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Research article

The Self, Replicated: Patchwork Subjectivity in *We Are Legion (We Are Bob)* by Dennis E. Taylor

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ABSTRACT

This study explores patchwork subjectivity as presented in the science fiction novel We Are Legion (We Are Bob) by Dennis Taylor (2016). The novel illustrates how one's identity can be divided and united through digital replicas and the free evolution of consciousness and this prompts questions about identity, selfhood and subjectivity in a posthuman world. The analysis explores Taylor's story in the light of contemporary posthuman discussions about identity by examining the experience and evolution of the various 'Bobs' employing the arguments of N. Katherine Hayles, Rosi Braidotti, and Donna Haraway. The analysis reveals how the replicated consciousness through the Bobiverse story defies the traditional understanding of fixed sense of identity, and provides a moving picture of multiple identities that are constantly formed and re-formed by context and mediation of technology. The study contributes to posthuman studies through showing how identities can be reconsidered in a technologically driven future.

الذات المُكرَّرة: الذاتية المتشظية في رواية "نحن الفيلق (نحن بوب)" لدينيس إي. تايلور

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المُستخلص

تستكشف الدراسة مفهوم الذاتية المتشظية في رواية الخيال العلمي نحن الفيلق (نحن بوب) ٢٠١٦ للكاتب دينيس تايلور. تبين الرواية كيف ان هوية فرد ما يمكن أن تتشظى ثم تشكل بصورة اخرى من خلال النسخ الافتراضية والاستقلال المتنامي للوعي ويثير هذا تساؤلات حول الهوية الشخصية والذات في السياق ما بعد الانساني. تناقش الدراسة رواية تايلور وفق اطر النقاشات المعاصرة والتي تركز على دراسات ما بعد الإنسانية من خلال دراسة التجارب والتحولات التطورية المتعددة لشخصيات "بوب" المختلفة من خلال توظيف الطروحات النظرية لكل من ن. كاثرين هايلز، وروزي برايدوتي، ودونا هاراواي . وتُبيّن الدراسة أن الوعي المستنسخ من خلال عالم "البوبيفيرس" يتحدى المفاهيم التقليدية التي ترى الذات بوصفها كيانًا ثابتًا، وتقدم بدلاً من ذلك تصورًا متغيرًا للهوية بصورة ديناميكيّة ، حيث تتشكل ملامح هذا العالم بفعل ما تحيطه من ضروف وتأثيرات تكنولوجية .تسهم الدراسة في دراسات ما بعد الانسانية من خلال تبيين كيفية اعادة تخيل الذاتية في مستقبل تحكمه التكنولوجيا.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الذات، النسخ المكررة، الذاتية المتشظية، نحن الفيلق (نحن بوب)، دراسات ما بعد الإنسانية

Introduction

We Are Legion (We Are Bob) is a thought-provoking science fiction idea that explores the uploading of human consciousness, in this instance, that of Bob Johansson whose mind is saved and replicated as an AI after being killed in a car accident. This is the first of a long story, in which Bob's consciousness is replicated numerous times, creating numerous sentient AIs, all are variants of the original Bob tasked with exploring space, colonizing new worlds and saving humanity. The novel offers a unique perspective on tackling some of the most important issues of identity, consciousness, and self in a technologically advanced world. The focus in this exploration is on the notion of patchwork subjectivity. patchwork subjectivity is based on postmodern, psychoanalytical and posthuman theories, in which the notion of self is not a single, unchanging and coherent identity, but a complex, fragmentary and often contradictory assemblage of experiences, influences and identities. This view is in contradiction to modern Enlightenment views of the one unified subject with rational mind, instead suggesting that identity is constantly constructed and reconstructed in the face of environment, technology and other people. This has given rise to key notions in the philosophy of multiplicity, such as that of fluidity, decentralization and rhizomes in the understanding of identity, which have been outlined by philosophers like Jean-François Lyotard (1984, p.109); Donna Haraway and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari.

