

Schizophrenia in the Digital Age: Jameson for the New Generation

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Abstract

This paper illustrates to what extent Fredric Jameson's notion of schizophrenia is applicable to the digital age. It reveals that in our postmodern day and age, communication technologies and late-stage capitalism have attributed to the breakdown of the signifying chain and the fragmentation of the self. Due to the constant stream of consumerist signifiers, we tend to constantly create and shed new identities in our inability to make sense of the world around us. Resistance can be offered in the form of collectivization and a reclaiming of personal data, to regain individual subjectivity.

Keywords: schizophrenia, capitalism, consumerism, Jameson, postmodernism, digital age

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Introduction

Marketing and consumption nowadays have become almost exclusively online activities. Online stores are emptying the cities' busiest shopping streets. Online supermarkets, sometimes promising to deliver within ten minutes, are threatening business of their traditional physical counterparts. Every sector of business has realized the effectiveness and cost-efficiency of digital marketing and many are attempting to progress further ways of digitally reaching consumers. The times of flashy billboards, or prototypical American malls are long past us. All of these products, services and messages are now compressed within our phones, marking a new peak in the digital age. *The Brewer's Dictionary of Modern Phrase & Fable* defines the digital age as: "A nickname for the period starting in the 1990s, in which rapid advances in technology have resulted in the transfer of many items of electrical or electronic equipment to digital operation..."¹

The rise of the digital age and its cultural and psychological effects are key topics of interest when discussing the evolution of postmodernism. The book *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* by Fredric Jameson seeks to give a definition of the postmodern age by viewing the cultural effects it has had on society. Therefore, he critiques the influence consumerism has on art, but also raises an interesting point about identity in postmodern times. Borrowing Lacan's definition of schizophrenia, he argues that postmodernism is characterized by the loss of clear signifiers to define one's identity with. Reality becomes fragmented and individuals easily shed and take on new identities, like a schizophrenic. Since Jameson wrote this before the digital age could take off, he did not take the fragmented nature of social media into consideration. Adding this dimension can redefine the value of his work for the field of philosophy in current times. That is why this thesis will consider to what extent Jameson's use of the term schizophrenia can be applied to the digital age. Contrary to sociological works on the digital age, this inquiry will define a cultural pathology of the human condition and add to the debate on the nature of human subjectivity.

Generation Z

Current Gen-Z'ers, those born from 1996 to 2015, have known nothing but the digital age and should therefore be the main focus of this thesis. Their online experiences have been

¹ John Ayto and Ian Crofton, "Digital Age," in *Brewer's Dictionary of Modern Phrase & Fable* (Chambers Harrap Publishers, 2011), <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199916108.001.0001/acref-9780199916108-e-2133>.

intertwined with consumption from early childhood. A considerable amount of media content, like cartoons and video games, but also toys are imprinted in the collective consciousness of the digital natives of Generation Z. They are also bound to remember the flashy, loud advertisements, tailored to their age group, in between these cartoons. The games they played were rife with sponsored content. Around this time, role-playing games for kids became popular. These often revolved around creating one's own avatar, that can earn in-game currency through, possibly sponsored, minigames.² With this currency, the avatar could purchase clothing or other items, often sponsored by popular or even luxury brands. Barely reaching prepubescent age, Gen-Z'ers already came to know an entire myriad of brand identities through sponsored content, be this the newest Barbie doll or a Gucci handbag.

The introduction of social media is for many Gen-Z'ers a defining part of their adolescence. The acceleration of speed at which these digital technologies transfer information is a key trait of the evolution of the digital age, since it became possible to connect with hundreds of people from all over the globe with just a quick status update.³ Generation Z could not only connect with their friends outside the realm of school, they could also express and shape their identity online. Building your social media profile became a prime way of presenting yourself to the world. Naturally, especially teenagers sensed the importance of one's online persona, since they are in the crucial developing stage where they are building their identity through interactions with other peers. Different subcultures have always thrived amongst the developing adolescent, and the internet gave them a real sense of community. No matter if they wanted to find their niche or tried to fit in with the majority, social media gave Gen-Z'ers a way to express themselves.

However, the bubble of a social media sphere defined by personal expression quickly burst when corporations discovered its marketing potential. These social networking sites were perfect for targeting niche groups or attempting to go "viral" to receive immense amounts of free exposure. Timelines filled up with targeted advertisements and brands started to build their online identity. However, in the early stages of social media marketing, brands may have underestimated the consumer. They quickly realized that superficial brand identities

² Ben Lewis and Lance Porter, "In-Game Advertising Effects," *Journal of Interactive Advertising* 10, no. 2 (March 1, 2010): 46–60, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15252019.2010.10722169>.

³ Jasmin C. R. Härtel and Charmine E. J. Härtel, "What the Digital Age Is and Means for Workers, Services, and Emotions Scholars and Practitioners," in *Emotions and Service in the Digital Age*, ed. Charmine E. J. Härtel, Wilfred J. Zerbe, and Neal M. Ashkanasy, vol. 16, Research on Emotion in Organizations (Emerald Publishing Limited, 2020), 9–17, <https://doi.org/10.1108/S1746-979120200000016003>.

did not work online and were perceived as insincere, especially by the digital native.⁴ Brands started to focus on integration and the age of the “advertorial” was born. One could be surfing their favorite cooking blog, only to realize that they are reading an advertisement for the latest innovation in slow juicer technology. Social media influencers came to be, who solely make their income by integrating products into carefully curated photos and daily life updates. Brands started adopting a more human tone and increased personal interaction with their followers on their social media accounts. This humanization of brands attempts to make consumers see themselves in and identify with these corporate personas.

