

## “Masks in the Public Space”

III Workshop *Identity, Memory, Experience*.

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*The fantastic level and the realistic level,*

*are the two levels upon which we live.*

*But which is the real one, really?*

*When you live on the fantastic level*

*but have to operate on the realistic level,*

*that's when you get spooked.*

Tennessee Williams, *The Night of the Iguana*.

### **1. Introduction**

A central issue in human sciences is the configuration of identity as a result of social interactions. There have been several approaches from different angles: sociology (Giddens, ;Goffman), anthropology, developmental psychology (Piaget), etc. Regarding philosophy, it has seldom been assumed that an ontological or ethical study should prevail, and so the expression of the inner self should take priority over other considerations. However, a study of identity cannot be developed without giving an account, not only of the relationship between the Self and the Other, but also of the complex web of relationships that we call the “public sphere”, which have been reshaped from late modernity (Sennet,1947). As a reflection of this exposure to others, the modern individual has been creating an inner space, which we call “intimacy”, which is not conceivable without reference to the public space. So, public and private spaces (even inner, psychological spaces) are intrinsically intertwined, or, so to speak, two faces of the same coin.

Since knowledge of public performance has great importance for identity studies (Butler, 1999), bodily features, physiological clues and gestures and, generally speaking, the physical expression of character have been not only an object for specifically oriented studies, but also have become a matrix of several metaphors. One of these, which has become a widespread figure, is the metaphor of masks. To say someone is wearing a mask (in a metaphorical sense) is a very hackneyed cliché, which almost every writer has used at some time. It means, as we can intuitively realize, that individuals do not show themselves as they really are, but project a fake image of themselves; and that this performance is probably designed to get some kind of benefit by manipulating other people's impressions of them. People create a screen to simulate some counterfeit kind of identity. Nevertheless, the metaphysical assumptions that underlie this mask concept are very problematic. This approach is grounded in what I shall call the *mimetic*

*background*, one that comprises the expression of an inner self to the outer, public space in terms of *mimesis* or “re-presentation”. The authentic one is “re-presented”, showed twice, and so usually misrepresented and perverted. A good representation should be, then, one that provides the maximum of faithfulness during the process. This is, obviously, a strongly platonic view, nonetheless it is not the only way of thinking about self-expression.

Earlier research has concentrated on the so-called *fashioned self* and the ways it is constructed by practices and representations (such as fashion, aesthetic surgery or cosmetics), but it has failed to confront a previous issue: the consequences of this metaphysical bias (e.g. Finkelstein, 1991) have been disregarded. This presupposition leads some of these authors to claim that individuals tend to develop multiple selves in which there is no inner core of self-identity, a statement that has been disputed by Giddens (1991,100) among others. Or, even more dramatically, it is said that the project of the self in modernity has failed as a consequence of this fragmentation and has become more and more artificial (as if a “natural self” is to be conceived, some kind of primary and spotless source of identity). It is true that authenticity and fragmentation can be treated as two separated issues, but since ethical discourses have identified both of them altogether, at least since Aristotle, it is not senseless to think that, in fact, they form a single source of ethical unease. A fragmentary self, we are told, cannot be authentic, because the good, the faithful self is always a unitary one.

I maintain the advisability of a critical analysis of the moral implications of certain metaphysical assumptions as a prior requirement for any research on identity; and I would like to suggest an alternative to the mimetic theory, namely, a performative one. This alternative is not based on the idea of “re-presentation”, but on the presentation of Self, that I have taken from Goffman (1959) and developed from a philosophical point of view. I am also indebted to Hume’s theory of passions, from which I trace an analogy that is of great help to my current investigation. For Hume, passions and actions do not “re-present” things in a certain way, but they simply are to be found, exist, are executed or felt... Therefore, they are not susceptible of being given a false/true value, as if they were propositional sentences. So truth and falsehood are good guidelines for knowledge, but cannot be the origin or momentum of action. This is why, in Hume’s opinion, reason will be always the slave of passions; because we do not make decisions impulsed by reason, but through the impulse of passion, and, at best, we are secondarily helped by reason to consider the circumstances for achieving our goals. There is no truth or falsehood to be found in grief, anger or melancholy, nor in a disdainful gesture. My suggestion is therefore to transfer this reasoning to the question of self : why not say the same about self-identity in public space? A social actor, while he is acting, does not “re-present” a role; instead he performs the self, he becomes what he does or, in other words, he enacts himself by acting in a certain way. Of course, it does not mean that we are always authentic, because this is evidently not the case. Sometimes we feel like we are imitating ourselves, and that it is not such a good imitation (Doniger, 2005). I would not dare deny this strong feeling, and, furthermore, it is a central element of my analysis. I am simply observing that the question is not answerable by a true/false alternative, and that the mimetical background theory does not fit in with it. Sometimes, even if the enactment is not perceived by the actor as an authentic one, it may eventually get “stuck to his skin”. That is what we call a mask.

