

The Imperative Flexibility

A Pornographic Vision of the Self

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A slightly perverse, heuristic game

Identity as a task

Identity as a task

Emotional coherence

“I have problems keeping up with my emotions. I’m not able to feel a way of being that’s mine, so I have to choose one. Having to do an action, I’m unable to feel any emotion that would make me act in one certain way. Instead, I feel two contrasting mandates (*I couldn’t care less!!Get angry!*). And I don’t know which to choose. I have reactions rather than real emotions. Also I don’t feel them, so I have to choose them rationally instead”

Post-modern men and women have the task to be perpetually constructing and reconstructing themselves; they are ever reassembling the pieces of their own identity, redefining themselves day after day. Being, Self, are organized in a reflexive way. Individuals are forced to choose their own life style among a multitude of alternatives

Identity as a task

Perception of oneself

“I have no perception of myself and so I try to find myself based on the way I construct the others’ experiences. I tend to imitate others, seeking their approval, but at the same time I’m trying to shape my own self. I’m not able to see others as people, rather they’re a means for my evolving”

The post-modern inadequacy evokes the inability to acquire the desired image, the ability to be, at the same time, both shapeable clay and the sculptor. The individual is both the onlooker and the teacher of himself

Identity as a task

Relationships

“Even though you keep suggesting I live each day for itself, I’d like to plan my future. But I can’t, because of the inconsistency of my emotions. I’m looking for love, but I don’t want to waste my time if it isn’t really it. For me a person with a steady tie to someone is a loser”

Marriage is a relationship that is maintained as long as possible in order to guarantee the emotional satisfaction that derives from close contact with another person. In contrast to a traditional marriage, a pure relationship is not tied to the external trappings of social life; rather, it is something that floats freely

Identity as a task

Faithfulness

“I can’t stand giving up, or the suspicion that a choice might eventually lead to having to give something up. I’m “cerebrally” unfaithful. I keep feeling interested in other people of the other sex. I associate a steady relationship to stasis, to giving something up, to failure, to cowardliness, to death”

The flexible Self wants to finish each game quickly to avoid long-term commitments. It refuses to settle down in one way or another. It doesn’t commit its life to following a single vocation. It doesn’t swear loyalty and faithfulness to anyone or to anything. It does whatever it can so the consequences of the game don’t go beyond the game itself

Flexible Self Temporality

It does not control the future and refuses to mortgage it. It blocks the past from interfering with the present. In short, it closes off the present from both sides, separating it from its history. It bans any form of time other than an arbitrary sequence of present moments. The flexible Self aims for an ongoing present

Concepts of Identity in Modernity

Freud and Jaspers

Discontents with civilization (Freud 1929)

- As civilization has been built on our restraining our drives, civilized man ended up “trading in a part of his chances for happiness for a bit of security”.
- Security is guaranteed by our submitting to norms of civilized living together, by our giving in to our “sense of reality”.
- Neurosis, that feeling that permeates modern human beings for not being able to find peace of mind because they neither belong to themselves nor to others, is the agonizing result.

Happiness or Security?

Modern women and men bartered their own happiness for a bit of security (Freud)

Late-modern men and women trade a part of their chances for security for a bit of happiness (Bauman)

Happiness now seems more within arm's reach than security; freedom might seem easier to gain and maintain than stability compared to the past

Ego consciousness (Jaspers 1913)

Based on the Kantian Self, it is the identity pole in subjective experience.

The principle of identity standing apart and above the stream of changing experience.

The necessary condition of possibility for coherent experience.

The logical subject of coherent experience.

The Jaspersian Self presupposes a *sense of coherence*.

It includes a sense of identity through time, of unity and one of demarcation from the external world, and a feeling of being actively involved in one's own experiences and performances.

The Body We Live By

Embodiment in Late Modernity

Embodiment

- Embodiment is the primordial matrix of the Self
- Immediate contact and acquaintance with oneself
- “Pure impressionability, that radically immanent self-affection which is nothing but our flesh” (Henry 2000)

Embodiment and Psychopathology

- In Modernity, the lived body is the grand-stage for:
 - Neurotic frustration of drives
(*Civilization*) and
 - Psychotic alienation of the Self
(*Technology*: body-as-object and body-as-machine).

The Industrialization of the Body

- In Late-Modernity, the body has become a subject of choice.
- We resist thinking that we were simply thrown into this body, and we believe that we can manipulate and change it at our will
- We have an instrumental relationship with our body.
- Esthetics and ethics have finally come to terms!

A New Type of Alienation

- A new type of dialectic between external control and alienation:
 - Emphasis on the person's public image, rather than the moral feeling;
 - Seeking the approval of others, rather than feeling a sense of duty.
- A new type of disorder of identity:
 - Shaping one's body coincides with shaping one's identity;
 - Controlling one's body coincides with controlling one's life style.

The Selves in Question

Archeological, Narrative, Embodied,
and Relational Selves

The Archeological Self

The Imperative *Know Thyself*

- Prescription to disclose one's profound, hidden personal identity
- Encouraging the introspective and mentalistic research of one's own Self, and disregarding the embodied and situated dimensions of one's own being.
- The pathway to Self-Knowledge is a *cognitive and rational enterprise*, involving an inquiry about oneself.
- Coherently, the Self is conceptualised as a sort of *interior statue* - an immutable substance, which pre-exists to the process of self-knowledge, and is unearthed by it.

The Narrative Self

The Imperative *Responsibility*

- Knowing oneself is a *process*, i.e. a narration or a construction. The Self is not a thing in itself.
- The narrative self is a more or less coherent self-image, composed of a past and a future.
- This view highlights responsibility.
 - One is responsible for the story one tells about oneself. A coherent Self is able to frame the events of his life in a coherent story.
 - One is responsible for projecting one's own life in a given way. Who I am hinges on my capacity (or incapacity) to keep my word.

The Embodied Self

The Imperative *Self-Acquaintance*

- Embodiment is the birthplace of identity
- Primacy of embodiment (perception and movement) as the pre-cognitive dimensions of being oneself.
- The pathway to Self-Acquaintance is a *spiritual exercise*, involving a return to oneself and the abandonment of non-essential concerns.

The Relational Self

The Imperative *Visibility*

- The Self exists only insofar as an object being seen and talked about by the others.
- Talking and seeing overpower feeling.
- Being seen and being talked about give substance to the Self.
- They take the place of the self-feeling of oneself.

Liquid Selves

- The Self, when is not relating to the Other, is in a gaseous state. When faced with the Other, becomes liquid.
- *Liquid* – not solid.
- The liquid Self takes on the Other's shape.
- Or better: the shape of that which the Self believes are the Other's expectations.
- A transitory shape

A Pornographic Vision of the Self

Watching Obscene Fragments
of the Self

Watching Obscene Fragments of the Self

- Is pornography a suitable metaphor for the Late-Modern Self?
- Visual pleasure
- Obscenity
- Fragmentation

Watching...

- Feeling pass through seeing one's own (and the Other's) body in action.
- Yet reflected as if by a *mirror*,
- rather than immediately (kinesthetically) perceiving one's own body (and within one's own body the body of the Other).
- Pleasure follow the same visual pathway

Obscene...

- What is perceived through the eyes (and not kinesthetically) are partial objects.
- Obscene fragments
- *Obscenum*, i.e. *out of the scene*.
- Outside the context of the totality of the Self

Fragments

- The action – like in a pornographic movie -- is not only fragmented over space, but also across time.
- Splintered into a series of snapshots or *positions*.
- Thus one of the rare epiphanies of ‘naturalness’ that had survived down to our age – *rhythmicity* - comes to be lost