All things considered, Gen Z has witnessed the online sphere being increasingly colonized by corporations, while it was and is a key space for them to develop their own identity. The digital age has intertwined with an accelerated consumerism in increasingly personal and intimate spaces. An average social media timeline consists of a myriad of stimuli. While it used to be easy to differentiate news and entertainment from regular advertisements, this has now become integrated with each other. Therefore, the key tools, content and spaces that adolescents use to revolve their identity around are becoming fragmented and commercialized. Icons are increasingly being commodified, while online social groups can be completely based on mutual consumption. The acceleration of information on social media, combined with the move of consumption to these same online spaces, is thus expected to impact the identity formation of Generation Z in a similar way that Jameson has illustrated in his works.

Roadmap

This thesis can only be explored if some key terms are elaborated upon before discussion. Firstly, chapter 1 explains what distinguishes postmodernism from its predecessor modernism and why social media is a characteristically postmodern invention. Then, the term schizophrenia and its bounds can be elaborated upon by juxtaposing it to its modern predecessor anxiety. Jameson’s idea of intensities and the weakening of emotions in postmodern times are also expanded upon. In chapter 2, the idea of identity is introduced and analyzed in the context of late-stage capitalism and postmodern fragmentation. Having now established the scope of the schizophrenic crisis, chapter 3 will discuss to what extent

⁴ John Scott Gray and Paul Zube, “Authenticity in the Digital Age of Social Media,” *Journal of Ethical Urban Living* 1, no. 2 (May 2018): 41–49.

Jameson considers this problem solvable, and how this applies to our current situation. In the conclusion, this analysis will ultimately be connected back to the main argument of the thesis.

Methodology

The question that this thesis answers, will be analyzed through the use of relevant literature review. The main literature that will be utilized is the book *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, authored by Fredric Jameson. However, Jameson also further elaborates on the concept of identity and postmodernism in his essay *Postmodernism and Consumer Society*. With Fredric Jameson as the main focus of this thesis, these will be his two most important works used. Furthermore, Jameson explains his concept of “cognitive mapping”, relevant in chapter 3, scattered throughout different works. Other chapters authored by Jameson are therefore also of importance. Other authors might be discussed to elucidate terms or theories that are insufficiently explained in Jameson’s work. It is important to note that during the analysis, there will be special attention paid to the value these different passages can have for the digital age, since they were almost all written before its creation.

Chapter 1: Symptoms of Postmodernity

Fredric Jameson, in his book *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, describes a cultural shift that is especially seen in art, which indicates an increasingly postmodernist world. This chapter will illustrate the differences of the modernist versus the postmodernist world, according to Jameson. Adding on to this, it will explain why social media belongs to the realm of postmodernity. The rest of this chapter discusses different ‘symptoms of postmodernity’, to develop the idea of the cultural effects on the postmodern psyche. Therefore, the term schizophrenia will be explained and differentiated from the Marxist term of alienation. Following this section, Jameson also describes ‘the waning of affect’, which affects human emotions as a result of postmodernity, which will also be discussed. Lastly, the relevance of these concepts for the digital native of Generation Z will be elaborated on.

Modernism & postmodernism

Jameson describes modernism mostly with the help of cultural examples, like The Beatles, poet Wallace Stevens, architect Frank Lloyd Wright and Picasso. The question however remains what these artists have in common when they adhere to modernist tradition. Like many works in philosophy, Jameson provides no concise definition for the term modernism, but exhibits its characteristics by contrasting it with postmodernism. His key example on the differences between modernism and postmodernism is a comparison of the Vincent van Gogh painting *A Pair of Boots* and the Andy Warhol print *Diamond Dust Shoes*. On the Van Gogh painting, Jameson writes that “the willed and violent transformation of a drab peasant object world into the most glorious materialization of pure color in oil paint is to be seen as a Utopian gesture, an act of compensation which ends up producing a whole new Utopian realm of the senses...”⁵ The artist transforms a seemingly nondescript object into a meaningful artwork, full of emotion and beauty, which Jameson regards as a Utopian gesture. The viewer can imagine the world and context of the shoes, while it comments on the tragic inequality of the working class. The combination of the Utopianism of the transformation of the object and the politicization of the object makes *A Pair of Boots* high modernism. On the other hand, Jameson comments on Andy Warhol’s *Diamond Dust Shoes* by saying: “There is therefore in

⁵ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 1st ed. (London: Verso Books, 1991), 7.

Warhol no way to complete the hermeneutic gesture and restore to these oddments that whole larger lived context of the dance hall or the ball, the world of jetset fashion or glamour magazines.”⁶ The lack of liveliness of the object leaves no room for imagination and Warhol fails to convey a message or emotion. According to Jameson, the shoe is fetishized “in both the Freudian and Marxian senses”⁷, since the value of a luxurious shoe is magnified in terms of both monetary value and desirability. Therefore, as a postmodern artwork, *Diamond Dust Shoes* lacks a transformation of the object that speaks to our senses, and instead relies on our pre-existing notions of the value of the object.

This analysis on Van Gogh’s and Warhol’s art highlights and points to some key cultural differences in modernism and postmodernism. Not only does it symbolize a loss of Utopianism in postmodernity, it indicates the breaking of the barrier between high and low culture. Andy Warhol is seen as one of the most popular artists of the pop-art movement, which is the embodiment of bringing mass consumerist symbols into the realm of art. This commodification, in this case of art, is in postmodernity present in all realms. Postmodernity cannot distinguish between reality and culture. While in modernity people searched for truth in history, postmodernity does not historicize, according to Jameson, and is only occupied with the present. Therefore, it remains uncritical of its situation, which benefits the system of late capitalism.

In the context of our current time, the cultural significance of many of the technologies we use belongs distinctly to the postmodern realm. An average social media timeline is commodified in various ways, with advertisements woven through personal updates and news and entertainment limited to bite-size flashy headlines. The social media user does not reflect and is obsessed with the present, which makes their timeline a battlefield for their short attention span. Not only is the barrier between high and low culture non-existent, the barriers between news, entertainment, art and “reality” diminish with all realms flowing together in one space.