It would thus be of interest to learn what exactly are these masks are and how they influence the constitution of self. The aim of this investigation is to provide an explanation of the issue of identity in terms of performativity, contrary to the Platonic thesis of representation or *mimesis*

and the Aristotelian requirement of a strictly unitary self. The conclusions of this study will ideally make a contribution to the current debate about moral identity in late modernity. The text is structured in two main parts: first I will provide three arguments against the traditional conception of self, based on the concepts of true mimesis and of homogeneity. These three arguments are claims against i) The assumption of a natural self and authenticity as an inner truth; ii) the idea that one's body can lie and the possibility of applying a true/false pattern to bodily expressions; iii) the argument that deduces from the fragmentation of the self the impossibility for the existence of a chore of subjectivity or *upokeimenon*. And finally, I offer a reflection about the resilience of performativeness and narrativity in the formation of the self. In the second part, I will offer an alternative to the former theory by supplying an analytic definition of what a mask is, as a social device for the development of the self, and a further discussion of this definition as a useful tool for re-orienting research about identity.

## 2. Against the natural self

My greatest adversary in this discussion is not Plato nor Aristotle, but an eighteenth-century philosopher whose reputation pervades modern thought: Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In his moral and biographical writings, particularly his *Confessions*, he offers a thorough exposition of the platonic attitude against imitation, which he cunningly links with the arena of social intercourse. I will sum up the bulk of his theory by saying that social *milieux* corrupt the inner, natural self of individuals by constraining them to adopt false identities in the quest of self-interest and longing for the recognition of others. So, for Rousseau, social behaviour is aimed towards selfishness and vanity, and the only possibility for a real person to maintain their authenticity is to live in isolation from society, as he himself did in the last days of his life. There is also a concession to the aristotelian claim of unitarity as a refusal of fragmentation, which I found in a part of the *Confessions*, where he recognizes that, for the space of few years, he tried to adapt to a fixed image of himself, and he created the character of the philosopher Rousseau. But he finally failed due to the excessive amount of effort that such a performance demanded, and gave it up.

Another way of explaining this metaphysical as well as moral bias of Rousseau's, which has become a generalized point of view in modernity, is his critique of actors, which is in some aspects shared with Diderot's. The main point here is that actors are not only dangerous to the public order in a civil society, as in the critique of poets in Plato's *Republic*, but also an intrinsically corrupting influence for young people. That is, actors are both a political and a moral or even ontological source of distress and *malaise*. By imitating others without internally identifying with the ethical substance of the characters they represent, actors become a bad model for other potential imitators, i.e., the easily influenced youth and lower classes of a city. For Rousseau, rural communities with their floral games in the pure air are far removed from the wicked influence of theatre and their surroundings, much more than urban populations. The corollary of this argument is easily foreseeable: as urban modern society imitates the upper classes' behaviour, and they are basically like actors in a social scene (*les salons*), so they have the same problem as actors. They suffer from lack of authenticity, they change their will and aspect so often that they could not find again the pure core of their identities again, even if they

tried. A supplementary problem linked to the former and which aggravates it is that, due to the mimical nature of human beings, these behaviours are highly contagious. So this is a vicious circle that reflects on the human nature the circularity of Rousseau's argumentation or *petitio principii* on human nature.

