Becoming ‘The IT Girl’: Google Identity, Celebrity Culture and Contemporary Subjectivity

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The IT Girl (ITG) is a play, devised by Central Coast theatre company DevisingTheatre, exploring the interrelated concepts of Google identity and celebrity. Here, I shall consider Google identity and celebrity as contemporary mechanisms of subjection. Examining ITG in relation to other theatrical works presenting media technologies as formative of our subjectivity, I shall draw on Haraway’s (1991) ‘cyborg’ theory to critique Watt’s (1998) analysis of media as ‘viral’ in these works. Unlike popular rhetoricising of IT as ‘infectious’ or dangerous, ITG positions the Internet as banal in both our contemporary lives and conceptions of selfhood. I argue that though the Internet contributes to thinking of the postmodern subject as interconnected, it is simultaneously adept at producing and reproducing the ‘individual’. This is illustrated by Google identity which, like Foucault’s (1977) ‘case’, discursively produces a subject for surveillance. Google identity is likened to ‘celebrity’, another discursive construct developed in virtual spaces. Both Google identity and celebrity represent a desirable formation of self; in ITG, both are equated with cultural significance. This significance relates to increased visibility and, in turn, the success of the Panoptic mechanism, illustrating the continued production of the subject within discreet power operations.

In this essay, I shall first contextualise ITG, including its position within a larger research project, the devising process, plus a brief plot summary. Next I shall use Watt’s (1998) analysis to contextualise ITG amongst other theatrical works. I will then critique this analysis using Haraway’s (1991) ‘cyborg’ theory to provide an alternative to conceptions of media technologies as ‘viral’ in the construction of contemporary subjectivity. After examining the Internet as a banal feature of contemporary life, I shall draw on Foucault’s (1976) theory of ‘subjection’ to consider how the Internet may be linked to Panoptic processes of individuation and surveillance. I argue that the problematic application of Foucault’s concept of subjection to a Harawayian understanding of selfhood finds a middle ground in ITG where subjectivity is depicted as interconnected but deeply individuated. This essay next examines the role of ‘celebrity’ in ITG, which is linked to other discursive identity formations such as Google identity, through its emphasis on visibility and individuality. The essay concludes that visibility is a contemporary marker of identity that simultaneously constructs the subject within Panoptic power mechanisms.

Background to ‘The IT Girl’

ITG fits within a theoretical research project that utilises devising theatre processes to examine, in practice, how the autobiographical subject is constructed in performance. To problematise canonical understandings of ‘autobiography’, this research explores practices that suggest ‘autobiography’ but do not conform to autobiography scholar Phillipe Lejeune’s widely cited definition: “a retrospective prose narrative produced by a real person concerning his own existence, focusing on his individual life, in particular on the development of his personality” (Lejeune, 1982:193). My interest in devised autobiographical theatre is how the process of devising allows an avenue for theorising the discourses constructing the subject prior to and during the autobiographical process. As Laura Marcus (1994) indicates, the emergence of autobiography as a genre within criticism is linked to historically- and culturally-specific notions of selfhood. She observes that “the demand placed on the ‘semanal’ autobiographical texts is that they each, in and of themselves, express an exemplary individuality. The model (of the) text is…referred back to the model (of a) life” (2). In contrast, my project positions autobiography as discursive in a Foucauldian sense. That is, discourses not “understood as groups of signs (signifying elements referring to concepts or
representations) but as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (Foucault, 1969:54). Autobiography is an ongoing process of constructing the self through different mediums. As explained by literary theorist Michael Mascuch (1997:52), “just as every text is an articulation of the relation between texts, every author – indeed, every self – is the articulation of an identity structured within and around the discourses available to it at any moment in time”. The autobiographical ‘product’ is thus one formulation of this discursive identity. By analysing that product within its historical, cultural and social context, it may be possible to identify the discourses comprising the autobiographical subject. Critical theorist Nick Mansfield (2000:2-3) usefully clarifies the terms ‘self’ and ‘subject’: “Although the two are sometimes used interchangeably, the word ‘self’ does not capture the sense of social and cultural entanglement that is implicit in the word ‘subject’: the way our immediate daily life is already caught up in complex political, social and philosophical – that is, shared – concerns” (Mansfield, 2000:2-3). In light of Mansfield’s clarification, here, I use ‘self’ when indicating a popular understanding of the individual, and ‘subject’ when emphasising that “social and cultural entanglement”.

The practical component of this research provides a starting point for thinking through contemporary identity formations and their role within wider practices of autobiography and autobiographical performance. Creating autobiographical performance material through the different performative modes of playing a character, persona or ‘the self” enables theoretical enquiry into formations and performative practices of subjectivity. The practice component questions which aspects of self the performer utilises when developing a character, persona, or their own self within devised theatre. By analysing how the performance was constructed, contemporary formations and performative practices of subjectivity may be identified for further analysis, particularly as acting styles are frequently informed by these formations.