Anxiety & schizophrenia

Jameson is rather pessimistic about the human condition in postmodernity, but also applies the Marxian concepts of anxiety and alienation to describe the cultural pathology of the modern age. Edvard Munch’s *The Scream* is characterized as a modernist painting that

⁶ Jameson, 8.

⁷ Jameson, 8.

expresses pure alienation: “it shows us that expression requires the category of the individual monad, but it also shows us the heavy price to be paid for that precondition, dramatizing the unhappy paradox that when you constitute your individual subjectivity as a self-sufficient field and a closed realm, you thereby shut yourself off from everything else and condemn yourself to the mindless solitude of the monad, buried alive and condemned to a prison cell without egress.”⁸ Alienation therefore is used in this context to describe the effects of a growing individualism, which causes people to feel disconnected from society. *The Scream* represents the suffering subject ripe with anomie and solitude. As will become clear, this focus on the subject stands in stark contrast with the pathology of the postmodern age.

Jameson writes that “concepts such as anxiety and alienation...are no longer appropriate in the world of the postmodern.”⁹ Instead, a new concept is needed to capture the disorder in the postmodern human condition: “This shift in the dynamics of cultural pathology can be characterized as one in which the alienation of the subject is displaced by the latter's fragmentation.”¹⁰ The problem shifts from an isolated self to a self that is fragmented. Jameson even goes so far as to call it the death of the subject. This fragmentation of the self Jameson regards as “schizophrenia”, which can, in a symbolic sense, express itself in subjects, art or writing. He clarifies this concept by using Lacan's description of schizophrenia, which is a “breakdown of the signifying chain”, that is described in rather linguistic terms.

Lacan is a psychoanalyst and a proponent of Saussurean structuralism, especially its interpretation of the relation between the signifier and the signified. Unlike the traditional conception, where a concept (that what is signified) can be expressed through a signifier, like a word, meaning becomes relational and the connection between the signifier and the signified changes.¹¹ The focus is instead on the network of signifiers, the signifying chain, which socially constitutes its relation to the signified. Therefore, we perceive meaning through difference and thus trace the signified through the difference of signifiers in the signifying chain. However, Jameson writes that “when the links of the signifying chain snap, then we have schizophrenia in the form of a rubble of distinct and unrelated signifiers.”¹² What happens in postmodernity, is that we cannot form a unified network of signifiers

⁸ Jameson, 15.

⁹ Jameson, 14.

¹⁰ Jameson, 14.

¹¹ Ferdinand Saussure, “Ferdinand de Saussure, Course in General Linguistics,” in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 59–71.

¹² Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 26.

anymore that is so central to the subject itself, which leads to us being unable to make sense of the world. This explains why Jameson writes that “the ideal schizophrenic, indeed, is easy enough to please provided only an eternal present is thrust before the eyes, which gaze with equal fascination on an old shoe or the tenaciously growing organic mystery of the human toenail.”¹³ The schizophrenic can only live in the present and take sense experiences for what they are, an incoherent set of signifiers, which is why the *Diamond Dust Shoes* is a distinctly postmodern work. It is easy to process for the schizophrenic, being presented with only a commodity with no story or message behind the object for us to imagine.

The waning of affect

This pessimistic interpretation of the postmodern psyche and postmodern art seems to claim that postmodernity is only commercial and unpolitical. Art has become devoid of emotions. Jameson, however, aims to bring some nuance into this idea: “Of course, it would be inaccurate to suggest that all affect, all feeling or emotion, all subjectivity, has vanished from the newer image.”¹⁴ He admits that there is some feeling of glamour to be found in Andy Warhol’s *Diamond Dust Shoes*. Yet, feeling for the postmodern subject must be understood along different lines, which is why Jameson introduces a term for the deterioration of emotion in postmodernity: the waning of affect.

The waning of affect is considered a symptom of the new “depthlessness”, which in turn is another symptom of the postmodern age. Depthlessness is the superficiality of our current time, due to the postmodern claim that it is impossible to find truth. Postmodernists often adhere to a paradoxical epistemology that there are multiple truths to be found and that we can never know one true truth, or as Jameson interprets: “depth is replaced by surface, or by multiple surfaces”.¹⁵ Therefore, there is little left for the postmodern subject to grasp, to reflect on or to make sense of, which causes the subject to fragment and become the ideal schizophrenic.

To describe the waning of affect, Jameson shortly returns to his individualist interpretation of Edvard Munch’s *The Scream*, that contrasts with the death of the subject in postmodernity:

¹³ Jameson, 10.

¹⁴ Jameson, 10.

¹⁵ Jameson, 12.

As for expression and feelings or emotions, the liberation, in contemporary society, from the older anomie of the centered subject may also mean not merely a liberation from anxiety but a liberation from every other kind of feeling as well, since there is no longer a self present to do the feeling. This is not to say that the cultural products of the postmodern era are utterly devoid of feeling, but rather that such feelings -- which it may be better and more accurate, following J.-F. Lyotard, to call "intensities" -- are now free-floating and impersonal and tend to be dominated by a peculiar kind of euphoria, a matter to which we will want to return later on.¹⁶

Therefore, Jameson believes the fragmentation of the subject, meaning that there is no longer a stable sense of self, leads to the incapability to experience true emotion; feelings "wane". The postmodern schizophrenic rather feels "intensities". The depthlessness of the everyday alternates with these intensities, which are moments of extreme emotion, with either high positive or negative intensity. A fragmented self living in the present only can experience in a disorganized, amplified way. Jameson especially emphasizes the possibility for "euphoria", the experience of strong positive intensity. Since the intensities serve as a replacement for the dominance of anxiety and alienation, this emphasis gives a more positive nuance to the pessimistic term of schizophrenia. He also compares it to the experience of the sublime, as authors like Kant and Burke have described, which reveals to us the nature of intensities as a disorganized, overwhelming and boundless experience.