Before going further with counter-argumentation, a *caveat* is to be made: I am not really speaking against Rousseau. What I want to do is take Rousseau's core ideas as a feature of commonly assumed claims about identity, which are still very much alive and very present in contemporary ways of reasoning, more than any other philosopher's moral principles, as far as I know. So it is not Rousseau, but the Rousseauian point of view about human nature that I am discussing here. Such a point of view postulates a kind of subject with very precise features: an inborn, naturally generated self. By this I mean that his nature or essence is not produced by social contact, but pure by nature. Later it is developed and, most of the time perverted in the intercourse with other human beings: the first of these maculating experiences being pedagogy. Besides, it is embedded in a body that reflects it imperfectly, due to the unavoidable tendency of matter towards disfiguring the spirit features (this is Augustine's heritage in Rousseau): so the body lies. In so far as identity is fragmented in a myriad of selves, faces or masks, it is imperfect and has a tendency to self-destruction... not in the physical sense, of course, but in a spiritual one. Fragmentation destroys the inner coherence of the self, a person's pivotal center, its essence, that is unity. As a consequence, one should adapt to only one feature of the self, just one character for one actor and try to perform it during one's entire life, although the ideal should be not to make use of any character at all, and show ourselves as we are, no matter what the consequences may be. Easier said than done. This may seem a very exaggerated posture which no-one could reasonably adopt, but, even if I may have overdone it a little in my exposition, there is no parody here. Let us remember that these kinds of claims are almost never explicitly expressed and that they work as a backdrop for further evaluations. And then, the original background of this kind of subject was a Puritan, Protestant one, which means that it carries a strict discipline regarding morality and subjectivity. Rousseau was raised in a Calvinist society, and, if Weber is to be credited, even in traditionally Catholic cultures, the assumption that a Protestant ethic of labour and values is profoundly linked with modern, capitalist culture is still valid.

Here are, then, some of the main objections I have found that could be raised against the Rousseauian view:

i) The first objection refers directly to the premise according to which we all have, originally, a natural self, an inborn inner truth or essence that reflects our perfection (Saint Augustine would say that human nature reflects God's nature). The concept of nature is a complex, Aristotelian one that we have no space here to discuss extensively, but which is genetic, essentialist and implies a principle of self-motion. Further human experience in social groups is supposed to have slight or not positive influence on this nature, but strong possibilities of miscarrying the self into false guises and ways of being, such as pride, falsehood, mischief, deception and so on. Well, this position is not very likely when accurately analysed. Let us leave aside the religious question of whether human nature reflects or not God's nature. Neither will I be examining the anthropological experiences with the so-called "wolf-children", because, although striking and relevant to this discussion, they are excessively exceptional and it is difficult to draw any general conclusions from it. Like Plato's myth about the Egyptian origins of language, they presuppose a thesis more than they prove it, because the conditions of each particular case and

witnesses concerned could be suspected of manipulation. Developmental psychology studies, such as Piaget's, are more pertinent with regard to this issue, but instead let us focus on the argument itself.

If this conception of self were true, the only further development available for self-improvement would be a lonely path in which the individual became voluntarily segregated from society, and so personal and collective progress would be two separate, even opposed paths. I think it is clear from historical as well as common experience that this is not so. Is a human self conceivable without the cultural fashioning that only social interaction and training can provide? I am thinking of language and technical skills, not to mention reading and aesthetic habits, which form what Bourdieu calls the *habitus* of a person. Another feature linked to self-development has to do with the dynamic impulse or momentum, which drives us to develop a self. Neither it is conceivable outside of the influence and stimulating input of a web of social relationships. Even biologically, for an individual permanently isolated from others it would be hard for him or her to develop themselves at least without the ability of self-replication that some viruses possess. A possible answer would be that this is too obvious, that the inborn self does not go against the social nature of human beings, *zooi politikoi* as Aristotle would have said. One is not necessarily constrained to conceive the human self as an entirely artificial or constructed thing to accept this objection. It fits into the principal claims of anthropology to say that all the individuals of the human species share some common features, and one of these features is undoubtedly his social nature. Or, in other words, the need of other human beings, constituting an entourage or social milieu in order to develop a self. There is no self without language, culture, technique... so there is no self without others. Then what is the point of assuming that social intercourse is necessarily negative?

