigm shift ushered in by technology. If no clear distinction in historical epochs between the modernist and postmodernist self can be drawn this would undermine the analytic power of such distinctions as the mechanical versus the virtual age, print versus

electronic cultures, or between different modes of signification, at least in regard to subjectivity. Indeed, while both Stone and Poster are wary of simplifying accounts of technology and Poster explicitly maintains that the mode of information merely has an analytic purpose, phrases like “print culture” and “digital culture” do take on a life of their own. When Poster suggests, for instance, that print culture and electronic culture constitute the subject in distinct fashion, both take on a reified air suggesting that there is indeed *a* print culture or *an* electronic culture.

Furthermore, the precise role of technology in this paradigm shift is left unclear in these accounts. While both Stone and Poster downplay causal claims, the tenor of their arguments strongly reinforce the claim that technology does indeed play an active, causal role in the production of the multiple self. Stone suggests she doesn’t wish to simplify the causal issue and the question of periodization (Stone 1995, 21), preferring to see this as part of cultural processes long underway (Stone 1995, 37). But she does claim that the process of creating new subjectivities is inevitable because the technosocial evokes unruly multiplicity as an integral part of social identity (Stone 1995, 42). Later she suggests that “ubiquitous technology...rearranges our thinking apparatus so that different thinking just is” (Stone 1995, 168). Poster similarly suggests that his position should not be interpreted as a form of technological determinism. But like Stone, he often places technology in the active role. The mode of information *enacts* a radical reconfiguration of language (Poster 1995, 57); he refers to the decentering effects of electronically mediated communication (Poster 1990, 18); in electronically mediated communications subjects float, “suspended between points of objectivity, being constituted and reconstituted in different configurations... (Poster 1990, 11). He compares the mode of information to a

slow earthquake bringing major changes to the constitution of subjectivity (Poster 1990, 113). The precise role of technology in this transformation is left ambiguous, then.

Related to this last point are questions about the precise nature of the self constituted by these new forms of technology. In suggesting that computers create a new species of humans, Poster alternatively describes this new species as decentered, dispersed, fluid, multiplied in continuous instability, no longer located in a fixed vantage point. Television advertisements, he writes, dissolves, disperses, and decontextualizes the subject (Poster 1990, 15). In the world of electronic music, the subject “has no anchor, no fixed place, no point of perspective, no discreet center, no clear boundary” (Poster 1990, 11). Stone too describes the subject in the technosocial mode as multiple, fragmented, unbounded, as made up of quasi-independent personalities. Discussions of the multiple self in the Internet age shift routinely shift among a variety of different and distinct models for understanding this self: Gergen’s saturated self, Emily Martin’s flexible self, Robert Jay Lifton’s protean self, Daniel Dennett’s multiple drafts model of the self. The difficulty with enumerating too long a descriptive list is that the descriptions fail to cohere and we are left unclear as to the nature of this form of subjectivity. Is a decentered self identical to a multiple self? Is a person composed of quasi-independent personalities the same as a fragmented person? Furthermore, the nature of this disunity is hard to comprehend. The multiple self could be understood as sequentially multiple, in the sense that it occupies diverse perspectives at distinct times, or multiple at the same time, two very different cases. Lacking a clear account of the nature of subjectivity as it is produced by new communications technology, we are unable to fully evaluate this key claim.

Jointly I think the above points suggest that Stone's and Poster's key claim regarding technology and subjectivity is ambiguous and perhaps driven by theoretical interests and analytic distinctions that don't hold up. These points also raise questions about the possible kinds of evidence that might be adduced in support of this claim. The primary mode of argument in both Stone and Poster is analogical, comparing the impact of earlier print technologies with the potential impact of digital technologies. These historical analogies, though, are very broad and lack the specificity necessary to establish claims about the impact of digital technologies on the self. Given the ambiguous nature of accounts of the modern versus postmodern self, the print age versus the digital age, or the mechanical versus the virtual age, historical analogies can bear little weight.