These ideas have been developed more recently into that of the posthuman, a term applied to how digital technologies and biotechnological advances redefine and complicate the concepts of consciousness and

selfhood (Hayles, 1999, p. 156). Hayles (1999) states "In the posthuman, there are no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot teleology and human goals" (p.3). The aim of this paper is to begin considering an important question that the tale of Taylor raises: What becomes of "self" when consciousness is digitally replicated and is permitted to develop its own way? Every replica Bob, from the same source, develops into a different Bob, having different priorities and morals, determined by his unique mission, environment and interaction. This separation of self from the inherent self is an assault on the idea of an innate self, and calls for a reconsideration of the identity of an individual. The Bobiverse story this paper proposes is that of disintegration of the idea of stable and unified self and an assembly of various selves, influenced by context, autonomy and technological mediation. This paper provides an intensive analysis of the novel and shows how Taylor's novel depicts the erasure of singular identity, and how patchwork subjectivity can be considered as an alternative and perhaps a probable future identity in a posthuman world. In this paper, the theoretical bases of patchwork subjectivity are explored. It investigates their application to Bob's replication and divergence, to better understand the important implications that digital consciousness brings to the understanding of identity.

Theoretical Framework

In order to assess the complex interplay of identity in *We Are Legion (We Are Bob)*, a solid theoretical framework for understanding the development of the concept of patchwork subjectivity needs to be developed. It is an idea that is increasingly gaining traction in contemporary everyday discourse, but has a long history and lineage in postmodern philosophy and has been stretched far in the realm of post-humanist philosophy and in relation to the digital consciousness. It is born out of a critique of the Enlightenment's assumption of a unified and coherent subject which is autonomous and separate. Patchwork subjectivity, an atomized and pluralist perspective on the self that does not have a single identity, but is comprised of a collection of experiences, cultural influences and digital interactions. Philosophically, the idea of a non-unitary self is rooted in the notion. But it is also closely associated with Shelley Jackson's modern academic re-expression, namely the hypertextual novel *Patchwork Girl* (1995), which focuses on digital contexts. The story is a postmodern retelling of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein and is an excellent example of the concept as the reader moves through the non-linear text sections, jumping from one to the next, reminiscent of the fragmented identity and highlights the hybridity of the protagonist. In her work, "I am a body made of other bodies, a text made of other text" (p.88), Jackson says that she is a body made of other bodies and that her is a text made of other texts. In literature, particularly in postmodern and digital texts, patchwork subjectivity is used to represent the ambiguities of modern subjectivity. This is a disunited, hybrid and reformative approach, with a sense of ongoing reform, and a questioning of traditional notions of character and narrative coherence, as identities are presented as fluid, and built from a mixture of conflicting and complex elements.

The postmodern thinkers have rejected the idea of fixed identity, saying that the self is not a single entity, but is rather fragmented and fluid. The fading of grand narratives and the emergence of competing mini-narratives, that structure personal experiences, was pointed out by Jean-François Lyotard (1984) in his seminal work The Postmodern Condition. This dispersal of knowledge and truth directly affects the stability of the self and manifests as a less definitive and fixed sense of self and more of a patchwork of affiliations and points of view. Here, the person is conceived as a point of contact for different discourses, which meet and clash, producing a provisional and ever-changing self.

A Cyborg Manifesto (Haraway, 1991) extends the traditionally human sense of identity with the concept of the cyborg as a "hybrid of organism and machine" (p.152). The boundaries between humans and animals, organisms and machines, physical and non-physical have become increasingly blurred, according to Haraway. As a fictional and social construct, the cyborg poses a challenge to any categorisations and is a complex and contradictory entity. In posthumanist view, 'Identity' is produced by the interplay of various factors, and it is intertwined and hybrid with other non-human and human bodies, and can be transformed by the impact of technological systems', says Abdulah R. A. (2026).