ii) My second objection focuses, so to speak, on the side of the body. The metaphysical argument, implicitly or explicitly, sustains that bodily features are interposed between the natural self and a potentially direct expression of oneself towards the outer world. It is a part of the ancient idea of the matter as opposed to the spirit, the body as a cage of the soul; and that is based on a distinction between soul and body as two different, even opposite substances. It seems that there is no particular convincing evidence to support such a Cartesian, radical distinction; moreover, some neuroscientist such as Damasio (1994) claim that their research and experiments rather point instead to a spinozist theory, in which reason and emotion, matter and spirit, are inextricably interwoven and function simultaneously. But in the metaphysical view of mimesis, body and soul are facing each other in a permanent conflict, and the soul gets "spotted" by matter each time she tries to get out of her prison and show herself spontaneously. Body, voice and gestures cover spiritual features, or even worse, corrupt them and prevent us from attaining a true knowledge of each other, so the social space becomes a mirror gallery full of deceptions. That is something very similar, if not indeed the same thing as saying the body lies. However, this is not a good explanation of how bodily mechanisms work to express the emotions, which are the primal background of identity, forming the character of each person. And this is so because bodies do not lie.

Of course there are other species, such as chameleons, octopuses, some snakes and several plants and insects that can be said to lie with their bodies, by instantaneously mimicking the environmental colours or features, or even pretending to be what they are not, another more dangerous kind of animal. But to say that these animals "lie" would be no more than a metaphorical way of expressing an adaptative mechanism which is unconscious. And

intentionality is an essential, I dare to say necessary feature of lying, because deception does not function by looking like someone else. To pretend to be otherwise means to voluntarily manipulate another's mind to lead him to think what we want him to think, and that means having a theory of mind, that only few animals (primates above all) have and in a very rudimentary way. An octopus does not really pretend that he is a rock, he just does something, his body takes on the texture, shape and color of the stone, and it does it instantaneously, as a person being ashamed may blush without being part of a deliberate act. But what about complex social codes, e.g. a false smile? A smile can be false in the sense of not expressing an emotion actually felt, but could it be equated to a lie? I do not think so. Former studies about how brain and face muscles are interconnected (Cole, ) prove that the innervations implied in activating a real expression of joy are substantially different from those that come into play when a false smile is forced to appear. This is made evident in the external features such as wrinkles and expression lines. On the other hand, since the eighties, the discovery of mirror neurons (Rizzolatti, 1996) have been under discussion in neuropsychology circles. Leaving aside the controversial aspects of this debate, it seems undeniable that there is enough reliable evidence to state that mimetic potential attributed to human nature, and, more broadly to those of many primates, is grounded in a physical network of electrochemical impulses, a neuronal web that interconnects bodily reactions and mental states; and, more importantly, allows us to interpret other people's reactions with a minimal margin of error. Although it is possible (and it sometimes happens) that a gesture is misunderstood, this is scarcely a general pattern. We almost always distinguish a feigned smile from a spontaneous one, and if we are taken in by another person's deception strategy it is more as a consequence of ignoring involuntary body signals and focusing on other social features such as discourse, clothing and socially codified (and calculated) gestures. It is well known even in folk psychology, but also in professional circles that a lie is more easily betrayed by physiological symptoms, which are seldom manageable, than by the speech itself. The ability to completely repress or even manufacture these physical reactions demands a degree of discipline which, while being attainable, is out of reach for most of us. A body cannot lie because it lacks a theory of the other's mind, a theory of the mind is in the mind. This last argument may seem contradictory to the above mentioned discussion about whether we can or cannot accept the traditional dichotomic soul-body distinction, but in any case, since it is not my aim in this article to discuss that issue, I will take the two terms at present as conventionally used, as a useful device for discussing the topic in question.