Indeed, it is fairly remarkable that while Stone claims that the very structure of meaning production by which we recognize each other as human is being called into question (Stone 1995, 173) and Poster suggests that computers are creating new species of humans, neither offers up any evidence to substantiate these claims. Indeed, much of this recently popular discussion of the multiple self and the Internet is highly impressionistic and anecdotal. When, for instance, Poster claims that "long or intense experience with computer-mediated electronic communication is associated with a certain fluidity of identity" (Poster 1995b, 90), he cites no evidence in support of this claim. Stone includes an account of the oft-discussed case of a male psychiatrist posing online as female and of a trial of a man accused of raping a woman with multiple personality disorder, but like Poster, her observations are largely theoretical and stay on the level of sweeping, cultural generalizations. While observations of this sort can often be valuable, they can also obscure important distinctions and differences that might

provide more detail about how people actually are using and responding to new communications technology. There is a notable lack of specificity in their discussions of the ways in which new technologies are being used and the way in which different technologies may be used differently. There is a presumption that MUDs, IRC, e-mail, home pages, are all being used the same way by everyone, suggesting that the impact of these technologies is uniform across the range of diverse subject-users/consumers. The actual subjects using the technologies never really appear in Poster's and Stone's analyses. Furthermore, given the difficulties with which social scientists have had substantiating even simpler causal claims regarding, for instance, the impact of watching media violence or playing violent video games on actual incidents of violent thoughts or behavior, it seems unlikely that empirical evidence can be adduced in support of the more significant claim that digital technologies are leading to a change in subjectivity.

Examining the more extended and developed accounts of the multiple self in the Internet age leads to the conclusion that a key claim common to both critics and proponents of the digital age is largely unfounded. The claim that digital technologies is leading to a shift in the nature of the self is highly ambiguous and the evidence in support of it is weak. Nonetheless, the claim is widely made and remains popular. Proponents might continue to insist on its plausibility and suggest a case can yet be made to support it. In the final section of this essay, I suggest that arguments to the effect that digital technologies produce changes in subjectivity rely on questionable assumptions about the nature of the self.

III

In the previous section, I undertook a close analysis of two extended accounts of the impact of digital technologies on our sense of self, arguing that these accounts fail to establish their central claim. It is worth stepping back for a moment and asking more broadly what the self must be in order for interactions with technology to produce the kind of changes Stone and Poster discuss. While the nature of the self is never explicitly addressed in these accounts of the multiple self in the Internet age, we can gain some insight into this issue by briefly examining the background assumptions and context of these arguments.

Central to these and other accounts of the multiple self and technology is the assumption of social constructionism: there is nothing natural about the self, rather, the self is simply a reflection of cultural practices, a product of linguistic or communicative acts. This assumption is a clear part of the background of both Stone's and Poster's account of subjectivity. Stone, for instance, draws a clear analogy between her account of the self and social constructionist accounts of gender and the body. "The just-so character of stories of gender...help conceal the operations of networks of power and the flow of their energies, and in a similar way the homely, given character of bodies and selves conceals networks, pervasive and powerful in their own ways" (Stone 1995, 84). Those things we have thought about ourselves as given and immutable are in fact quite plastic and malleable. Stone makes few references to the role of the body in the realm of the technosocial, other than to refer to its "physical facticity" (Stone 1995, 17) and as a physical substrate (Stone 1995, 65). The physical map of the body and our experience of inhabiting it are socially mediated. Stone suggests we take the next step in regard to the

location of the self: “It should not be difficult to imagine the next step in a progression toward the social—to imagine the location of the self that inhabits the body as also socially mediated...within a system of symbolic exchange, that is, information technology” (Stone 1995, 92).

Poster’s work on the mode of information is allied specifically with poststructuralism and the claim that language has a figurative, structuring power that constitutes the subject who speaks. In the mode of information the self is not a stable and centered entity but is constructed or constituted. “I take from poststructuralism the theme that subjects are constituted in acts and structures of communication. I investigate the way changes in communication patterns involve changes in the subject” (Poster 1990, 11). Like Stone, Poster suggests that an implication of this is that “the body is no longer an effective limit of the subject’s position...communications facilities extend the nervous system throughout the Earth to the point that it enwraps the planet in a noosphere” (Poster 1990, 15).