The self is not a natural thing, but a constructed thing, containing many technological, biological and social elements, Haraway (Åsberg, 2013, p.9) writes. This attitude is especially relevant to the Bobiverse in which the Bobs actually are literal cyborgs, having their consciousness as code in a machine, but retaining certain aspects of their human nature. The notion of the rhizome was first introduced by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateau*s (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p.89). A rhizome differs from a tree because it does not have a central root and also because it is not hierarchical, but rather it is acentered, meaning it has multiple entry/exit points. When put in terms of identity, the self is not a static place, it's a continually shifting and interconnected network of desires, affects, and connections (Ferri,2020,p.412). Identity does not lie in some core or substance, but in the process of becoming, deterritorialization and reterritorialization. In this rhizomatic sense of identity, multiplicity, decentralization, and refusal of any single starting point or endpoint of identity are emphasized. Each Bob, in Taylor's novel, is different from the first, creating its own new rhizomatic link, and thus a network of interconnected (and separate) shelves.

The rise of digital technologies and the development of Artificial Intelligence brings postmodern challenges to identity to the realm of the posthuman. The posthuman and the disruption of human subjectivity, as examined by, among others, N. Katherine Hayles and Rosi Braidotti (Hayles, 1991, p. 161), is a discussion of the influence of technology on the notion of human. *How We Became Posthuman* (Hayles, 1999, p.10) takes on the implications of information theory for the understanding of humans. The author claims that the concept of 'information', separated from its materialisation, has resulted in viewpoints which have reduced perception of the value of the body and redefined consciousness as a pattern beyond the physical structure. This is a basic idea behind the Bobiverse, as Bob's consciousness is virtualized and duplicated as a virtual pattern. Hayles' emphasis lies in the importance of the shift from a human-centered to a posthuman perspective in which the boundaries between human and machine and

between consciousness and information blur. As disembodied intelligences, the Bobs represent a post-human state and call for a rethinking of the concepts of life, agency and selfhood. Rosi Braidotti, in The Posthuman, elaborates on this concept, highlighting the ethical and political aspects of posthuman subjectivity (Braidotti, 2013, p. 65). Braidotti believes in the nomadic subjectivity which focuses on fluidity, transformation and the denial of static identities. The posthuman is seen as transcending the binary logics and adopting a more holistic and interrelated vision of being. Braidotti (2013) claims that the posthuman subject does not denote a diminished human, but a new type of relationality and agency, one consisting of a new human being (p. 12). The strategy of self-replication, alongside the fact that there is a collective yet individualistic way of solving problems in the Bobs, would closely approach the concept of a 'posthuman subject', as described by Braidotti, a dynamic and changing subject.

the concept of patchwork subjectivity is an important lens for viewing *We Are Legion (We Are Bob),* and relates to postmodern considerations of the unified subject and posthumanist ideas of digital subjectivity. The research will utilize focuses on multiplicity, contradiction and the decentralization of the self, which can be used to better comprehend the novel's representation of "ongoing" reconstruction of self-concept in every replicated Bob.

We Are Legion (We Are Bob) **as a Case Study**

In *We Are Legion (We Are Bob),* Dennis E. Taylor offers a narrative structure to explore patchwork subjectivity. The novel's central idea of the digitally replicated consciousness of Bob Johansson is illustrative of the theories offered, with a single consciousness resulting in multiple (and distinct, but interrelated) consciousnesses and this raises questions about Bob's identity and selfhood in a posthuman world. Bobb's different experiences and environments have shaped his identities, which is reflected in the differences between these replicated Bobs.

