

**What am I for the other? Digital media and its discontents  
[abstract only]**

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## **‘What am I for the Other? Digital Media and its Discontents’**

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### **Abstract**

It seems as if our very addiction to ‘social media’ has, today, become encapsulated in the tensions between its facilitation as a mode of interpersonal communication and as an insidious conduit for machine learning, surveillance capitalism and manipulation. What is more, we remain fully aware of the problems and unethical practices perpetuated by digital media companies that we frequently use and require. While we realize and accept that not everything that we see online can be taken at ‘face value’, our relations to/with digital media continue to be characterized by a ‘fetishistic disavowal’ (Žižek, 2008). Though ‘we know very well that the media and our current cultural climate are influencing our behaviour and our choices as consumers to an extremely problematic extent, we still like to pretend that we are free to make our own choices’ (Mangold, 2014, 4). Such a *pretense* is grounded in a level of interactivity that, while affording the opportunity to engage with a ‘world wide web’, remains enveloped in a passive engagement with the content onscreen. It is this passive engagement which is paradoxically founded upon our own active involvement in digital environments.

In this paper, attention will be given to exploring how our digital media relations can be read as a form of interpassive exchange, whereby the hysterical question, ‘what am I for the Other?’, can work to re-align our approach to digital media platforms. Specifically, I will draw from the position of the hysteric (Clemens and Grigg, 2006) in accordance with Robert Pfaller’s (2017) notion of interpassivity. Together, these

concepts will be used to provide a psychoanalytic account of how our subjectivization through digital media renders an unconscious endorsement that both frames our awareness of the dilemmas encompassing social media, while also positing an inherent limitation that may offer a possible path out of its impeding affects. This subjective ambivalence – delegated yet reluctantly disavowed – offers an opportunity to realign discussions on the lost object of desire (*objet a*) and its reproduction in the algorithm.

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