Discussions of social constructionism and poststructuralism have certainly received widespread attention outside of accounts of the emerging digital and in the context of this essay it would be unreasonable to attempt an assessment of this rich and diverse literature. I would, though, like to briefly point to ways in which certain deficiencies of each are magnified when appropriated by these accounts of technology. Poststructuralist thought has often been criticized for eliding important dimensions of the human being. Paul Smith, for instance, in his influential *Discerning the Subject* argues that the subject of poststructuralism is a purely theoretical subject removed almost entirely from the political and ethical realities in which human agents actually live (Smith

1988). Susan Bordo critiques the emphasis in postmodernism on interpretive multiplicity and the indeterminacy and heterogeneity of cultural meaning, comparing this to a new imagination of disembodiment, a dream of being everywhere that elides human embodiment and locatedness. A number of feminist theorists, including Evelyn Fox Keller, have critiqued the excessive emphasis on social constructionism in feminist thought, arguing that we need to attend to “the constraints imposed by the recalcitrance of nature—the reminder that, despite its ultimate unrepresentability, nature does exist. We should also recall the recalcitrance of sex. Neither nature nor sex can be named out of existence. Both persist, beyond theory, as humbling reminders of our mortality” (Keller, 1987, 48). Importantly, none of these writers are defending any simplistic essentialist position of the subject, embodiment, or nature. Rather, they counsel against simply eliding these aspects of human life. These reminders are important because, as Katherine Hayles points out, the history of digital technologies has been a history premised upon flight from embodiment, nature, and human finitude. In her history of cybernetics *How We Became Posthuman*, Hayles convincingly shows how theorists of information technologies were seduced by fantasies of unlimited power, disembodied immortality, and a human life free from the limits of nature. She suggests a parallel between this and postmodern thought:

Coincident with cybernetic developments that stripped information of its body were discursive analyses within the humanities...that saw the body as a play of discourse systems. Although researchers in the physical and human sciences acknowledged the importance of materiality in different ways, they nevertheless

collaborated in creating the postmodern ideology that the body's materiality is secondary to the logical or semiotic structures it encodes. (Hayles 1999, 192)

Accounts of the subject in the technosocial realm and the mode of information, then, share many of the same deficiencies as those of poststructuralist thought, including an elision of human embodiment and locatedness. The view of the self implicit in these accounts is often anemic and under-theorized, a free-floating entity reduced to a mere reflection of linguistic and cultural acts. Arguments to the effect that interactions with digital technologies will lead to a change in the nature of self or subjectivity rely on these questionable background assumptions and should be deemed unpersuasive.

The weakness in these approaches to the self can be seen more clearly when contrasted with recent accounts of the self coming from a number of fields, including philosophy, psychology, and neurophysiology. In recent work by Andy Clark, Antonio Damasio, Peter Carruthers, Daniel Dennett, and others, there is a concerted effort to incorporate evolutionary, biological, psychological, and cultural evidence into empirically sound accounts of mind, consciousness, and self. Clark explicitly argues that the scientific study of mind demands interdisciplinary effort and multidisciplinary cooperation on a whole new scale, "probing adaptive response at multiple organizational levels including those incorporating bodily, cultural, and environmental scaffolding" (Clark 2001, 161). This is precisely the kind of perspective lacking in most approaches to the multiple self in the Internet age.

From the perspective of the multiple self, the most interesting of this work is that of Dennett's. While this is not the context for a discussion of Dennett's exhaustive work on mind, consciousness, and self, permit me to simply note a few relevant points.

Rejecting the realist picture of the self as some kind of thing or Cartesian “I,” Dennett develops a naturalistic and revisionist view of the self that borrows from evolutionary, developmental, biological, and computational perspectives. The self is not a thing and there is no “Central Headquarters” in the brain, itself a loosely organized series of modules. “Nobody really has a soul-like agency inside them: we just find it useful to imagine the existence of this conscious inner ‘I’ when we try to account for their behavior. We might say indeed that the self is rather like the center of narrative gravity of a set of biographical events and tendencies...” (Dennett and Humphrey 1991, 149).