*ITG* was devised and produced by DevisingTheatre, which includes this author, in the Central Coast town of Woy Woy. Instead of dramatising events from our lives, this project instead approached devising an autobiographical work by initially creating characters based on aspects of ourselves, like age (24-33 years), interests, aspirations, even clothing choices. As autobiographical narrative was not the aim, it was necessary to develop a plot to ‘activate’ our characters. The play’s themes and characters arose from group discussions attempting to articulate our self-perception. What emerged beyond superficial aspects of identity were some of the conceptualisations comprising our selfhood. These were Google identity and the influence of celebrity culture. The question of Google identity arose from the devisers’ own preoccupations with ‘ego-surfing’, defined by online encyclopaedia Wikipedia as “the practice of searching for one’s own given name, surname, full name, pseudonym or screen name on a popular search engine, to see what results appear” (Wikipedia, “Egosurfing”, accessed 1 August 2007). Similarly, our casual discussions regarding celebrities provided a touchstone from which to relate our experiences.

These understandings of self may be understood as ‘glocal’: in this case, a hybrid identity embodied in a regional locale, informed by a global sense of interconnectedness fostered by IT and the media. Social theorist George Ritzer (2003:192) defines ‘glocalisation’ as “the interpenetration of the global and the local resulting in unique outcomes in different geographic areas”. A glocalised identity is the result of globalised IT and media technologies where we are encouraged to compare ourselves with remote identities (i.e. celebrities), or develop our identity in a worldwide forum (i.e.

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1 I use ‘activate’ to evoke a sense of how the characters were devised. While writing the script, we asked ourselves at important junctures, “what would I do in this situation”? Our presumed personal response became that of the character. This method was a variation on Stanislavski’s ‘Magic If’. Our characters were thus not direct transpositions of ourselves, if that is even possible, but fictional creations based on self-perception and assumption. However, because we invested a great deal of our own personality and self-knowledge, they felt ‘real’, and we were never stuck for an answer to the question, “what would you do here”? Once the script was finalised in rehearsal, we switched from discussing the characters in the first to third person, although we still sourced our reactions, inflections etc from our own experience. It is for this reason I term our creations ‘characters’ as “character is the interpretation we attach to an individual’s activity” (Beckerman in Shepherd and Wallis, 2004:183). “Activity” suggests provisionality, and makes no promise of a stable interiority.
Internet). While premiering on the Coast, locality is never specified in the script (Sydney is mentioned once). The otherwise ‘nowhereness’ of the play links to the devisers’ conceptions of selfhood as not necessarily bounded by an embodied, local context. Literary theorist Robert Livingston’s (2001) analysis of glocalisation may clarify. Livingston suggests globalisation is a social process, “what is happening” (145), while “the local” is “the site of physical copresence, phenomenologically grounded in bodily orientation” (147). Not reducing global/local to a dichotomy like mind/body, Livingston instead emphasises their interrelatedness – ‘glocal’ – in that ‘globalisation’ is discursive and the ‘local’ is the site of its lived effects. The ‘glocality’ of ITG is similarly expressed in its subject matter. This is clear in regard to the Internet, but also represented by the fantasised impact of celebrity on ‘glocal’ lives. In a regional, ‘local’ context, but fascinated by the global potential offered by IT and the media, celebrity may represent to young people what media theorist Nick Couldry (2004:58) calls the “myth of the media centre”, a ‘special’ space in which those who enter ostensibly acquire cultural significance. The desire for celebrity portrayed in ITG, and its tangible impact on the characters’ lives, suggests celebrity to be a phenomenon of globalization but with lived, ‘glocal’ consequences.

ITG follows two females named Kimberley Clark (one a PhD student, one an event manager) and what happens when another Kimberley Clark wins a TV role through a magazine competition. Soap star Kimberley Clark is an absent-but-present character like Beckett’s Godot. She creates crises for the other two Kimberleys through her media presence, perceived as a threat to both their online identities and real life selves. That these characters share the same name is critical to the play’s conceptions of individuality and the subject, as it illustrates the often arbitrary nature of Google identity and celebrity. Parallel to this narrative runs a second, where sordid photos of Event Manager Kimberley appear online, resulting in her inadvertent celebrity. Both onstage Kimberleys are hyperaware of the importance of visibility and its equation with success in contemporary culture. The characters are frequently depicted in relation to media technologies – computers, mobile phones, magazines. To position ITG in relation to some other plays that utilise media culture as theme or subject matter, I shall draw upon theatre theorist Stephen Watt’s (1998) examination of “the consuming subject”, and suggest the possible limitations of his analysis with insights provided by Donna Haraway’s (1991) ‘cyborg’ theory.