iii) The third objection goes against the idea that fragmentation of identity implies the absolute loss of an inner core, and therefore of what we may call the traditional subject. Many authors, such as Foucault, Barthes or Blanchot have spoken about the disappearance of the subject in modern contexts, but this has been in many ways misunderstood, because these contexts are narrative and literary. It is true that modern (or post-modern) subjects are subjected to a level of fragmentation of their identities that is very likely higher than in any other historical age. Nonetheless it does not follow from this that the ontological subject is going to evaporate. It depends mainly on what we claim the subject relies on, or where we believe that it is rooted. The main core of all identity features have been object of discussion and speculation for long centuries, and I am not giving an absolute answer to this question which, I think, must necessarily remain open to allow human ethical development and growth. We are, as stoics used to say, permanent in change, we are change. However, some proposals can be advanced. Where does this *upokeimenon*, this subject-core inhabit? Is it in bodily perception? Is it in my memory?

I have a body that is owned by me and that I recognise as belonging to me, even if it is damaged. A proof of this is that, when the body is damaged and this leads to a difficulty in identifying with it, we find strong identity disorders. Then, I have a memory which puts together all the moments in my life, and that reminds me of the body that I was when I had a different body. When memory is shattered by, say, a neuronal illness, identity is also damaged. And there is something more, something that gives sense to all these memories configuring a trajectory of the self, and connects the universe of bodies through time and space. I do not know what exactly this “something” is, but I do believe that it is more an ability than an object, a thing or even an attribute. It would be said, in Spinoza’s vein, to be a *modus* of the self. I refer to it as the narrative skill of human beings. Narrativity has not only to do with telling stories to oneself and to others, but is a very complex mechanism which has to do with emotions, for instance. We learn how to act in a concrete social context, which should be the appropriate feeling in a certain situation, through stories, novels and fairytales. In this way we put together all the attributes allegedly belonging to a single, individual self. Therefore, I suggest that what ultimately puts together a self, however fragmented or post-modern it may be is a blending of a thing, the body and the bodily perception it involves, which has been called *a corporal scheme* (Merleau-Ponty, 1964); a property or attribute of the mind that relates bodies and events to time, memory; and a narrative skill, which is a mode of the self: the human way of relating to oneself and others.

The theory of narrative identity has been an object of great controversy during the last few years, since the idea was brought up by Paul Ricoeur. But here I have to specify the way I understand the narrative theory: the narrative way gives a subject the sense of a proper unified field by giving sense to his experiences, but that does not imply that the self has only one feature. There is not one story belonging to one character, since each story is shared by many actors, and each actor appears in several stories. Similarly neither is there only one character for each actor. I think it improves our ability to understand the whole scene of modern experience to think about it as an extensive web or weave knitted out from many threads, each one of them a short story. Self-identity can be conceived of as an actor with many masks, and this is in fact what mask metaphors do. But the interesting thing is not just to say that a man is the summation of all his masks, or that every man is an actor. This could be too incomplete or even a misleading way to put it; I do not mean that a man is a sum of all the characters he plays, but that he is more than this. To have a good identity is not, in the moralistic sense, to have only one mask that reflects a unique inner self, but in the ethical sense, to be able to lead oneself through a good life, a life that is worth being lived, a life that makes sense.

The idea that a subject with many, fragmented identities is going to erode the main self and lose his essence is questionable, if the subject makes himself able to cope with these identities, to give them sense. A story about origins was once crucial to this act of giving sense, and while still important, it seems to have handed over part of its preeminence to other orientations: to the future, as in the enlightened idea of progress and philosophy of history in the nineteenth century. But it seems today that these big epic narratives, as Lyotard called them, are also dying. Future is conceived nowadays more in the sense of aims, individual purposes and management of uncertainty than in an eschatological collective sense of destiny. And over all of these temporal conceptions, it would seem that the present is also getting a big part of the issue. Individuals are very consciously, self-reflectively focused on living the present with such fruition that makes it obvious that it is some counterpart of an existential anguish. Some pieces

of our direct experience, necessary but unpleasant ones, such as madness, death and every form of abjection have been hacked about, and then reintroduced in a mediated, fictionalised way. This is what Giddens calls the “Sequestration of Experience” ( ). Some emotional distance is provided by each device of cultural industry that generates fictions and fictionalised views of the real world. A large-scale redistribution of the main fields and conceptions of fiction, virtuality and reality is going on, and the self, the individual, is in the middle of all this whole reallocation process.