Rather than treating the self as a thing, Dennett suggests we should view it as a principle of organization, analogous to a center of gravity, a robust and familiar fiction with a nicely defined and delineated role. The very simplest, proto-selves came on the evolutionary scene with the emergence of simple life-forms that obeyed the basic biological principle of self-preservation. This minimal self amounts to “the existence of an organization which tends to distinguish, control, and preserve portions of the world, an organization that thereby creates and maintains boundaries” (Dennett 1991, 358). It is the elements of control, self-preservation, and maintenance of boundaries that Dennett sees running from the simplest selves to our sorts of selves. What distinguishes us from simpler organisms is our particular approach to self-control and boundary maintenance: self-representation. Where spiders spin webs and beavers build dams, human beings tell stories. “We are almost constantly engaged in presenting ourselves to others, and to ourselves, and hence representing ourselves—in language and gesture, external and internal” (Dennett 1991, 359). The effect of these stories is to encourage us and others to posit a unified agent whose words they are, to posit a center of narrative gravity (Dennett

1991, 360) While this center is a fiction, it is, Dennett suggests, a useful fiction. Owing to the complexities of human social life, we find a need for an inner unifying figure. “Thus we come back full circle...to the idea of a proper-self: not a ghostly supervisor, but something like a ‘Head of Mind’ with a real, if limited, causal role to play in representing the person to himself and to the world” (Dennett and Humphrey 1991, 150).

An interesting implication of Dennett’s view of the self is his account of Multiple Personality Disorder. Dennett suggests that the possibility of developing multiple selves is inherent in every human being. Multiple personalities develop out of the same process by which selves develop. “Sybil is only a strikingly pathological case of something quite normal, a behavior pattern we can find in ourselves. We are all, at times, confabulators, telling and retelling ourselves the story of our own lives, with scant attention to the question of truth” (Dennett 1992). Dennett suggests that multiplicity is not only biologically and psychologically plausible, but in some cases it may be the best—even the only—available way of coping with a person’s life experience.

In the normal course of development, [the individual] slowly gets acquainted with the various possibilities of selfhood that ‘make sense’...In most cases a majority view emerges strongly favoring one version of ‘the real me,’ and it is that version which is installed as her elected Head of Mind. But in some cases the competing fictive-selves are so equally balanced, or different constituencies within her are so unwilling to accept the result of the election, that constitutional chaos reigns—and there are snap elections (or coups d’état) all the time. (Dennett 1991, 362).

While this summary of Dennett’s extensive account of the self is necessarily brief, it does suggest some interesting similarities and differences with that of Stone’s and

Poster's. Regarding the similarities, Dennett, like Stone and Poster, rejects a Cartesian or Kantian view of the self which suggests that it is an enduring, indivisible, unified, integral subject of experiences. His view of the self is sympathetic to the role of language and self-representation in human life. As do Stone and Poster, he countenances the possibility of multiple and disunified selves. But where Dennett places that multiplicity in the context of an understanding of the self that is rich in evolutionary, biological, and cultural details, Stone's and Poster's, and indeed most accounts of the multiple self in the Internet age, abstract from these messy and complicated details and talk about the self as if it were a mere product of its current interactions with technology. Dennett recognizes, as well, the need in the normal course of development for a unified center of narrative gravity.

We might note as well one last difference. Where Stone and Poster celebrate the multiple, fragmented self, Dennett recognizes that our capacity of self-representation and our language of self-description is intimately tied to our capacity for self-improvement and self-evaluation. Beyond recognizing the need for understanding the self in a broad evolutionary, biological, and development perspective, is the recognition that deeply connected to our notion of self-identity are related notions of character, agency, trust, and emotions. As Dennett notes, citing a point articulated by Charles Taylor, we create our values while creating ourselves (Dennett 1984, 90). Ought we to be willing to sacrifice these values for the sake of the multiple self? Before acceding to these new modes of subjectivity and self-identity in the digital age, with their promise of freedom, liberation, and irruptive ludic quality, we would do well to critically examine the claims and arguments offered in their support. In this essay I have attempted to do just that,

suggesting that while these digital self-conceptions may be fashionably widespread, there is little to recommend them.

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