The “Consuming Subject” vs. The ‘Cyborg’

Stephen Watt’s (1998) analysis of the influence of popular media in contemporary US plays compares it to a ‘virus’ against which theatre may provide an antidote. Watt examines the “consuming subject on the contemporary stage” (157): dramatic characters whose subjectivity is “molded in the crucible of the media” (158). For example, reading the position of television in David Rabe’s In the Boom Boom Room, Watt argues this play “demonstrates not only the modelling capacity of . . . cultural factors – popular cultural forms, electronic media, imagery – but also the manner in which for Rabe such factors have replaced the depth models of psychoanalysis in explaining human behavior” (169-170). Beyond Rabe, Watt suggests that “on the contemporary stage . . . the effects of electronic media form a kind of counterweight to ‘deeper’, specifically psychoanalytic, conceptions of identity formation” (164). Interestingly, Watt likens “the image” to a “virus”, “infecting” an “ever-growing audience” through “films, television, popular music, and other cultural forms” (158). This viral metaphor conjures so many negative associations – the destruction of the virus’ ‘host’, contamination, suffering – that this identity is positioned not simply as diseased, but as victim. Using associations, metaphors and similes sourced from the media in our articulation of day-to-day life in Western culture is perhaps symptomatic of this ‘virus’. This negative critique leads Watt to borrow Augé’s concept of the ‘non-place’ to regard performance as a site of resistance. For Augé, postmodern ‘non-places’ might be airports, hotel rooms or shopping malls. For Watt, they occur on “the stages of theaters and performance venues” as “alternative
spaces of ‘non’ or different being”, where the performance of “temporary identity…acts as an antitoxin to vaccinate one against…the transportive power of the media” (Watt, 1998:177). He argues performance constitutes “an act of resistant cartography or subjective remapping, becoming a safe haven for the revised subject far from mass culture’s formidable electronic reach” (177).

However, is it even possible to establish such a “safe haven”? The inability to position our subjectivity outside the influence of popular culture is taken up in ITG where discursive practices associated with IT and celebrity culture are fundamental to the characters’ subjective experience. Although Student Kimberley sardonically describes herself as “[J]ust a consumer” (ITG, Sc. 4, p. 18), the two Kimberleys are more than consumers. The media was not the crucible in which their subjectivity was “molded” (Watt, 1998:158), the media was the substance poured into the forge. Both popular media content and form led to the characters’ (and their creators’) conceptualisations of themselves in a way that is comparable to wider usages of technological imagery to articulate contemporary subjectivity. To illustrate, I will first concentrate on the depiction of the Internet in ITG, and return to the question of celebrity culture.

One media form Watt (1998) does not consider is the Internet. Performances incorporating processes or issues associated with the Internet, or taking place online, have become common. “Since the early 1990s, performers in the United Kingdom have produced DMP [digitally mediated performance] – or, in the terms of performance archivist Barry Smith, taking ‘dramatic forays into IT’” (Chvasta, 2005:161). Such UK performers include Joe Lawler and Christine Malloy of Desperate Optimists, a performance group who once toured live shows but now produce filmed work for wider exposure online (see Chvasta, 2005; www.desperateoptimists.com). Performances engaging with IT are often situated on the cutting edge of arguments concerning ‘liveness’, presence and the mediatized body, promoting reconsiderations of the nature of performance and performers themselves. For example, influential performance theorist Philip Auslander has written extensively on ‘liveness’ as a historically and ideologically determined concept (Auslander, 1999; 2005). His analysis of Listening Post, a work ‘performed’ by computer, queries whether machines can be ‘performers’ in the human sense. As Haraway’s (1991) ‘cyborg’ theory reconsiders the human and machine, Auslander stresses the mediatisation of all ‘live’ events. As performance theorist and new media artist Steve Dixon (2001:1) summarises, “Online technologies call received ideas about the nature of the theatre into question.”

