

IDENTITY IN THE META

FROM AN 'ART OF LIVING' TO TINY SCREENS

According to the rules of grammar someone can be a something. I can be a doctor for example. This can be true in the world as well. But it does not have to be. Becoming acquainted with different languages and cultures can expose the ways that thought and actuality does not have to flow through certain grammatical tracks.

Most of the pictures on my phone are 'taken'. They contain pieces of information that I need to put in my pocket to use later. Tickets, reminders, sunsets, damaged goods. Things far away that I bring closer and keep. At least for now. Next, I send and receive them. Caring and looking at images of myself, before sharing with others. Others look at them for less than half a second as they rub their finger furiously across their screen for around 7 hours a day. Rubbing until their storage runs out and they need to clean up some files, buy storage in the clouds or stay stuck with a phone that keeps reminding them that 'storage is full'. But full of what? What is it that we are collecting? That a phone can even be full differentiates it from our mind. Whilst both may contain ideas. Our mind does not run out of storage space. Although the mind does not always remember as well as a phone, which remembers and marks the screen with the position of pixels.

One way of relating to these constellations of pixels we collect is as visual property. These are things we need. We need them and they define us. Like the grid of objects that takes centre stage in Holbein's painting of the ambassadors. A portrait which does not put likeness at it's centre, but possession. It affirms possession as identity and identity as possession. Or at least the representation of identity.



The concept of possession is essentially constructed on accumulation, fabrication and multiplication. As well as the legal and perhaps ethical agreements and or forceful coercion that determine what belongs to whom and not to others. These are perhaps the central ideas of possession. But there is more to possession. To possess in some sense is also to become and to be. To possess a suit is part of being a lawyer, to possess a cardboard cup is part of being a beggar and to possess a crown is part of being a king. Thus the link between physical objects and identity. But also virtual objects help with constructing and maintaining identity. What happens then when these virtual objects accumulate. As if a king would have a collection of crowns. The accumulation of badges often seen on War veterans.

Reverse baptism

In Albert Camus's book 'The Fall' the main character Jean-Baptiste Clamence goes through a reverse baptism. From thinking of himself as a good person, who does good things, to realising why he does these good things and what they mean. How does this happen and what does it mean to undergo a reverse baptism? Whereas a normal baptism cleanses one of sin, a reverse baptism consists in the abandonment of the pretence of being a virtuous person. A reverse baptism is the process of a good person realising that they are not as good as they might have thought. Clarence's first realisation comes after helping a blind man cross the street. When he tips his hat to the blind man he starts to ask himself: to whom is this gesture directed? Surely not to the blind man, since he cannot see the gesture. To whom then is he tipping his hat? To himself? To the onlookers?

Whilst the internet is a place that allows one to navigate and comment anonymously. It also allows one to do precisely the opposite. To shout one's identity from the rooftops. But to whom? To blind men, to oneself, to onlookers?

Getting slapped in the face with reality

What does it mean to find oneself? To find oneself does not mean peaking into oneself. To venture internally. Self-becoming precisely consists of having oneself be expressed through the process of being exposed to an external challenge. The hero knows this. The hero becomes themselves by fighting a monster. Not by going on a trip to Bali. To peak into oneself is not where one will find, or become, oneself. The Buddha when peeking into himself found nothing.

Red ink

The internet grants many freedoms. But can we express these freedoms on the internet? Does the internet allow for actual identities - identities that can express themselves and act in the world-beyond the identities it allows us to create.

To show how identity and expression function on the internet an old joke is apt.

A German worker gets a job in Siberia, aware of how all mail will be read by the censors, he tells his friends; "Let's establish a code, if a letter you get from me is written in ordinary blue ink; it's true, if it's written in red ink, it's false" After a month, his friends get the first

letter; "Everything is wonderful here, the shops are full, food is abundant, apartments are large and properly heated, cinemas show films from the West, there are many beautiful girls ready for an affair, the only thing you can't get is red ink"

The internet is a place where one can say and be many things. But the form in which one can say and be is that of the wrong ink. Thereby effectively reversing all that is said. Screaming for help by posting a happy selfie. Asking for support by liking a meme. The ink present in pixels is that of an inability to say what one is supposedly able to say. And an inability to be what one is supposedly able to be.

The internet gives us freedom and yet does not give red ink. The internet tallows us to create identities but these identities are impotent, they are without red ink, unable to truly say what they want to say. Unable to consume what they earn. Kim Kardashian's online avatar is unable to eat the ice cream bought with the money she made from showing her ass online.

Is the internet a tool? or a joke.

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