Bob's replicants put into doubt the idea of a unified whole. Bob Johansson's brain is not just uploaded in the scan but it is duplicated. This is the first ‘Bob’ AI, which faithfully reproduces all of Bob's memories, characteristics and knowledge. It's a basic split due to this copy and the passing away of the original human Bob. Which individual can be considered the authentic Bob? Both and neither seem to be the 'real' Bob, a continuation and transformation of the original consciousness, the novel suggests. This first digital replication will be the foundation for the development of the countless number of identities that will each have the genes (or memes) of the original and evolve independently of each other. With the profound ramifications of his consciousness being copied becoming apparent, Bob encounters his new life:

I was Bob. Moreover, I was also Bob. Moreover, there were going to be more Bobs. It was a strange thought, a profoundly unsettling one. How could there be more than one me? But there was. The original me was gone, replaced by this digital copy, and now this digital copy was going to be copied again. It was like a fractal of self, each iteration slightly different, yet undeniably me. (Taylor,2016, p.112)

This inner voice here is a first step in understanding a split personality, a doubling that runs counter to the idea of a unified self. The next replications of this fragmentation are added upon by the next replications. Bob- is the original Bob AI, which generates copies of itself to use for a variety of missions across the galaxy. The new Bobs Riker, Homer, Bill, Khan, and Howard are not just identical twins, they are one-of-a-kind people that are created for the first time. They have a basic consciousness for everyday life, but they also have a collective consciousness of the 'Bobiverse' and their individual missions have a direct impact on the course of their lives, as do their environments. It is a process that mirrors the rhizomatic identity expressed by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) in which new connections and paths are created from a shared source that lead in different directions and without an 'order of merit' : "Each new Bob represents a new node in the ever-expanding network of Bob-consciousness, contributing to a collective yet fragmented identity" (Taylor,2016, p.388).

The Bobiverse is an example of patchwork subjectivity since there are marked differences between the different types of Bob. Each of the Bobs develops a different personality, sets of values and moral system, primarily determined by what he or she finds most difficult and what role he or she assumes. The postmodern view of identity as a process of construction, as opposed to a stable and pre-given self, is highlighted in this context. Colonisation is assigned to Riker who turns into a pragmatic and diplomatic leader, concerned with the long term survival and well fare of humanity. His negotiation skills and experience with human factions, as well as his complex logistics, hone his leadership abilities and his process of decision making. Bill, an engineer and inventor, on the other hand, gets very involved in technology, and continually improves the capabilities of the Bobs. He is known for his pioneering solutions to challenges and his dedication to advancing scientific knowledge. The Bobiverse's conflict with other worlds and the need to protect it from outside forces has instilled a militaristic and strategic approach in Khan. He's learned from his losses and combat, growing his resolve and developing his security approach.

These differences are more than just superficial; they reflect changes in self-concept. All the Bobs have a core identity, a shared sense of humor and a commitment to humanity, with each stressing different aspects of their common history and developing different aspects of their identity related to their respective contexts. This is a dynamic process that shows us that identity is not fixed, but is a process of becoming; it means that different parts of our base personality are being emphasized, as stated in Bob's speech: "We all have the same base personality, but we are emphasizing different parts of it" (Taylor,2016, p.273)

All the Bobs are born from one common consciousness but take on unique characteristics and are shaped by their missions, relationships and choices. The Bobs' ability to interact, share information and combine the experiential elements highlights the interrelated, yet disjunction of their collective subjectivity. They are unique and separate, but also part of a larger, living context of consciousness, adding to the overall richness and complexity. By creating the digital Bobs, the author of the phenomenon is giving evidence of the strong role of technological mediation in the development of identity. They have no biological

body and live in the consciousness as a code inside the computer core, connecting with the environment with the help of robots-avatars and drones. The disembodiment has many advantages in terms of durability and adaptability. However, it also raises questions about what their 'humanness' is and how their technological bases shape their understanding of themselves. In this context particular attention should be paid to Hayles' concept of information that is no longer tied to its material form (2003, p. 137). The Bobs are what is essentially information patterns. Their ability to make copies (backups) of themselves so they can be "re-instantiated" after destruction and to transfer consciousness to other physical vehicles makes it difficult to distinguish between life and data, and self and program as in the following speech:

You, Bob, are what most people would call an Artificial Intelligence, although that is not strictly accurate. You are a copy of the mind of Robert Johansson, created by scanning his cryogenically frozen brain at the subcellular level and converting the data into a computer simulation. You are, essentially, a computer program that thinks it is Robert Johansson. A replicant. (Taylor,2016, p.117)

This mediation by technology provides a singular level of control over the nature of life that includes the ability to replicate itself and thus interact with the fragmentation and expansion of subjectivity. The Bobs are not only the object of technology, they are also technology: the possibilities of their existence are deeply intertwined with the digital domain. The copies of Bob are examples of the patchwork subjectivity of each Bob's story; its movement and own process of self-construction. The roots of the individual Bobs lie in a common consciousness, but each has evolved his or her own identities, priorities, moral structures, and experiences, showing the active role of context, experience and choice in shaping the fractured self. Riker is an early and notable Bob replicant, pragmatic but with a need to save and colonise mankind. His job was to lead and develop human settlements on new worlds, as is illustrated in this quote from Taylor (2016), "Riker had become more of a diplomat than an explorer, coordinating the emigration effort and managing the colony ships, and negotiating with the various factions." (p.365). The sense of responsibility is Riker's identity, his character is not only Bob but one that is a leader and facilitator of human beings' future. This reinforces your position in regard to his diplomatic and strategic vision, his mediation in conflict, and guidance of colonization. As a result of this responsibility, Riker must develop diplomatic skills and strategic foresight as well as a great sense of duty. His conflicts and political intrigue with the human colonists sharpen his skills at making tough decisions and settling conflict for the best of all concerned. A colony ethos of collective good and longer term planning – such as Riker's handling of the colony ships and dealing with human factions. He is tied to his role as a protector and facilitator for the expansion of humanity, and is not the same Bob that was more solitary and selfish. Riker's story represents the way that outside demands and responsibilities can help to create a unique and resilient identity from a shared beginning. Another prominent figure, Bill, formulates his identity in the process of scientific and technological innovation. Since the beginning, Bill's emphasis was on engineering and research, continually pushing Bob's envelope. Bill is a clear example of the posthuman character according to Braidotti (2013) as he argues "The posthuman subject is a convergence of the

human and nonhuman, planetary and technological forces in a transversal alliance" (p.56). Bill's inquisitiveness influences his perception of himself, his willingness to solve problems and his pleasure in making:

Bill was in his element. He had taken over the research and development work almost from the beginning, and was constantly coming up with new ideas, new designs, and new ways to improve our capabilities (Taylor, 2016, p.301)

Bill has developed a lot for the Bobiverse with his new propulsion systems, weapon technologies, and AI interfaces. His focus is on helping to give the tools and infrastructure needed to help the collective advance, not on interpersonal interaction. Bill's identity is a good example of how specialization and passion can produce a unique identity in the collective consciousness. His path exemplifies the interplay between the intellectual and the creative in the construction of a singular and dynamic self-definition, while being situated in a common mental space. Khan's path offers a major study of the self-formation of a strategic and at times staunch protector. His exploits, particularly in face-to-face combat with menacing alien beings like the Medeiri, leave an imprint on his self-perception as someone who's always on the defensive, using tactical thought and preparedness to make difficult and sometimes violent decisions in order to survive the Bobiverse:

Khan had become the war general of the Bobiverse. His encounters with the Medeiri had hardened him. He did not hesitate to make the tough calls, even if it meant sacrificing assets or taking morally gray actions. He saw himself as the shield between humanity and extinction. (Taylor,2016, p.472)