In contrast, ITG is a conventional drama that takes the Internet for its subject matter. The conventional nature of the play befits the position of IT within the narrative – it is ordinary and everyday. Yet, like more edgy, online performance work, the technologies of the Internet raise questions in ITG regarding the construction, stability and limits of contemporary bodies and identities. Another recent Australian play, The Chatroom by Reg Cribb (Perth Theatre Company touring production, seen 3 June, 2007), presents the Internet as a threat. Playing on populist fears of the Internet as a stalking ground for predators, The Chatroom includes a teenager who performs a live striptease before her webcam, a sexually abusive teacher and teenage suicide. Publicity material for the original Perth Theatre Company production emphasises the shadow of menace this play casts over the Internet: “Carmen’s parents are frightened to let her wander the streets, but there may be a greater threat in their own house, in Carmen’s bedroom, at the click of a mouse” (Perth Theatre Company website, accessed 8 August 2007). To hammer the point home, Reg Cribb asks, “Is cyberspace our salvation in a disconnected world or has it unleashed our darkest fears?” (Cribb, 2006). Like the “viral media” forms Watt (1998) examines, the Internet is here posited as something which may contaminate or make victims of its users. The Internet as a potential threat to our ‘real’ lives/selves echoes the tone of a strand of early cyberculture studies that David Silver terms “popular cyberculture” (Silver in Bell, 2007:10). Here, as cyberculture theorist David Bell summarises in his cyberculture literature review, “dystopian” works offer “portents of doom about the digital age” (Bell, 2007:10). In such representations of the Internet as threat, it is interesting to
note the persistence of ‘viral’ metaphors. For example, Bell refers to “the ‘ambient fear’ of computer viruses” that “[pervade] our time online, making us anxious, suspicious of any spam emails…guarded about where we go searching, spooked by pop-ups or attachments, wary of infection” (6). Just as Watt’s (1998) “consuming subjects” are rendered as ‘infected’ or ‘victim’ by ‘viral’ imagery, so does this imagery blur distinctions between the human body and computers in popular conceptions. Donna Haraway’s (1991) influential ‘cyborg’ theory, which remains current in cultural, media and feminist studies, develops a sophisticated approach to unpacking the political and cultural implications of such imagery when considering the impact of IT on discussions of subjectivity.

While the use of ‘viral’ imagery appears to break down distinctions between machine and our embodied selves, it may potentially reinforce the sense of a discrete self. The concept of viral infection, whether electronic or biological, suggests the penetration of a boundary, one theoretically protected by some sort of immune system. Donna Haraway (1991:204) argues:

> the immune system is a map drawn to guide recognition and misrecognition of self and other in the dialectics of Western biopolitics. That is, the immune system is a plan for meaningful action to construct and maintain the boundaries for what may count as self and other in the crucial realms of normal and pathological.

Haraway problematises this socio-political function of the immune system with her concept of the ‘cyborg’: “Bodies have become cyborgs – cybernetic organisms – compounds of hybrid techno-organic embodiment and textuality…The cyborg is text, machine, body, and metaphor – all theorised and engaged in practice in terms of communication” (212). Haraway’s concept of the ‘cyborg’ provides a useful alternative to Watt’s (1998) “consuming subject” when articulating how technology is portrayed in ITG. Applying the term here with caution, ‘cyborg’ avoids the negative connotations of ‘viral’ and its implications of a discrete, stable host, while conjuring an interconnective subjectivity that blurs dichotomies like online/offline and real/virtual.

The characters of ITG understand their offline and online experiences to form and maintain their existence as embodied subjects, and this understanding underscores the play’s action. They may be read, in Haraway’s (1991) formulation, as ‘cyborgian’. By extension, when examined within the frame of Haraway’s cyborg theory, Watt’s (1998) onstage “consuming subjects” are indistinguishable from the popular media informing their construction. The term ‘consuming’, like ‘viral’, connoting the penetration of definable boundaries, becomes problematic. However, as ITG suggests in its exploration of Google identity and celebrity, the subjectivities of these characters present a paradox. They are ‘cyborgian’, networked, interconnected. For example, despite having never met personally, awareness of each other's existence impacts upon the self-perception of the two onstage Kimberleys. However, they are also deeply individuated, sectioned off through their interaction with IT2. Google identity and celebrity are two formations that, while experienced via technologies which contribute to articulating the fragmented and networked self, may be read as constructing their subjects necessarily within discernible parameters. To illustrate, I shall first examine Internet usage in ITG, before considering Google identity as a mechanism of individuation.

Internet usage in ITG is banal when contextualised amidst discussions of IT and contemporary subjectivity. Conceptualising ourselves through technological imagery and vice versa is nothing new, with the technology used in such conceptions historically and culturally specific. What is