### 3. Being many masks

It is possible to summarize the main possible attitudes towards the relationship between the self and the outer world in three primary lines of thought. First of all, as we have just explained, essentialist theories, which sustain an idea of expression or representation of selves in which the movement is made from the inside to the outside, and in which any possible influence in the opposite sense is denied or labelled as wicked. The second one would be exactly the opposite: what we could call the relativist, externalist or behaviorist perspective, one in which the important influences are always come from the outside, from the others, and the self is equal to his behaviour. This could be resumed as “I behave like this, and that is what I am”; we are what we do. Tempting as it is, this approach seems to me still inaccurate, because it does not account for the multiple and complex interaction between inside and outside, or, which is the same, between the self as a unified identity self-perception device and the many “masks” adapted to a variety of social environments. A third possibility, a pragmatic model that could supply a comprehensive mechanism to explain all the inputs and outputs that constitute the self involved in a social outer world, would be the most complete of the three theoretical options discussed. This pragmatic view implies that at any stage of self-development, an individual receives input from the external world, social pressure to behave in a particular way, and interacts with narratives that show available models of how-to-be, but, at the same time, considers himself or herself as something like a fixed entity that is self-recognized and recognized by others, and struggles to be recognized in a certain way and not another. That is what we call expressing oneself in front of others, to show oneself as one really is. It is not only a question of behaviour; although behaviour is very important, beliefs and recognition skills matter too. So, the processes involved in self-formation are not a one-way flow, from inside to outside or vice versa, but a feedback in which some imaginary (or rather, self-invested) but powerful neural core, which we properly call the *self* is continually put to the test, contrasted and undergoes change along the way. Moreover, a crowd of little selves, contextual ones, also make up the self in a more extensive sense; they are perpetually interconnected with the matrix. The fact which gives coherence to these fragmentary images of the self (what others see of me and what I perceive of myself) is the narrative in which a person is inserted, the way she gives sense to these images of self and the events in which they participate by attributing to them certain motivations, aims or a particular ethos.

When we speak about “masks” or wearing a mask in a metaphorical sense, we refer to some experience of unauthentic self-expression. So the experience is somehow related to some kind of failure which spreads over the whole identity as a consequence of this failure to express

oneself. This kind of negative experience about the self is extremely important, because, I think, we only speak about masks when they fail, when something goes wrong in the mechanism. But before we continue, it is necessary to give a definition for the current use of the term, one that is not metaphoric, but analytic: **a mask, as it works in processes of performativity, is an interface device that connects the ideal or projected self with intersubjective reality.** What we call a mask is the device, or the set of tools that allow an individual to present himself in a public space, in front of others. It is the way by which an ideal self projects itself onto the social scenery and adapts itself to the demands of this network of relationships; therefore, no-one speaks about masks or even perceives them when these masks are working correctly. The experience of being unauthentic is explained mostly as when something does not fit: when an ideal or intimate image of the self does not manage to fulfill the requirements of the environment. When individuals are unable to fit into a given context, they will try to correct themselves, to change and reformulate the way in which they present themselves to others to be accepted easily. If the strategy collapses, and the performer is identified as a liar, a trickster or manipulator by the people standing around him, then it is said that he or she has been unmasked, exposed, or that the mask has fallen.

Therefore, it is of the utmost importance to focus on these cases in which the mask collapses, since we fail to perceive it when it is effective, and wonder why this is so. As we have commented, a mask as interface connects two levels of human existence, the individual and the collective, the imaginary and the real, the lonely and the crowded in a special way, creating something like an experience of *in between*, an almost fictional way of existence that is characteristic of each human being. A human is not able to live in the absolute present without self-consciousness (if we could, we would be animals), his presence in the world is always something more than one isolated self. Even if someone feels isolated or lonely, it is so because they know that, out there, there is a world full of people and that they have relationships from which the individual concerned is excluded. So a mask allows a subject to create an image of self that could be projected into the social space; if the mask receives the acceptance of the other actors, and it is considered as positive, and as such recognized by the community. A mask does not necessarily have to be positive in the sense of demonstrating a high rank on society; the fool and the beggar also wear their masks, and these are important for the maintaining of community values (we know that exclusion of the disadvantaged is a key element for the constitution of select clubs and organizations, it causes their value to increase (Bourdieu, 1980).

