

From Cyberspace to Corporate Culture: Analyzing Blended Identity in *Pattern Recognition* by William Gibson

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Abstract

This article focuses on contemporary digital identity crisis in the digital forum and corporate workspaces as implied in William Ford Gibson's novels *Pattern Recognition*. Blended identity is analyzed to be a disagreement between an individual's digital persona and their true identity and the resulting effects this embarks on the dark web. Digital platforms offer space to connect with mixed identities, fostering the development of new groups and a stronger sense of belonging. The article underscores the complexity of blended digital identities as highlighted in Gibson's *Pattern Recognition*, and the ways in which it links and distances people from one another. Further, it also focuses on the corporate environment's subcultures, thereby categorizing the boundary between the real and the virtual world, a very trait of cyberpunk novels of Gibson.

Keywords: blended identity, digital identity, gender bait, masked identity, cyberpunk, virtual world, identity crisis

From Cyberspace to Corporate Culture: Analyzing Blended Identity in *Pattern Recognition* by William Gibson

The article entitled "From Cyberspace to Corporate Culture: Analyzing Blended Identity in *Pattern Recognition* by William Gibson" focuses on contemporary subjects of corporate workspaces as implied in Gibson's novel *Pattern Recognition*. The paper mainly highlights the concept of blended identity in the dark web which refers to the integration or blending of cultural or social identities to develop a distinctive sense of self. Race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, nationality, and other characteristics play a role in this. A wide range of elements, including past experiences, family history, societal norms, and cultural customs have an impact on one's blended identity. It is crucial to remember that the idea of a mixed identity is not new; as people have always combined and redefined their identities. But as our world has grown more linked and globalised, blended identities have proliferated and gained acceptance, contributing to a fuller and more varied sense of what it is to be a person. The complexity of blended digital identities is highlighted in Gibson's *Pattern Recognition*, and the ways in which it links and distances people from one another. It also focuses on the effects of internet identity on the real world and also the connection between technology, creativity, and authenticity. The internet forum in the novel is a classic example of the digital identity crisis.

The term blended identity in cyberspace refers to a person's online presence, through a variety of digital tools and platforms that frequently results in a blended digital identity. Digital platforms offer space to connect with mixed identities, fostering the development of new groups and a stronger sense of belonging. The concept of blended digital identity addressed in Gibson's novel *Pattern Recognition* is from the perspective of Cayce Pollard, a marketing consultant tasked with discovering a mystery collection of well-liked online video clips. Cayce has a blended digital identity since she is deeply ingrained in the fashion and advertising industries online, and also has a significant sensitivity to branding and logos in the real world.

Cayce investigates the origin of the enigmatic video snippets in Tokyo and London and struggles throughout to reconcile her digital persona with reality. She joins a digital forum namely F: F:Fetish: Footage: Forum which is a website, discussion forum, and chatroom that Ivy truly created and is similar to contemporary social media groups. The purpose of the website, which Cayce often checks, is to critique anonymous movie posts.

Cayce makes connections with other people who share her obsession with the video clips through her involvement in F: F:F, and she becomes excited about the community's efforts to find the footage's origin and significance. As the novel elaborates,

There are perhaps twenty regular posters on F:F:F, and some much larger and uncounted number of lurkers. And right now there are three people in Chat, but there's no way of knowing exactly who until you are in there, and the chat room she finds not so comforting. It's strange even with friends, like sitting in a pitch-dark cellar conversing with people at a distance of about fifteen feet. (4)

Cayce Pollard is drawn to this forum by her interest in the video - "She types Fetish: Footage: Forum, which Damien determined to avoid contamination, will never book mark" (3). Cayce interacts with people who share her interests and hobbies in the F: F:F community, which provides a forum for group investigation and interpretation. There are more lurkers in the forum who never participates.

Cayce's frequent visits to the forum make her feel at ease there, making her perceive it as a safe place. Cayce's familiarity with the internet is a reflection of modern-day internet users and their comfort in the virtual space. Gibson has portrayed Cayce in this way as a paradigmatic representation of contemporary civilization. Similar to the online forum, Cayce places a high value on the footage too. She considers the forum to be her home, as the "forum has become one of the most consistent places in her life, like a familiar café that exists somehow outside of geography and beyond time zones" (158). Gibson relates the current generation being sensitive to cyberspace in this way.

The key attraction of cyberspace is the quick transition from reality to the virtual fantasy world. People choose to stay in that cyberworld for an extended period of time for long hours. This kind of aimless surfing on the internet can be associated with the term cyberflâneurs. John Hendel in his article "The Life of the Cyberflâneur" underscores the strolling of the cyberflâneur in a chaotic cyber world: A cyberflâneur, by definition, strolls through the Internet. Little purpose guides his journey, and hours slip by as the individual explores the many different crevices of the ever-growing web, from Wikipedia to Tumblr, from popular news sites to Twitter, from obscure journals to social media. He crawls through them all and is all the stronger for it. How do you turn a corner into the unknown online? You click a link. You go places. Who cares where? The cyberflâneur strolls more for the journey, the experience, the flow of the digital landscape, all to seek without any one destination or goal. He pokes around in Pinterest and dives into Digg, cruises Archive.org and gazes deep into Google Books, ventures into Vimeo and calculates Kickstarter potential. There's never been a better, more suitable time to be a cyberflâneur, after all.