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2 These characters suggest the experience of the ‘postmodern’ subject. Cultural theorist Terry Eagleton (1998:71) provides a useful description of the postmodern subject: “a dispersed, decentred network of libidinal attachments, emptied of ethical substance and psychical interiority, the ephemeral function of this or that act of consumption, media experience, sexual relationship, trend or fashion”. While the postmodern subject may be considered dispersed and decentred – similar to the ‘cyborg’ – this subject remains situated within discursive formations that reproduce discourses of individualism.
interesting when considering the Internet in self-conceptualisation is that, not only metaphorical for
the fragmented self, it has, to quote prominent cyberstudies theorist Sherry Turkle, “contributed to
thinking about identity as multiplicity” (Turkle, 1995:178). Concurrently, it provides a new stage
for the postmodern subject’s multiple identities. The Internet is “an alternative space in which to re-
rehearse the always-already divided, fragmented and plural self” (Dixon, 2001:2). Thus, the Internet
contributes three ways to understanding the self by influencing conceptions of the self as
fragmented, providing metaphors and imagery for articulating that fragmentation, and providing a
space for devising and performing that self/ves. This is comparable to the influence of theatre and
acting metaphors, with online selves and spaces often likened to dramatic stages and characters.
However, like over-useage of “all the world’s a stage” metaphors (discounting academic discussions
of performativity), citing the Internet as metaphor for the self risks banality. “[C]yberspace
has…become a ‘consensual cliché, a dumping ground for repackaged philosophies about space,
subjectivity and culture’” (Markley in Dixon, 2001:2). IT is fully integrated in day-to-day life. Bell
(2007:133) describes “how the commuter train has become for many people a collective mobile
office, as they carry out work activities on their laptops, mobiles, BlackBerrys, PDAs. The
banalization of cyberculture is evident in these everyday, taken-for-granted uses. ” IT no longer
holds a mysterious fascination, and, despite recent campaigning on Internet dangers by the
Australian Government (see Hearn, 2006; www.netalert.gov.au), is no longer considered a potential
harbinger of doom. When devising ITG, we drew upon this sense of IT as ordinary, utilising the
prevalent notion that it significantly factors in the shaping of an individual’s self-perception. We did
not position the Internet as a phantasmic realm of predators for this is not our experience. For us, it
is an everyday work, social, and recreational tool, used fairly uncritically.

Such banality may mask IT’s operatations as a mechanism of ‘subjection’, (re)producing the
‘individual’ while maintaining ostensible interconnectivity. ITG negotiates a middle ground
between subjection and interconnectivity as the characters are shaped by online interaction, but are
reinforced as individuals by this very interaction. David Beer (2005:3) describes digital
technologies, “like digital cultures”, as “concealed, embedded, and invisible” within everyday
practices. Here, Beer is referring to digital technologies that we may not consider, like showering
(2). However, the Internet has become so embedded in contemporary life that we neglect to reframe
it as a technology of normalisation and surveillance of online and offline selves – a mechanism of
‘subjection’. Social philosopher Michel Foucault’s examinations of the development of the
‘individual’ within history – influencing considerations of subjectivity across a range of academic
disciplines – remains useful for considering online identity as, like the types of ‘subject’ Foucault
examines, this identity is discursively produced. ‘Subjection’ refers to the mechanisms or processes
which produce “a knowledge of the subject” (Foucault, 1976:70). ‘Subjection’ not only produces
and determines the subject, but a way of knowing the subject: it is a “system of legitimate
knowledge” (72). Some of the mechanisms of subjection described by Foucault include the
medicalization of sexuality (1976) and institutional organisation (1975) which have produced the
classifiable, distinct, discursive ‘individual’. This is problematic if we accept Haraway (1991:245,
note 4): “Our dominations don’t work by medicalization and normalization any more; they work by
networking, communication redesign, stress management.” That is, reframing the Internet as a
mechanism of subjection is problematic if we conceptualise ourselves as ‘cyborgian’. I agree with
Haraway (1991:152) that “late twentieth-century machines have made thoroughly ambiguous the
difference between natural and artificial…and many other distinctions that used to apply to
organisms and machines”. However, while the Internet ostensibly promotes interconnectivity –
particularly by literal and metaphorical ‘links’ – it is also adept at (re)producing ‘the individual’. As
a general example, this is evident on websites such as MySpace and Facebook where the user is
understood as sharing their unique self, emphasising personal interests and activities.
Simultaneously, the acquisition of ‘friends’ positions the user as linked within an online network.
The point, however, is to recreate the self in a virtual environment – a self considered pre-existing
and unique within the ‘friends’ network, not dependent on it. Even related technologies, such as
iPods and mobile phones (featuring heavily in *ITG* as markers of identity through choice of ringtones), are promoted to generate a sense of individuality. Foucault (1977:191) argues that the “individual is no doubt the fictitious atom of an ‘ideological’ representation of society; but he is also a reality fabricated by this specific technology of power that I have called ‘discipline’” (194). That is, the ‘individual’ is a construct of power through disciplinary mechanisms such as surveillance. The ‘individual’ as a concept continues to be (re)produced online, frequently self-monitoring and self-disciplining in the web’s interconnected network. Google identity, as it is developed in business discourse in particular, is one online phenomenon where the ‘individual’ is positioned as a concept whose boundaries, as portrayed in *ITG*, need vigilant defending. Google identity is *ITG*’s major theme, presented in the play as both status symbol and a potential tool for surveillance (used by bosses, clients, friends, family, the media).