Postmodernism in the 21st century

These symptoms of postmodernity laid out by Jameson can also be applied to the times that came after his work, which are dominated by new information technologies. At this stage, Jameson's comments on technology as he saw it in his time cannot be ignored. Jameson mostly downplayed the roles of technology, claiming that they are mostly involved with reproduction instead of production.¹⁷ It is no wonder that he saw contemporary technology as a tool for representation, since he lived in a time where information technology was a one-sided medium, whereas they are now dominated by the possibility of interaction. The focus of Web 2.0, introduced during the early 2000s, is user-generated content, a term which in itself implies production rather than reproduction.

¹⁶ Jameson, 15–16.

¹⁷ Jameson, 37.

It is no coincidence that the rise of the Web 2.0 closely follows the birth of a new Generation Z, who are subjected to the symptoms of postmodernity reflected upon in this chapter. Again, taking the example of a social media timeline, this is the ideal space for a schizophrenic to be born. A timeline, having dramatically moved away from its traditional meaning, is a disorganized stream of messages, minimally held together by a vague sense of temporality. The social media timeline is the perfect example of an incoherent set of signifiers, representing the commodified versions of news, art and entertainment in one space. It is depthless due to the superficiality of messages, only allowing bite-size formats consumed in spurts of attention. The subject becomes fragmented, thus schizophrenic, as a result of an overload of indistinct and incoherent information. In addition, the waning of affect is present in the battle for attention of the digital native. Due to an incapability of the user to properly process information, it is often corporations that resort to flashy, unrepresentative headlines for the sake of a moment of intensity, which might lead to a “share”. The obsession with going viral points to a constant search for short-lived moments of euphoria, whereafter one again fades away into depthlessness.

However, Jameson’s comparison of intensities with the experience of the sublime provokes a different interpretation of technology that can be viewed in the context of his work. Coined “the digital sublime”, Vincent Mosco draws upon those same authors as Jameson when illustrating the sublime in the context of the digital age.¹⁸ The digital sublime describes the sense of awe we are overwhelmed with when experiencing the sheer incomprehensibility and scope that technology confronts us with. We can neither grasp the magnitude of the internet, nor the technologies along which it functions, yet we have become completely dependent on it. The schizophrenic is overwhelmed with this experience of the sublime, but must continually live in the present to accept this fact.

The next step

This chapter has established what Jameson regards as the true features of postmodernism, but also the symptoms that indicate how it influences our culture, psyche and society. The schizophrenic is used as a characterization of that what was once the subject in modernity, but is now affected by the depthlessness and fragmentation of postmodernity. Due to the undeniable postmodern character of our new information technologies, the digital native is

¹⁸ Vincent Mosco, *The Digital Sublime: Myth, Power, and Cyberspace*, 1st ed. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2004).

bound to become schizophrenic. However, Jameson's analysis of schizophrenia has limited itself to the linguistic realm. The next chapter will illustrate in a more personal context what schizophrenia means for identity formation and how this relates to the development of the newer generations.

Chapter 2: Identity & Schizophrenia

Jameson's description of postmodernity and the severity of its symptoms allege that this new age will bring detrimental consequences for culture, and consequently humankind, since culture is purely produced and reproduced by humans. *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* explains the term schizophrenia on the basis of Saussurean structuralism, which tends to a more linguistic approach. However, to fully understand how identity formation works for the schizophrenic, it is worthwhile to add another, still Lacanian, perspective, which provides more background into the field of psychoanalysis. Jameson's essay *Postmodernism and Consumer Society* will offer exactly this. Afterwards, the interaction of identity and (late) capitalism will be described, since Jameson naturally considers the schizophrenic to be greatly influenced by the hegemonic economic system.

Identity & Lacan

It cannot be ignored that a Lacanian perspective on psychosis will always be an issue of language, but there is much that can be nuanced in his views. Jameson concludes from his work that "psychosis, and more particularly schizophrenia, emerges from the failure of the infant to accede fully into the realm of speech and language."¹⁹ This quote is based on Lacan's views on infant development, wherein he regards what he calls "the mirror stage" as a crucial point. The mirror stage occurs when a baby of approximately six months sees his reflection in the mirror and is actually able to distinguish the figure as himself, as opposed to another indistinct sense perception.²⁰ This is the first time that a child experiences himself as a coherent individual and gains a sense of a unified identity, the "Ideal-I". The "Ideal-I" will also be quickly confirmed by language, often by a mother who exclaims: "Look, that's you!", associating the signified with the signifier. However, this unified identity is not magically complete in a baby's infancy, and needs to develop over time. One's upbringing and environment will determine in what way one's identity will unify, according to what key characteristics, like religion, community or life experience. These characteristics can be called signifiers. Just as language is socially constituted, in accordance with Saussurean structuralism, Lacan logically also believes identity to be formed in the same way.

¹⁹ Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster, 5th ed. (Washington: Bay Press, 1987), 118.

²⁰ Jane Gallop, "Lacan's 'Mirror Stage': Where to Begin," *SubStance* 11, no. 4 (1982): 118–28, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3684185>.

While consciousness about being an individual may sound like healthy development for an infant, Lacan actually believes the mirror stage to be the source of different kinds of psychic disorders, among which schizophrenia. This is because the child now wants to be like the Ideal-I, since humans strive for perfection, while his reflection is actually a representation of the “other”.²¹ Therefore, the Ideal-I can never be attained and the subject is split. This psychoanalytic background explains to us how the schizophrenic is “born”, and how he is predisposed to psychosis. His development of an ego is especially relevant in the age of consumer capitalism, which will be elaborated on later.