But when the masquerade goes wrong, we find ourselves confronted by one of these two occurrences: firstly, that in the conflict between the private self and the interpersonal social consensus of values marked by the social space the imaginary realm wins and the individual “loses the sense of reality”. It does not mean that he becomes frantic or incapable of self-awareness, but that he unconsciously chooses to adapt the way he perceives the public (or real) world to a way that fits his self image, rather than the other way round. A well known instance of this disassociative process is Cervantes’ character, Don Quixote, and it is interesting to realize that, rather than becoming insane one day, abruptly, Quixote constructs himself a new identity by forging a complex narrative, which involves disguising other persons in his entourage as characters from the story he is living out, as in the case of Dulcinea del Toboso, who is actually Aldonza Lorenzo. The dexterity of the narrative is not only that a low nobleman, Don Alonso Quijano, transforms himself into the knight Don Quixote, but that he transforms everything he touches with his imagination; he can turn a peasant girl into an enchanted

princess. But it is not necessary to turn to Spanish classic literature to find an example for this kind of failure; all of us have had contact with or know several cases of mental disturbance in which individuals, temporarily or chronically lose their sense of reality and become a mask, generating a self image unrelated to the real circumstances of life, and living within it. But I do not want to suggest, either, that this kind of “dysfunction” of the mask is necessarily pathological, like in split personality cases; in fact, we do it every day, trying to forget the real situation and to impose our perception of things, our way of seeing and doing things as an act of will (what is commonly called “wishful thinking”) in a social context, by trying to intimidate, charm or seduce our audience. This involves expressing oneself as the self should be or is wanted to be.

This first case of mask dysfunction is not what we commonly conceive as being unmasked, but as being insane. Nevertheless, I believe that if we examine it closely, it turns out to be the complementary phenomenon of what we really mean when we say that someone has been unmasked. In the second case the problem is just the opposite, since a weak self-image has not been able to withstand the circumstances and the mask collapses. To provide another literary example, Barry Lyndon in the novel by W.M. Thackeray is continually confronted with situations in which he is impelled to win people over to his cause, to gain their sympathy and therefore to make them help him, trust him. Sometimes he succeeds, but in the novel it appears not so much as a reward for his dexterity in deceiving, but as a random and lucky turn of events, or as the consequence of the secular atmosphere of indulgence and self-satisfaction that reigned in the high society of 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe. Then, sometimes he speaks about himself and tries to behave like a gentleman, and sometimes people believe him, or at least act like they do, and sometimes they do not. He is of course an adventurer, and a gambler, and everyone knows it. The only people that are tricked by him are precisely those who want to be duped. So here we come back to my prior claim, that even when disguise and deception are most of the time involved in these events of mask-making, the issue is not to be satisfactorily explained by a true-false option, as if we were talking about propositions and propositional states of the world. First, it is a question of imagination, of being capable of imagining himself with a variety of features and taking in the others, to make them think that this particular feature is true to life, plausible, realistic or at least recognizable. To “counter-identify” (Butler, 1993) someone is the opposite process; when someone gets used to dealing with a certain group of individuals, by recognising them by some particular marks, and then discovers that the person he is confronted with does not really pertain to this category, even if he exhibits the distinctive marks, the deluded person will tend to give an account of the situation in terms of deception: “He was trying to cheat me, I was deceived by him...”. But from the point of view of the mask, what happened was simply that a certain mask did not fit well enough, that the individual wearing the mask didn't manage to pass the test. There can be lies, or disguises involved (and they usually are) in the techniques of mask building, but they are not indispensable, and in my opinion, they do not serve as an explanatory tool than can fully account for what is happening in these cases.