Cayce is one of those cyberflâneurs, who is drawn to cyberspace, as seen by her fixation with the forum and the video. Cayce frequently visits the site as a result of her fascination with tracking down the whereabouts of the internet popular video. It is because of her interest, she regularly discovers a clue behind the footage during her visits. She watches the video clip several times to gather clues about the creator in an effort to get to know them better. As a result, she assesses it - "The front page opens, familiar as a friend's living room. A frame-grab from #48 serves as backdrop, dim and almost monochrome, no characters in view. This is one of the sequences that generate comparisons with Tarkovsky" (3).

Cayce successfully decodes the video clip attributable to her analytical abilities. Cayce associates the video clip with Tarkovsky's work because of her exposure to cameras and resources. Popular director Andrei Arsenyevich Tarkovsky makes movies. And his films are known for their slow pacing and extended takes, strange visual imagery, and concern with nature and reflection. They deal with spiritual and philosophical subjects. Cayce also conducts her research expertly. As it is just another type of art that she analyses in a professional manner, it is not surprising that she does so. She is accustomed to these logos, marketing materials, and advertising elements because she works as an advertising consultant. Cayce has a tendency to become obsessed with logos and companies - "It's about a group behaviour pattern around a particular class of object. What I do is pattern recognition. I try to recognize a pattern before anyone else does" (86). She is described by Gibson as a "cool hunter" (2). This example amply demonstrates that. A cool hunter is someone who notices or foresees upcoming fashions and trends.

Modern social media has made the actual world boundary free. Anyone at any time can use the internet to travel from a local space to a global communication space and visit any place on the earth. One can also freely converse and share ideas with anyone at any time. The possibility of developing lasting online friendships has increased because of social networks. Nonetheless, there are still a lot of

factors that affect it. In this scenario, it is important that the video's mystery remain a factor. And thus Cayce notices a pop-up email with an attachment that had no content. "Parkaboy's e-mail is text free. There is only the attachment" (22). With that mail, the handle named Parkaboy befriends Cayce and the friendship evolves through their passionate discussion on the anonymous video clip.

The first email from Parkaboy contains merely a file attachment numbered attachment #135 with no other content. Since she thinks that it is related to the video she advances that friendship. As per her insight, her unresolved questions get clue regarding the clippings through Parkaboy. Meanwhile, Cayce and Parkaboy respond to almost all videos and they personally show more attention to get the clue behind the video. One of the personal mail, she gets from Parkaboy is as follows - "While everyone else is still trembling over The Kiss, as ever #135 will surely be known, Musashi and I have lit out the territories. I don't know whether you are following F: F: F or earning what passes for your living, but everyone is mad for #135, no end in sight, and I suppose you know about CNN?" (74).

But, as evidenced by the friendship that forms between them, Cayce and Parkaboy, together with the footage heads, create a subculture centred on a mutual interest in the footage but extending beyond it. Gibson uses the fact that Mama Anarchia ultimately turns out to be Benedetti's login to demonstrate how virtual and real life are blending into what he refers to as blended reality. The mentioned Mama Anarchia is a member of F:F:F like Parkaboy.

According to Gibson, in the era of social media, this is a serious issue to be concerned about. His observation of Cayce and Parkaboy's connection highlights virtual connections progressing into romantic ones. At the beginning of the novel, both are online friends; Gibson makes this clear by portraying Parkaboy as a virtual character of the digital platform. Afterwards, he turns into Cayce's favourite, and she instantly qualified that statement by including him in the formula F: F: F. As they converse and cooperate to find the footage, they get closer to one another.

Creating new worlds and visualisations where human and computer subjects co-exist and interact in real-time, the virtual space that connects Cayce and Parkaboy is the online digital forum F: F: F. Cayce and Parkaboy is found to continue in their relationship despite not having a physical relationship. Here, Gibson underscores the thinly blurred lines between the person's real self and the digital identity in online social media. Soon after, Parkaboy informs Cayce that a friend of his friend has found an encrypted watermark on one clip - "Taki as he prefers we call him, claims to orbit a certain otaku-coven in Tokyo, a group that knows itself as a Mystic, though its members never refer to it that way in public, nor indeed refer it to all. It is these Mystic works according to Taki who have cracked the watermark on #78" (76). Watermark is basically an image that appears below the primary text of a computer document, such as in official business documents or documents used for presentations: In order to display company logos during a presentation, a watermark is frequently employed as it is more translucent than a background.