The schizophrenic, attempting to form a unified subject, will define his identity along the lines of signifiers that are doomed to break down in postmodernity, due to all the symptoms previously discussed. This breakdown has consequences for his sense of temporality. Jameson again draws upon Lacan when he claims that the experience of temporality is an effect of language. He explains: “It is because language has a past and a future, because the sentence moves in time, that we can have what seems to us a concrete or lived experience of time.”²² We can express our experiences through time with language, but for the schizophrenic, these signifiers become disconnected. Since identity is also supposed to persist through time and require a consistent “I”, this loss of temporality also means a loss of personal identity. At the beginning of his essay, Jameson distinguishes between two postmodernist views of identity. The first claims that the individual identity was once attainable, when industrialism started to rise, but that “the age of corporate capitalism” has pronounced it dead.²³ The second position, coined as poststructuralist, claims that the individual subject with a unified identity has never existed in the first place. One was deceived into thinking having a unique identity was a possibility through philosophy and culture.

Identity & capitalism

While it has been clarified how postmodernity can create a cultural pathology that essentially constitutes the death of the individual identity, it should also be acknowledged how the current economic system sustains this pathology. Jameson wrote his critiques on late capitalism when consumerism was on the rise, and we can argue that this cultural shift has

²¹ Gallop.

²² Jameson, “Postmodernism and Consumer Society,” 119.

²³ Jameson, 115.

continued on, if not worsened, into the 21st century. To describe how capitalism can dictate identity, or the lack thereof, it is useful to first return to the psychoanalytic position influenced by Lacan. In late capitalism, the “Ideal-I” transcends one’s reflection in the mirror and essentially becomes commodified. Consumerism supports the mirroring of individuals to unattainable ideals, be that a photoshopped influencer on social media or simply a can of Coca-Cola, since consumerism also sells lifestyles. Similar to how Roland Barthes describes the experience of going to the cinema, buying this can means recognizing oneself as the “image-repertoire”.²⁴ The image-repertoire is the lifestyle that is being presented, which buyers are meant to identify with. This process of identity formation is one that supports the logic of consumer capitalism.

Presenting the postmodern consumer as being on a quest for unattainable ideals would make them the perfect victim of late capitalism, but this quest presupposes a certain continuity through time, while the schizophrenic has no sense of temporality. Jameson even writes that “he or she also does nothing, since to have a project means to be able to commit oneself to a certain continuity over time”.²⁵ This quote somewhat contradicts the notion of the schizophrenic as the perpetual shopper obsessed with material goods. It also hard to reconcile how consumerism is completely based on identity formation while the schizophrenic does not possess a personal identity.

The solution to this contradiction can be found within a new psychoanalytic approach to temporality. French author Jean Laplanche defines time through the experience of a “rhythm”, which dictates identity formation. According to him, this rhythm works through a continual sequence of “de-translation”, which is the experience of the defragmentation of signifiers, and “re-translation”, which are the constant attempts to unify signifiers into a coherent identity.²⁶ It is because consumer capitalism keeps presenting us with constant and sometimes contradicting image-repertoires, and because humans have the natural urge to form a unity, that this rhythm endures. Not only does it endure, in our information age, this process of de-translation and re-translation endures at an ever-increasing speed, since consumers are targeted every day with more corporate messages than Laplanche or Jameson could imagine

²⁴ Roland Barthes, “Leaving the Movie Theater,” in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard, 1st ed. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), 345–49.

²⁵ Jameson, “Postmodernism and Consumer Society,” 120.

²⁶ Jean Laplanche, “Psychoanalysis, Time and Translation,” in *Seduction, Translation and the Drives*, ed. John Fletcher and Martin Stanton, 1st ed. (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1992), 161–77, <https://pesquisa.bvsalud.org/portal/resource/pt/psa-44757>.

in the previous century. The schizophrenic's experience of time is dictated by this rhythm, because re-translation requires them to commit to an identity, which is also a temporal experience, while de-translation allows them to quickly abandon it for the next. The limited temporal continuity of their identity is just sufficient to persuade them into buying the desired product. Not to mention, nowadays, this ever-increasing rhythm is facilitated by the ever-increasing speed of buying, characterized by fast-fashion and fast-food.

Therefore, the rhythm of de-translation and re-translation sustains the system of consumer capitalism by forming ever-changing identities which are only coherent enough to fulfill a consumerist desire. For this reason, Jameson only denies that the schizophrenic has a *personal* identity.²⁷ The schizophrenic can at any point have an identity, but these identities are weak and ever-changing, to the point that it can be barely be recognized as an identity anymore. He has neither a *unified* identity, nor a *unique* identity and can still not be considered a subject, since his temporality is not dictated by his own identity but by the creating and replacing of identities.

Relevance for Generation Z

This analysis of identity in consumer capitalism has great consequences for the generation that was born into what can be considered an “age of acceleration”. Generation Z experienced their mirror stage around the turn of the century, which, according to the psychoanalyst, laid the groundworks for future psychosis. This prediction is supported by the corporate targeting of children, not only in literal advertisements, but also the cultural values that trickle down into toys, cartoons and video games. It is inescapable that these children spend their youth chasing unattainable Ideal-I's, like Lacan described. Important developmental aspects, like fantasy and imagination, are more often than not taken advantage of by corporations to promote products completely based on identification. Dressing up personalized dolls or playing games sponsored by kids' favorite soda stimulates ego formation which is supported by the already well-developed brand awareness of a young child. While a child's ego formation has been well-discussed in psychoanalysis for years, this process is now being used to sustain consumerist values.

The aforementioned “age of acceleration” relates to the acceleration of speed at which information travels in the digital age, which is a crucial element of its definition. It is no

²⁷ Jameson, “Postmodernism and Consumer Society,” 119.

surprise that this acceleration of information will make the experience of rapid de-translation and re-translation even more evident. An overload of messages guarantees that the schizophrenic stays switching identities and keeps looking for the “next best thing”. The Internet is even considered of great use to target and create a mass of specific niches, which can be argued to make the process of re-translation even more intense, characterized by brief moments of euphoria that Jameson describes. The identity is sustained long enough for a product to be bought, which is now facilitated by just the simple click of a button in the age of online shopping. However, the digital age is also characterized by endless scrolling on social media, and while this does evoke the image of the schizophrenic who “does nothing and has no project over time”, their life does not seem to be dictated by doing continuous shopping. Therefore, the traditional view of a consumer ought to be updated.