**Google Identity and ‘ITG’**

Google identity is well established in business discourse and refers to having a presence on the Google search engine – i.e., when searching your name, hits are returned that refer to you (not someone with the same name). Online articles address the fundamental notion of Google identity, and stress the importance of maintaining a vigilant awareness of one’s own Google identity (see Arruda [2006]; Domin [2007]; Dent [2000]; Crosariol [2006]; University of Buffalo [2004]). What is unspecified, but is explored in *ITG*, is the multifaceted nature of Google identity, and its creative potential for developing fictive individuals existing only on the search engine. That is, Google identity may refer to the persona constructed when all the hits returned by Google are conceived as referring to one individual. Google identity is thus fragmented and often arbitrary. It may also exaggerate one aspect of the offline self. For example, US author Lori Culwell (2007) complains that when self-Googling, “usually all I can learn is that I’m Katie Holmes’ ex-best friend”.

Importantly, in contrast to identities forged through email, homepages, chatrooms, MySpace etc, Google identity is not necessarily an intended identity. Rather, it is an electronic footprint left via participation in activities or events recorded on websites, relying, in part, on what Wright (2005:48) calls “that magic combination [of words] that will earn [us] a spot in the top ten of a Google search”. This is a conscious consideration if you own the website, but otherwise a fluke.

The two main characters of *ITG* – Kimberley the PhD student and Kimberley the event manager – maintain awareness of their Google identity by ego-surfing. They are vying for the coveted number one position, equating it with success and importance, although (like the play’s devisers) they are unsure how Google’s ranking system works. As Student Kimberley argues, ranking first “means that you’re important. Successful. That people think you’re worth Googling” (*ITG*, Sc. 2, p. 6). The Kimberleys present ego-surfing as a legitimate method of ascertaining their position both online and offline, similar to the line taken in business discourse where an unsavoury Google identity may disrupt an individual’s employability. For example, Dent (2000:1) facetiously asks, “what if, in searching the Internet after the [job] interview, [potential employees] discover I’ve published racist manifestos, am a known felon, and that I regularly post vicious and libelous diatribes about corporate executives – including one from their own company?” He later argues that it is crucial to be aware of what others of the same name are doing on Google in order to arm yourself with a “that’s not me!” at job interviews. Dent explains that “people searching for your name will often assume multiple matches apply to you” (1). This is precisely the dilemma portrayed in *ITG* as neither Kimberley wants to be associated with the other’s activities in case their self-constructed image – their ‘individuality’ – is compromised. Google identity thus fosters a keen sense of the individual and its boundaries. The self-constructed image of the two Kimberleys relates to their chosen occupations: ambitious, feminist academic; fashionable, fun-loving event manager. When Event Manager Kimberley complains that academic Kimberley’s work is gaining more prominence on Google, her sister and personal assistant Sascha sarcastically replies, “We wouldn’t want people to confuse you with an academic and start thinking you’re intelligent” (*ITG*, Sc. 2, p. 8).
onslaught of unrelated links when another Kimberley Clark comes to prominence creates crises in this already contested battlefield of identities. That this Kimberley has won a role on the fictional soap opera *Neighbourhood Practice* through a competition in fictional magazine *Wannabe* means the attention on her is intense, and the other two Kimberleys are relegated to page seven in the Google rankings. Here, ‘celebrity’, the second theme of *ITG*, intersects with Google identity and its processes of subjection.

Google identity is not merely a persona, it is a discursive construction of the ‘individual’. Importantly, soap star Kimberley never appears onstage. Assumptions about her are made from scant textual evidence such as quotes or descriptions in magazines accessed by the onstage Kimberleys. When the onstage Kimberleys construct their perception of soap star Kimberley, they are literally (re)creating her, just as they (re)create each other through Google. Like with any auto/biography, the subject of Google identity (and its concept) is a discursive practice. However, the (re)created Google identity is a slippery one. For the person who self-Googles, a demarcation is established between their identity and others of the same name, and, as is reiterated in business literature, this demarcation must be defended. On the other hand, for those unfamiliar with the Googled person, new identities may be constructed through ‘mistaken identity’. Both consequences are explored in *ITG*, but the emphasis is on individuation. Google identity is shown to produce emotions conducive to the construction and maintenance of individuality, including pride in one’s achievements and fear that others’ negative behaviour will be misattributed in a way comparable to the nurturing of a celebrity identity. Similarly, Google identity is situatable amongst a series of electronic practices of individualisation and surveillance.

