Status Update: Celebrity, Publicity, and Branding in the Social Media Age. *By Alice E. Marwick.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013. 368 pp. ISBN: 9780300176728.

How does the ideology of the digital economy shape the attitudes and experiences of people in the tech world? Based on her observation that software companies value profits over political change, former Microsoft researcher and dot-com employee Alice Marwick investigates this question in *Status Update: Celebrity, Publicity, and Branding in the Social Media Age*, an ethnography of the mid-2000s San Francisco tech scene. Researched at a time when pundits like *Time*'s Lev Grossman (2006) declared "You" as the magazine's "Person of the Year" and prophesized that platforms such as YouTube, Wikipedia, and MySpace were going to "change the world" (see also Benkler, 2006; Shirky, 2008; Tapscott & Williams, 2006), Marwick's book attempts to clean up the "idealistic cyber-drool of the digerati" (Terranova, 2000, p. 44) by providing a more sober account of the critical implications of this so-called social media (Aronczyk, 2014).

Combining informant interviews with Twitter's "micro-celebrities" and participant observations from a seemingly endless number of industry meet-ups, drink ups, and star-studded conferences, Marwick constructs social media as a neoliberal technology of subjectivity that produces social status as the ultimate commodity. Focusing specifically on the San Francisco based Twitter as a vital piece of industry infrastructure that facilitates this practice, Marwick argues that the logic of marketing and advertising embedded in social software has infiltrated the ways in which we relate to ourselves and to others, teaching us how to be good corporate citizens along the way. In this narrative, Marwick's "characters" are ideal neoliberal subjects. They are young and childless, highly entrepreneurial, and justify consumption only when done in the name of self-improvement or work. They tout the techno-utopian party line of the neighbouring Silicon Valley, which positions social media as a great equalizer destined to "change the world" ("into one where they're rich," quips one of her insiders).

While Marwick's argument that the commercial imperatives of social media are eclipsing its democratic potential is hardly news for critics of the information society and the Internet (Dean, 2009; Garnham, 2004; McChesney, 2013; Schiller, 1999; Webster, 2006), her micro-perspective from the lifeworlds of workers skillfully constructs the San Francisco tech scene as a puzzling set of contradictions. The idealistic techno-libertarianism of Web 2.0, for example, emerges from a peculiar West Coast combination of radical activism and business culture that endorses creativity and rebellion so long as they are profitable.

Industry perspectives regarding digital social climbing are similarly perplexing. While many of Marwick's characters feign a blasé attitude or express disdain toward those who take Twitter seriously or use it to self-promote, she keenly observes that most are hyper-vigilant about their own Twitter metrics—such as number of followers, retweets, and mentions—in order to evaluate and display their own level of prestige, in-

fluence, and social connections. As an aside, I found it quite amusing that Marwick notes how critical academics are of this practice, when mediated self-promotion is increasingly becoming a necessary part of securing tenure, or even employment in our field.

Marwick also suggests that it is a mistake to conflate the technical characteristics of Web 2.0 with its social affordances, as this digital culture's emphasis on openness, transparency, and participation reinforces hierarchies and perpetuate inequities rather than dismantles them. With its hip headquarters juxtaposing the abject poverty of San Francisco's Mid-Market neighbourhood (thanks to the civic urban revitalization initiatives offering tax breaks), Twitter—and its propensity for gossip, entertainment, and publicity—functions more as a networking hub for micro-celebrities and their branded so-called authentic selves to participate in endless self-promotion, the fetishization of labour (what insiders call "the hustle"), and lifestreaming a consistently "safe for work" self.

This is motivated less by narcissism and more by necessity. Marwick notes that these practices are advocated as a universal solution to an economic downturn characterized by fleeting job security, a reduction in social services, diminishing worker protections, wage stagnation, and offshoring to developing nations (p. 204). Under this guise, knowledge workers use social media to engage in new forms of immaterial and emotional labour that are well-suited to late capitalist demands for individuals to be "highly visible, entrepreneurial, and self-configured to be watched and consumed by others" (p. 13). Marwick understands this as politically and economically motivated: as government institutions become more secretive and corporations attain personhood, social software benefits these stakeholders by encouraging citizens to become more transparent about their activities and to behave more like brands.

That Marwick's characters have internalized the values of the market is echoed through their aggressive insistence that their field is egalitarian and meritocratic, which makes them willing participants in the discursive erasure of class struggle and the disavowal of systemic barriers. While she concedes that the tech industry has lower barriers to entry than other white-collar industries, Marwick suggests that the myth of meritocratic entrepreneurialism is disingenuous. This is an industry that tends to privilege ascribed rather than achieved status, despite the can-do rhetoric of tech author-speakers such as Gary Vaynerchuk (2009) and Tim Ferris (2009). While such gurus assure audiences that economic success can be achieved by those who work "hard" or "smart" enough, Marwick reminds readers that this Protestant work ethic hinges upon the capitalist outsourcing of domestic and administrative labour onto expendable bodies that tend to be racialized, feminized, and proletarianized (p. 178).

Marwick's assertion that status signifies racial, gender, and class privilege becomes more apparent toward the end of her book. Web 2.0's celebratory rhetoric surrounding openness and transparency, for example, ignores the structural factors that make publicity dangerous for groups such as undocumented labourers, women fleeing violent situations, and queer people forced to keep their identities private (p. 236). Equally concerning is that Marwick's women and men repeatedly deny that sexism exists, despite the fact that they consistently trivialize women's accomplishments by accusing them of sleeping their way to the top. While Marwick names several organizations actively working to address gendered inequities in the industry, it is important to note that so long as

corporate feminism propels the neoliberal mantra that women simply need to *Lean In™* (Sandberg, 2013; for critique, see hooks, 2013) perhaps "gender equality in tech" is about as rhetorically flimsy as the technocratic idealism that underpins "changing the world."

Status Update offers important insights that enrich our understanding of both the ideology that propels social media and the economic imperatives underpinning promotional culture. It also makes an especially valuable contribution to theories of audiences and publicity. One thing that raised more questions than it answered was Marwick's cultural history of alternative media: given the gender and racial politics of platforms such as 90s zines and riot grrrl feminism, are we democratically better or worse off than before? While I share Marwick's concerns about Silicon Valley's seductive re-appropriation of revolutionary rhetoric, at the same time I ask: through what other means do marginalized perspectives get a voice on the same scale? This is an important question for our field to consider. Nevertheless, *Status Update* is a well-written and accessible text suitable for upper-level undergraduate courses related to new media and society, gender and communication, or qualitative methods. Offering an insider perspective on the means of status production in the Web 2.0 factory, Marwick encourages us to think critically about what it means to be a networked subject in a world where the possibilities of technology seem endless, but democracy and economic security feel increasingly finite.

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