Reaching the limit?

The move of marketing to the digital realm meant an entirely new approach of advertising for corporations, which Jameson could not foresee. It has become a battle for the attention of the consumer, due to the fast-paced environment of social media and the coming and going of trends. Advertisements need to now be disguised under a cloak of authenticity to be noticed by the digital consumer. They are hidden in entertainment articles or a social media post by one’s favorite influencer. Even when succeeding in letting a consumer glance at the advertisement for a fraction of time, this is still a far reach from the moment of purchase. Digital marketing now revolves around “awareness” and “engagement”, and there are many stages to walk through until the actual purchase of a product. The focus has shifted to “content”, either sponsored or user-generated to reinforce consumer culture. This newly created “content economy” is unpredictable and ever-changing. Therefore, corporations need to be constantly inventing new ways to keep up with the rhythm of the consumer. The rapid pace of de-translation and re-translation seems to now be working against corporations, instead of wholly sustaining consumer capitalism.

What is happening now on social media is particularly similar to what Deleuze & Guattari described to be the “limit of capitalism” in their book *Anti-Oedipus*. Much like Jameson, Deleuze & Guattari saw a link between capitalism and schizophrenia, but they viewed it from the perspective of a postmodern author. They saw schizophrenia as the limit of

capitalism that it has never quite reached yet.²⁸ At some point, capitalism will not be able to keep up with the defragmented, scattered nature of the schizophrenic consumer. While capitalism profits from the deterritorialization of signifiers, since it allows for unlimited commodification, the deterritorialization of schizophrenia can also harm the previously stable forces of capitalism, like markets or the class system. Therefore, it can get out of control and destroy the system that was once sustained by deterritorialization. For this reason, Deleuze & Guattari saw a possibility for resistance against late capitalism in schizophrenia. They go even further and claim that to use its full potential, the development of schizophrenia must be accelerated to work against the hegemonic forces.

Hence, the effects of the digital age, supporting all forms of acceleration, can be seen as the limit of capitalism, or at least, moving towards the limit. It should be noted that Jameson opposes the revolutionary potential of the “heroic” schizophrenic that Deleuze & Guattari describe, since he, as a modernist author, sees schizophrenia as being submissive to the logic of late capitalism. However, he explores the idea while searching himself for a solution or resistance for being overpowered by this cultural pathology. He writes:

As for the psychic subject and its theories, this is the area colonized by the Deleuze-Guattari notion of the ideal schizophrenic -- that psychic subject who "perceives" by way of difference and differentiation alone, if that is conceivable; of course, the conceiving of it is the construction of an ideal which is, so to speak, the ethical -- not to say the political -- task proposed by their *Anti-Oedipus*. I think one cannot too often emphasize the logical possibility, alongside both the old closed, centered subject of inner-directed individualism and the new nonsubject of the fragmented or schizophrenic self, of a third term which would be very precisely the noncentered subject that is a part of an organic group or collective.²⁹

Therefore, while he believes that schizophrenia cannot facilitate it, Jameson is interested in the idea of reinventing the subject that combines pure individualism and incoherent fragmentation.³⁰ Both modernism and postmodernism developed psychotic tendencies and left the individual fighting with oneself. A noncentered subject would theoretically overcome both alienation and schizophrenia due to being in touch with one's subjectivity, but also with the environment that one is truly included in. Being a part of an organic group or collective

²⁸ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 10th ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

²⁹ Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 345.

³⁰ Alexander Dunst, "Late Jameson, or, after the Eternity of the Present," *New Formations*, no. 65 (September 22, 2008): 105–19.

grounds the being, but this is fundamentally impossible in the system of late capitalism, since it supports defragmentation and impedes the creation of anything organic. Jameson is awfully aware of this fact and sees the noncentered subject as an ideal in his guidance to overcome schizophrenia.³¹ The question therefore remains what Jameson thinks can be done to heal society. The next chapter will discuss what he has prescribed in his bibliography and if this is still be applicable thirty years into the future, or if we are now truly past the point of no return.

³¹ Jon Bailes, *Consciousness and the Neoliberal Subject: A Theory of Ideology via Marcuse, Jameson and Žižek* (Routledge, 2020).

Chapter 3: Resistance Against Schizophrenia

Until now we have seen how Jameson describes postmodernity as an inescapable condition, that is constantly reinforced by culture, sustained by the economic system and deters us from questioning our own subjectivity or the status quo. Therefore, it is surprising that Jameson provides us with a possibility to resist schizophrenic tendencies. Admittedly, the solution is not straightforward and requires a constant mental exercise to regain our sense of agency in society. Jameson calls this exercise “cognitive mapping”, which will be described in this chapter, along with an example of its real-life application. A perspective will also be offered if Generation Z will benefit from the concept of cognitive mapping, or if we have already reached a breaking point.

Cognitive mapping

The term “cognitive mapping” has many modernist influences, which would seem odd since we are trying to deal with a postmodern phenomenon. However, as Jameson is heavily influenced by Marx, his ideas for resistance are essentially based on a mass class uprising and focus on the collective. He admits that this is a far reach from where we are in the system of late capitalism, but also writes that we ought to concentrate on “a rattling of the bars and an intense spiritual concentration and preparation for another stage which has not yet arrived”.³² This preparation is done by the process of what he calls cognitive mapping, which aims to reintroduce a new, “real” sense of temporality and class consciousness into the world.³³ The goal is to understand the logic behind the system that we perceive as fragmented and bring narratives into the world again. Therefore, this approach revives some distinctly modernist terms.

