



# ***Virtually McLuhan:*** **Theorizing Code and Digital Life**

CCFI Noted Scholar  
Lecture Mini-Series

## **Encoding Digital Publics**

**Dr. Kate O’Riordan**, *Senior Lecturer in Media and Film  
at the University of Sussex*

[http://www.sussex.ac.uk/mediastudies/  
profile30746.html](http://www.sussex.ac.uk/mediastudies/profile30746.html)

This presentation sketches out the contours of the kind of public encoded through the Californian biotechnology company *23andMe*.

This public is constituted through an address to an:

- engaged citizen-consumer of science,
- informed and consenting research subject for genomic science,
- economic investor in information architecture, biotechnology and drug development.

These structures of address, at the scene of interactive digital media, together constitute what we might think about as the encoding of digital publics.

The claim that this public is working unfolds in two senses, that on the one hand it labours, or works as an operative entity currently generating capital, but also in the sense that on the other hand its publicity marks out a specific social imaginary.

The encoding of digital publics around human genomics in this case brings publics into being through an attention to biotechnological stranger- relations (Warner, 2002). These publics are not just biosocial groups (Rabinow, 1992; Hacking 2006) but orientated towards an attention to reading and annotating their own, and other genomic information through digital media in an emerging social imaginary that could be thought about as biodigital.

## **Post-Life: Theorizing the Global Village and the New Ends of Subjective Life**

**Dr. Stuart J. Murray**, *Assistant Professor of Rhetoric & Writing in the Department of English at Ryerson University*

<http://www.ryerson.ca/sjmurray/>

Life in the “global village” is not as we know it. We speak with the promises of “digital life,” but live increasingly within the inassimilable spectacles of war, torture, and terror. McLuhan’s view is less than promising:

“The global village is a place of very arduous interfaces and very abrasive situations... When people get close together, they get more and more savage.” He claims that global technoculture leads to the loss of identity and thus to violence as a largely futile quest to mitigate this loss. This talk addresses how subjectivity and our understanding of life have been transformed by instantaneous digital communications, the spectre of neoliberalism, and biopolitics – a spectacle the means and ends of which have become indistinguishable. I argue that conventional paradigms

of subjectivity and knowledge are incommensurable with the kind of lives we now live. Can we imagine the subject of media literacy? I suggest that one strategy might lie in the rhetorical resources of a critical media theory.

## **Biographies**

**Kate’s** work is a cultural study of technoscience, primarily concerned with the consumer interfaces, publics, and audiences of ICTs and human biotechnologies. She recently published, ‘From reproduction to research: Sourcing eggs, IVF and cloning in the UK’ in *Feminist Theory* 10(2), 2009.

**Stuart’s** work is concerned with the constitution of human subjectivity and the links between rhetoric, politics, and ethics. He is currently working on a manuscript, tentatively titled, *The Living from the Dead*.

■ **APRIL 9, 2009** ■  
**12-2 pm**  
**Neville Scarfe Building**  
**Room 310 - 2125 Main Mall**  
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