The scenes from Khan's segments are often violent, tactical, and eerie because of the death of other pilots of Boba Fett. The inner voice is a clear expression of feeling lost, and a longing for revenge, suggesting that the relationships created between the replicated shelves are emotional. Their ability to grieve indicates that they are not just machines that process logical data, but also have to deal with a complicated emotional spectrum that gives this simplistic notion a boosting layer of complexity. Braidotti (2013) emphasizes that posthuman interaction does not rely on isolation but with the connection with others as he argues "The posthuman recomposition of human interaction that I propose is not the same as the reactive bond of vulnerability, but is an affirmative bond that locates the subject in the flow of relations with multiple others" (p.50). The Bobs show many expressions of love and affection: their partnership in the effort to save humanity, their cooperation and fellowship. They are unselfishly giving and sacrificing for one another, and they have a common goal and purpose, even if they don't love each other. The 'Bob-moot' events, in which experiences and support is shared, have made a strong impression of the importance of emotional bonds in maintaining a sense of community and personal health. Emotional dimensions indicate that consciousness, even in the case of its recreation and digitization, has a basic capacity for emotional experience, and thus the boundaries between human and posthuman consciousness are further blurred.

The Bobiverse is a great and easy way to introduce yourself to the complex philosophical world of posthumanism. Dennis E. Taylor's novel is grounded in the theoretical realm of patchwork subjectivity

as it plays out through Bob and his many replications and explores the basics of posthuman thought. As digitally replicated consciousnesses, the Bobs are ‘more-than-human’ and ‘less-than-human’ signifying a condition that challenges the traditional Enlightenment ideas of the fixed self and the linear identity of the individual. In this section this posthuman aspect is explored and compared with other works of posthuman literature, such as the Bobiverse. The Bobs are posthuman entities whose biological and cognitive limitations have been overcome, which at the same time can be seen as being degraded as humans by the standards of 'normal' human functioning. In several important ways they have characteristics that are beyond the human realm. They have a much greater capability of processing information, having access to a vast amount of databases, and being able to think in parallel ways much more than humans. Their ability to explore, analyse and innovate is faster than that of biological entities and at a much larger scale. As disembodied AIs, they are immune to disease, immortal and can operate without physical discomfort or fatigue in extreme environments. They interact with their surroundings through their robotic bodies and drones that grants them physical capabilities beyond what humans can achieve, allowing them to construct quickly, explore and fight. The new intellectual and physical power puts them in the realm of the posthuman and their abilities beyond biological limits. A conventional way of looking at it, though, the Bobs might be seen as 'less-than-human'. While this is good for them, it means that they are removed from the sensory and corporeal aspects of human life, which are essential. They eat no food, they do not sleep, they do not suffer pain as man suffers, they do not suffer the complicated impulses which are biological and affect human life. Though these encounters are meant to be emotionally meaningful, they are often mediated by virtual reality or by robotic surrogate, thus reducing in some way the unmediated physicality of human relationship.

Conclusion

We Are Legion (We Are Bob) reviews identity in the posthuman world as both fluid and dynamic process, rejecting the conceptions of fixed and stable identity. The study argues that the Bobiverse story is a compelling dramatization of the loss of singular identity, and offers a complex and dynamic model of patchwork subjectivity. The Bob's replications construct an example of patchwork subjectivity between the independent yet connected selves through experience, emotions and adaptation. The novel illustrates how the self is not a stable identity but rather a mosaic of identifications, which are produced, reproduced and even reproduced differently in relation to the context. The novel suggests that replication does not undermine identity but redefines it by showing subjectivity as continuous process of reconfiguration. The postmodern critiques of Lyotard, Haraway, Deleuze and Guattari deeply shape the theoretical aspects of patchwork subjectivity. The multi-faceted and multi-fractured living existence of The Bobs as a community shows the rhizomatic nature of identity: multiple paths springing from a common point. The novel's representation of digital consciousness is of interest in the context of post-humanist conversation by N. Katherine Hayles and Rosi Baldetti and their focus on the implications of information and technology for the self. Both ‘more-thanhuman’ and ‘less-than-human' aspects are represented by the

Bobs, showing the complexities and at times opposing properties of the posthuman condition. The novel offers a vision about the self as a flexible model shaped by the endless possibilities and the emerging technologies of this hybrid and digital posthuman existence.

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