Jameson introduces the term cognitive mapping in *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* by way of Kevin Lynch’s book *The Image of the City*. Lynch criticizes the distinctly American city landscape, with endless homogeneous blocks, since it is particularly disorienting and alienating for the city dweller. One must be able to find their way and regain a sense of place with the help of a mental map, which is rendered impossible in places like Jersey City. Jameson finds this issue of spatiality interesting to apply to ideology: “There is, for one thing, a most interesting convergence between the empirical problems

³² Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*, 1st ed. (London: Verso Books, 2005), 233.

³³ Bailes, *Consciousness and the Neoliberal Subject*, 114.

studied by Lynch in terms of city space and the great Althusserian (and Lacanian) redefinition of ideology as "the representation of the subject's Imaginary relationship to his or her Real conditions of existence."³⁴ Early Marxists thought ideology was a false representation of how the world actually functioned, aiming to disguise class struggle. The structuralist Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser (1918-1990) however, claimed that ideology is taken for granted within our collective *unconsciousness* and represents how we *think* we relate to the world.³⁵ The state can influence citizens in such a way that they think the system and their position within it is a result of the natural order. The example of the "American Dream" comes to mind, which makes the subject take economic inequality for granted, since wealth only comes from hard work. Therefore, Jameson is interested where we think we are positioned in our ideological mental map and recognize as reality. The cognitive map is to "enable a situational representation on the part of the individual subject to that vaster and properly unrepresentable totality which is the ensemble of society's structures as a whole."³⁶ In essence, it aims to reveal truth behind ideological representation by structuring the totality of society. Logically, many parallels are to be drawn between this concept and class consciousness, although cognitive mapping is specifically inspired by structuralist philosophy.

The question that follows is what is to be done to reveal our true place in the ideological map of totality. The example of *The Image of the City* strangely concentrated on spatiality, while it is a loss of temporality that we suffer from in postmodernity. Therefore, cognitive mapping needs to bring back a sense of temporality, in order to regain historicity. By historicizing, we can reflect on narratives that faded during postmodernity. Through these narratives, the individual can not only return back to its lost subjectivity, but also come to understand one's own relation to the collective as the "noncentered subject" that Jameson emphasized previously. This lays the groundwork for a global class consciousness.³⁷ Late capitalism has concealed class struggle by outsourcing production to other countries. Therefore, the only way to resist the logic of postmodernity is to reflect on the global totality of the capitalist system and the narratives through which it is enforced.

³⁴ Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 51.

³⁵ Angus Reoch, "Book Review: On the Reproduction of Capitalism," *Studies in Social and Political Thought* 24 (2014): 92.

³⁶ Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 51.

³⁷ Tanner Mirrlees, "Cognitive Mapping or, the Resistant Element in the Work of Fredric Jameson: A Response to Jason Berger," *Cultural Logic: A Journal of Marxist Theory & Practice* 12 (2005): 10.

The semiotic square

Cognitive mapping, although theoretically beneficial, remains a particularly abstract concept if Jameson continues to offer us only cultural examples where the theory is partly applied. However, there is one example where he gives us a discursive exercise that anyone can apply in real-life. In the book *On Meaning: Selected Writings in Semiotic Theory* by Algirdas Greimas, Jameson authored the foreword and, in this chapter, he spoke particularly fond of the semiotic square. He writes that it “constitutes a virtual map of conceptual closure, or better still, of the closure of ideology itself, that is, as a mechanism, which, while seeming to generate a rich variety of possible concepts and positions, remains in fact locked into some initial aporia or double bind that it cannot transform from the inside by its own means.”³⁸ Therefore, it exposes presumptions within ideology that remain hidden to us at first sight, which corresponds to the Althusserian conception of ideology. Furthermore, the semiotic square is also considered to be “temporal or positional”³⁹, conducive to the aim of cognitive mapping, since the order of the concepts that are mapped can radically change the outcome.

To provide an example of a semiotic square, it is preferred to illustrate a real-life application in the realm of our interest: advertising. The semiotic square can help consumers be critical of advertising and unravel their hidden meaning. Yue Tao has shown how it can be applied to Apple advertising slogans.⁴⁰ Figure 1 dissects a simple example: the slogan *Forward thinking* for the iPhone 5s.

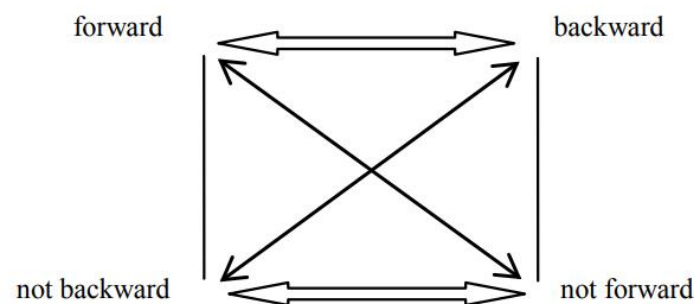


Figure 1. (Yue Tao, “*Apple in the Semiotic Square: Apple’s Advertising Slogans and Greimas’ Semiotic Matrix Theory*”, *Chinese Semiotic Studies* 13, no. 2 (May 1, 2017), 199, fig. 5.

³⁸ Fredric Jameson, “Foreword,” in *On Meaning: Selected Writings in Semiotic Theory*, by Algirdas Julien Greimas, trans. Paul J. Perron and Frank H. Collins, *Theory and History of Literature* 38 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), xv.

³⁹ Jameson, xv.

⁴⁰ Yue Tao, “Apple in the Semiotic Square: Apple’s Advertising Slogans and Greimas’ Semiotic Matrix Theory,” *Chinese Semiotic Studies* 13, no. 2 (May 1, 2017): 193–201, <https://doi.org/10.1515/css-2017-0010>.