However to collect the watermark code from the Japanese expert, Parkaboy creates a fake internet personality called Keiko - "I returned to Chicago, then, and Darryl and I, curiosity's cats began to lovingly generate a Japanese persona, namely one Keiko, who began to post, in Japanese, on that same Osaka site" (76). And in another circumstance, Parkaboy shares his worries about his inability to appear in a video call due to his fake identity - "He wants Keiko facetime, and I remain, your frustrated Parkaboy" (77). A user's digital identity is their online social handle on websites and other social media platforms and this proves to be fake and misled identities in most cases, like that of Parkaboy.

Parkaboy is actually a man in this scenario, but he pretends to be a woman in order to take advantage of his personality. This can be considered digital manipulation. The notion of blended identity is found to be the point of contention between real and online identity. Considering the effects of digital identity in a cyber-world where information and media are extremely influential and paves way for blended identities. The digital identity of a person or a community is considered a valuable digital asset which is traded in online markets. Therefore, it is implied that the sense of disconnection from one's genuine self and a loss of authenticity result from the commodification of identity.

In this instance, Parkaboy monetizes his identity as Keiko to obtain the video's watermark. However, Gibson refers to this concept of a man pretending to be a woman on an online platform to get more attention as Gender-bait. Gender-bait is defined as a man posing online as a woman to get the attention of other men and this term is first used by Gibson in his *Pattern Recognition*. Like Gender baiting, there are several other concepts which are as harmful as this. For example: the concept of mask

and blended identity. The identity and attitudinal shift in people with respect to the social or cultural context is all about the concept of mask. The shift of the identity and attitude is termed to be a mask.

Users like Parkaboy of online social media are able to design their individual profiles the way they wish. Therefore, ignoring their shortcomings and other negative traits, the identities of individuals vary based on the social or cultural context. The digital self contrasts with the actual, offline self. Therefore, Parkaboy's identity can be compared with the concept of blended mask perspective or blended identity which is the merging of the authentic offline personality and the flavoured online personality.

The reason behind retaining the digital identity is dark web and Parkaboy is a user of it. So he masks himself with his original self behind it. The dark web is referenced as a hidden corner of the internet where individuals can access encrypted, anonymous networks to engage in illegal or secretive activities. In accordance with the standards and principles, Cayce also recognizes his username Parkaboy when they speak over the phone. Yet when she offers to pay for his air ticket, his true identity is exposed and he reintroduces with his actual name as Peter Gilbert:

Cayce remembers Sylvie Jeppson, the two of them leaving the Russian

Consulate. "You'll need a visa," she tells Parkaboy, "and you can get one fast if you pay extra, but you won't need a ticket. There's a woman named Sylvie Jeppson, at Blue Ant in London. I'm going to call her and give her your number. She'll find the quickest flight and have your ticket waiting at O'Hare. And I know this seems completely insane, but I need your name. I don't actually know it."

"Thornton Vaseltarp."

"Sorry?"

"Gilbert?"

"Gilbert?"

"Peter Gilbert. Parkaboy. You'll get used to it. What's the bottom line on this flight to Moscow?" (278)

The Protagonist Cayce is a perfect illustration of the cyberspace who searches for new identities in the virtual space. Cayce's desire for meaning and purpose as she tries to make sense of digital media and advertising drives her digital identity crisis. She goes on a quest to find the real self in a world that is increasingly fragmented and artificial. Cayce's immersion in the world of digital media and advertising leads to a sense of paranoia and anxiety, as she becomes convinced that her every move is being monitored and tracked. She is also haunted by the mysterious viral video clip known as the footage, which has become a global sensation.

As a result, Cayce struggles to find a sense of connection and authenticity in a world that is dominated by media and advertising, leading her to question her own sense of self and the world around her. She feels shocked when her online community friend Parkaboy comes with the original self Peter Gilbert. She is clearly a victim of the potential dangers of modern online forums. Jean Baudrillard in his essay "Precession of Simulacra" argues that people no longer distinguish between reality and a constructed representation of reality. Baudrillard discusses the power of images and symbols to subvert reality:

By crossing into a space whose curvature is no longer that of the real, nor that of truth, the era of simulation is inaugurated by a liquidation of all referentials – worse: with their artificial resurrection in the systems of signs, a material more malleable than meaning, in that it lends itself to all systems of equivalences, to all binary oppositions, to all combinatory algebra. It is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real, that is to say of an operation of deterring every real process via its operational double, a programmatic, metastable, perfectly descriptive machine that offers all the signs of the real and short-circuits all its vicissitudes. . . . A hyperreal henceforth sheltered from the imaginary, and from any distinction between the real and the imaginary, leaving room only for the orbital recurrence of models and for the simulated generation of differences. (409)

According to Baudrillard, simulation is the imitation of the operation of a real-world process or system over time. Baudrillard claims that our contemporary society has replaced all realities and meanings with symbols and signs so that the human experience is a simulation of reality. Here it is identified that Cayce is constantly bombarded by media and advertising, with the fake and misleading simulation of identities in cyberspace leading to a sense of detachment from her own sense of self. On the whole, the article offers a nuanced exploration of the potential and pitfalls of internet forums, highlighting both the ways in

which they can facilitate connection and collaboration and the risks associated with online communities and the blended identities behind them.

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