**Individuation, Surveillance and ‘Electronic Personae’**

Foucault’s (1977) analysis of the ‘case’ provides insight into how banal conceptions, such as Google identity, operate as mechanisms of subjection. In *Discipline and Punish* (1977), Foucault details how the accumulation of documentation, the ‘case’, is one technology of subjection. Foucault argues that before the particular development of ‘mechanisms of discipline’ (prisons, schools, hospitals, barracks) in the eighteenth century, “ordinary individuality – the everyday individuality of everybody – remained below the threshold of description” (191). Disrupting the previous positioning of individual ‘historiography’ as the preserve of privilege, the ‘case’ “lowered the threshold of describable individuality and made of this description a means of control and method of domination…a document for possible use” (191). That is, “the case…is the individual as he may be described, judged, measured, compared with others, in his very individuality; and it is also the individual who has to be trained or corrected, classified, normalized, excluded, etc” (191). In Foucault’s account, these cases develop deliberately and systematically through measures such as examination and observation of “the child, the patient, the madman, the prisoner” (191) within the disciplinary processes of the school, hospital or prison.

Like the ‘case’, Google identity is linked to processes of surveillance and normalization, and thus discreet operations of power. It is one method of (re)constructing the individual through information via electronic sources. Turkle (1995:249) calls these online selves “electronic personae”. I suggest that “electronic personae” are equivalent, not to the ‘case’ per se, but to constructing the subject through accumulated documentation, whether via data collection software or piecing together a Google identity. Unlike the ‘case’, Google identity is (usually) not a deliberate formation. Like the ‘case’ are profiles compiled via electronic databases. Cultural theorist Anne Cranny-Francis (2005:154) reveals the darker side of electronic profiling, where the data collated by such software “may be used as the basis of social and cultural control”. She suggests that electronic profiles have been used to discriminate, arguing:
Recent events in Western countries such as Australia and USA, in which individuals of Arab background have been singled out for surveillance and/or interrogation, demonstrate that…stereotyping already afflicts the collation of data, and the subsequent construction of information on individuals (Cranny-Francis, 2005:154).

In her study of censorship and surveillance in MUDs (Multi-User Dungeons or Domains), Turkle (1995:247) queries the ‘freedom’ ostensibly offered by IT, engaging with Foucault’s argument, “that power in modern society is imposed not by the personal presence and brute force of an elite caste but by the way each individual learns the art of self-surveillance”. Drawing on Foucault’s theory of Panopticism, she suggests that “increasingly centralized databases provide a material basis for a vastly extended Panopticon that could include the Internet” (248).

Panopticism operates in popular business discourse with the recommendation that individuals frequently self-monitor their Google identity. This self-monitoring further contributes to a sense of, and desire for, individualization. In ITG, the Panopticism of Google identity is presented as both crucial to the maintenance of that identity, and something fearsome. To have a Google identity is to be visible, but, if you’re concerned about your professional reputation, it is imperative to be visible in the ‘right’ way. When compromising photos of event manager Kimberley appear online, then in Wannabe (with help from Student Kimberley), her business suffers. Her clients cancel, and the Panoptic process of separation, observation and normalization commences. Sascha reports that Charlotte, a previous client, “thinks your behaviour was unprofessional, inappropriate and vulgar!” (ITG, Sc. 3, p. 15). Kimberley is marked out, isolated and condemned. Earlier in ITG, however, the flip side of this visibility is elaborated. Worried about the photos, Kimberley is comforted by Sascha: “Look, even if it comes out it’s not going to be that bad. It’s not as if the sex tape ruined Paris. And hello? Kate Moss?…You’ve said yourself there’s no such thing as bad publicity” (Sc. 2, p. 9). Here, the Panopticism of Google identity intersects with ITG’s other theme and another technology of individualization – the construction of the celebrity subject. Like visibility on Google, which ITG characters equate with success, celebrity carries symbolic power. Couldry (2004:58) terms the mechanism of this power as “the myth of the media centre”, a centre associated with significant (Panoptic) visibility, assuring the individual’s ‘unique’ individuality. Achieving celebrity thus “seems an engaging idea for those excluded from wider means of social and economic power” (Johansson, 2006:352). Ironically, celebrity and Google identity are positioned in ITG as markers of existence, despite a consciousness that both “exists only at the level of representation” (Holmes and Redmond, 2006:210).