Within this slogan, “forward” is our term of interest and is positioned in the top left corner. “Forward” stands in direct *opposition* with “backward”, signified by the thick white arrow. As opposed to other tech companies, Apple thinks forward. “Forward” also stands in *contradictory* relation with “not forward”, likewise with “backward” and “not backward”, signified by the black arrows. Apple contradicts those that do not see the phone as innovative. Lastly, “forward” and “not backward” along with “backward” and “not forward” are combinations of *implication*. While they can both be true at the same time, the reader should consider the reason why Apple has chosen to specifically use the term “forward”. The square therefore illustrates every possible relation of this semantic term, which helps to analyze the underlying meaning of persuasive messaging. Jameson especially appreciates the “conceptual closure”, that in its ability to reveal to us the bounds of a semantic term, exposes its whole meaning. When applied to more complex relations, it can bring whole underlying narratives to light.

Cognitive mapping's future

Cognitive mapping is an ambitious attempt to introduce modernist elements back into the world and bring the individual in charge of their own subjectivity again, while not losing the sight of the totality that once caused individuals to be alienated. Moreover, it becomes a beyond ambitious attempt to undertake for a generation that has never known modernity in the sense that Jameson describes. For Generation Z, there is no reviving of subjectivity, narratives or temporality, since all they have known is the fragmented nature of postmodernity. However, it would be too short-sighted to dismiss Jameson's efforts of improvements when it can be recognized that it is useful to start mapping our increasingly complex world. Especially for a generation that is still cognitively developing, these maps can help us stay critical of advertising by dissecting consumerist messaging. In addition, Jameson was particularly accurate in directing our focus towards a global approach, where today we see an ever-growing need to observe complex global supply chains and study their harm on the world.

Yet, the future of cognitive mapping cannot be properly discussed without mentioning the failings and potentials of new technologies. It is almost paradoxical how we have accumulated these extreme amounts of data, while still unable to make sense of our relation to the world, but it reveals to us the consequences of mankind being faced with the digital sublime. Data does not exist as something visual and is therefore neither spatial nor temporal.

We only convert it to something empirical when we analyze, visualize or map it.

Unfortunately, we are more often than not forced to hand over our personal data through our daily technology usage. Therefore, to attempt to take back control of this information and use it to our own advantage can revive Jameson's hopes for a class uprising and reinstate a global class consciousness.

Conclusion

Considering the cultural changes caused by the culmination of late-stage capitalism and the digital age, the Generation Z of the 21st century is not facing any ordinary identity crisis. The schizophrenic tendencies of the age marked by social media, digital marketing and deeply ingrained consumerism is a symptom of the nature of the postmodern age. Fredric Jameson saw where the world was heading towards, but could not foresee how applicable his ideas turn out to be thirty years later in the digital age. Social media reflects to us many elements that he found as distinctly postmodern traits, which has considerable effects for our psyche. Our cultural signifiers become fragmented, lack depth and fluctuate with varying intensities. The timeline is a perfect example of never-ending incoherent streams of cultural signifiers.

Jameson's notion of schizophrenia has proven to lend itself well to the state of subjectivity in the digital age. Changes in relations between signifiers will not only have impacts for our culture, but consequently also for the process of our identity formation. Generation Z is receiving messages through ever-present advertising at unprecedented rates, due to the acceleration of information that technologies facilitate. Having chased unattainable and consumerist Ideal-I's since infancy, it has become impossible for this generation to make sense of the unlimited and contradicting image-repertoires that their digital environment offers. The result is an unstable identity that is constantly stuck between de-translation and re-translation, never grasping any true connection to one's subjectivity. The subject is dead, as Jameson writes. It can even be argued that schizophrenia will have the ability to deterritorialize the forces that uphold our capitalist economy, and that consumerism sustains a pathology that is destined to destroy it.

To escape this bleak rhythm of depthlessness, Jameson would argue for constant discursive exercises through cognitive mapping to grant our subjectivity the tools to reveal the underlying ideology of the constant image-repertoires we face. In the present information age, we should start viewing (digital) information as the key cause and cure to Generation Z's schizophrenia, like the structuralist views language. We are currently processing too much information of a schizophrenic, corporate nature at a much too rapid pace. Companies are constructing an ideology that sustains our pathology through control of information, due to the fact that they are able to monopolize the truth through mass gathered consumer data. This becomes integrated into our constant identity formation to the point that we reinforce it ourselves through user-generated content, culminating in the content economy. It is peculiar that we have all the tools for egalitarian and radical discourse at our disposal in the form of

information and communication technologies, but have become too alienated from our subjectivity to utilize it for collectivization.

For Jameson's ambitions for the potentials of cognitive mapping and a mass class uprising to come true in the future, the aim is to take back control of information previously manipulated by corporations and gain ideological power. This would allow individuals to assemble, map and analyze information on their own to create their own narratives again. It would revive a sense of subjectivity, temporality and historicity, reminiscent of those elements that we ceased to be able to grasp after modernity. Establishing global information technologies as a means to collectivize and reclaim discursive power would be the first step to move towards the "noncentered subject that is part of an organic group or collective". Organic discourse, which might or might not be an attainable ideal for the digital sphere, is the key to repairing the signifying chain, which can help individuals develop and construct their sense of subjectivity.

Naturally, like Marxist revolutionary ideals of class uprisings, what is being illustrated here is a utopia for the situation we find ourselves in right now. However, it is important to keep creating utopias like the one in Vincent van Gogh's *A Pair of Boots*, since postmodernity generally leaves no room for imagination of radical change. It should be regarded as a plea to not only view data and information privacy issues through a philosophical lens, but also to consider the loss of subjectivity as a driving force in the search for solutions. This is relevant because in our current digital age, consumers are being robbed of their personal information and corporations are selling it back to them through their own fragmented, schizophrenic logic.

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