**Cause Célèbre: Celebrity as Surveillance in ‘ITG’**

In ITG, the media is associated with the power to be recognised as an individual, or, as it is popularly termed, a ‘personality’. ‘Celebrity’ is the discursive production of a specific type of individual that has received a surge in critical attention regarding its impact upon contemporary perceptions of selfhood. As cultural theorists Su Holmes and Sean Redmond (2006:9) summarise, “Stars articulate what it means to ‘be human’ in capitalist society, dramatizing ‘ideas of personhood, in large measure shoring up the notion of the individual.’” Like Google identity, celebrity may be approached through Haraway’s (1991) cyborg theory, as the production and maintenance of the celebrity identity depends upon interaction with and visibility across all media technologies. Celebrity originates “in sites that are virtual, digital or animated”, and thus produces subjects that are “literally hyperreal and technological” (Holmes and Redmond, 2006:209). Celebrities, referring both to the actual person and their circulated image, inhabit arguably the most blatant and visible Panoptical system: the media. Practices of bugging or covert filming, made possible by advances in media technologies, has increased the potential for surveillance of celebrities in even their most private moments (Holmes and Redmond, 2006:210). Further,
constructing a celebrity subject requires the accumulation of documentation, whether textual, visual or audio. This may be compared with the ‘case’ (Foucault, 1977). Like Google identity, celebrity is a public (auto)biography in progress, explicitly performed and documented, and relying on that documentation for its very existence. A celebrity subject is created for the public through articles, interviews, images and professional works (such as films) that may or may not bear resemblance to the individual identified as that celebrity.

*ITG* depicts how the majority of the non-famous experience celebrity: as absent-but-present characters that make their way from the media to our consciousness, yet potentially achievable in an age of Reality TV ‘instant celebrity’. The devisers originally wanted to explore the Hollywood ‘party girl’, exemplified by Lindsay Lohan and Paris Hilton, but couldn’t name an Australian equivalent. Instead, a young, blonde soapie starlet was created to fit the Aussie celebrity mould. To this was added a twist of ‘reality’: the celebrity won her fame through a magazine competition. This reflects two intertwined phenomena in contemporary celebrity culture: that is, “a world increasingly dominated by instant celebrity” (Whiteley, 2006:329), and the notion of “‘democratic’ fame, in embracing ‘downmarket’ celebrities, such as soap actors, pin-up girls and reality TV participants” (Johansson, 2006:351). Johansson refers to “a trend in contemporary celebrity discourse toward the validation of those without cultural capital or elite roles rising to fame” (351). *ITG* portrays two other get-famous-quick possibilities: when event manager Kimberley is mistaken for soap star Kimberley and compromising photos of her are splashed across a magazine, and when PhD student Kimberley decides to sell her story of leaking those pictures. PhD student Kimberley, who researches celebrity culture, believes that it is possible to transform into a celebrity by identifying the practices and processes that construct celebrity, then utilising them on the self. In this way, celebrity oscillates in *ITG* between something that most people want and something they can have if the right circumstances are orchestrated.

**Conclusion**

While sharing many characteristics with Watt’s (1998:157) “consuming subjects”, the two Kimberley Clarks of *ITG* arguably occupy a middle ground between subjection and a ‘cyborgian’ interconnectivity. Their unproblematic acceptance that Google presence is crucial to ‘real life’ success suggests they do not differentiate between online and offline spaces. In fact, preoccupied with Google identity, their behaviour suggests that success online is more important than offline where it is not as visible to so many other Internet users. A large part of their identity is developed and maintained via a computer. They are networked, but individuated. The *ITG* characters suggest that the ‘cyborg’ is not free of mechanisms of subjection. The “politics” that function “on the various connections and boundaries, the ‘interfaces’ that form between representations and bodies, social groups and institutions, machines and human networks” (Feury and Mansfield, 2000:119) may be implicated in processes of individuation and surveillance. Our online ‘cyborg’ selves are as enmeshed in self-regulation and normalization as our offline selves, and it may be the visibility of connectivity that makes this so. I argue, however, that visibility is positioned within popular discourse as a state to be desired. Excess visibility constructs a specific subject, the celebrity subject, which raises many questions around the individuation, surveillance and discipline of the contemporary subject. In *ITG*, the influence of celebrity culture through the media is positioned as another mechanism in the development of self-identity, and as ‘cyborgian’ as Google identity.

*ITG* fits within a larger research project of investigating the production of the subject through autobiographical performance. I have focused here on Google identity and celebrity as two discursive formations complicit in the individuation and surveillance of contemporary subjects as these arose from the devising process. In this paper I have used a very basic application of Foucault’s theories but intend to probe these concepts deeper. The production of Google identity
and celebrity refer to fragmented biographies and autobiographies, written and performed online and offline, representing two methods in which the contemporary individual is devised. Autobiographical performance itself is another such method, and like Google identity and celebrity, remains a lucrative site for exploring how we desire to create and perform ourselves today.

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