This is not a defence of lying, but an effort to understand the formation of a modern self, a work in progress from the Renaissance to our times. The thesis sustaining the idea of the failure of the modern self, because of its fragmentation, presupposes the prior existence, or at least, an ideal of unity; artificiality or simulacra are very dense criteria for the rejection of certain behaviour patterns, because it is thought that if they are repressed, a natural self would emerge. Or conversely, that these artificial patterns struggle to suffocate this natural being. My

suggestion relies on the proposal of leaving aside, for a moment, this general, almost narcissistic metaphysical backdrop, because it is not very useful for understanding the issue in question, although (or precisely because) it has been and still is a major drive for action, and an important guideline for agency. But the logic of reason always relies on pre-logical systems of significance that have their own way of creating links between things and words (Bourdieu). To analyse these pre-logical, practical attitudes and understand the relevant principles that harbour them, a certain stepping-back is required from the researcher. The impetus of moralizing before knowing exactly what are we analyzing or how it works is also a major problem in human sciences, and still, when the time for evaluating subjectivity from objectivity comes, the endeavour is always problematic.

#### 4. Conclusions

I have underlined the improbability of the existence of a unified, unitary, natural and pure self, dissociated from the external world, because I think there is no plausible evidence of it and because of other reasons I have explained. The only support for such an idea would be a religious belief in a divine seed of God in our souls, and that is a theological question, and so, very far removed from this text. And after all, a belief is not evidence. It could be even questioned whether the assumption of a strong separation between soul and body is to be taken for granted (I do not believe so). But my aim in this brief exploratory essay is to demonstrate that an unconsciously assimilated bias, moreover, a whole metaphysical system which determines what is above and what below, what is the inside and the externality; how, when and where a subject must be understood to be authentic or not represents an obstacle to the analysis of the conditions of the social building of the self.

Of course, not only social intercourse help to give the individual a proper sense of self, but also the interior or intimate moments are as crucial as those others. This is why I choose the third, pragmatic model of explaining the feedback between the self and the external world, because it makes it possible to give an account of the processes with all their complexity. Since the sense of the intimate or private world is strongly interdependent on those of social space and sanctioned behaviours in front of others, since, as Mead (1967) said, we all have an other inside the *me*, the *other within*, each change in the nature and texture of emotional self-perception depends on changes in the social surface of individuals. What is more, I would like to cast doubt upon the spatial metaphors and wonder: does it make sense to speak of inside and outside, core and surface, when we are trying to distance ourselves from the logic of the metaphysical system that sustains the metaphor? It is very difficult to keep moving forward without these indispensable tools, the words that give an order to our world, even if this order is about to be questioned. But precaution in this field is to be appreciated, since each word, which is used in a certain frame or representation of the world carries on its back not only a meaning, but an inner logic of how things must match one another. And metaphors are deceiving, because, although they never directly lie, they create strange and undisputed claims about what is to be a human, a self or an authentic person, and they are often beyond the reach of critics, who begin their analysis by having accepted in a certain degree some of these *Weltanschauungs* which constitute the realm of the metaphors they feed. So metaphors should not be dismissed as lies or

errors of reason, (they are major affordances in the constitution of narratives of the self and the discovery of the unconscious) but they have to be discussed and criticized as valuable receptacles of a culture's principles. They are practical knowledge, they inform us about how to think and how to act in moments when there is no time for the application of formal, theoretical knowledge. A new way of thinking may demand for the emergence of new metaphors, but it is undoubtedly necessary to check the old, structuring ones.

So, an identity, fragmentary as it is, is constituted from several selves or masks that cope with different social situations, with a sense of bodily belonging, a memory and a certain narrative sense that gives sense to all these actions in a chronological as well as logical, coherent, tale. But what we call a mask or many of them is not an object, an element of the self, like a piece of a machine, not a technical object but a technology of the self (Foucault, 2001). This means that in the analysis of the self, this study gives priority to the processes by which the self is transformed rather than those taxonomies which try to comprehend it through the relationship between the parts and the whole. It is not the memories, one by one, but the force that binds them together; it is not one mask or a hundred, but the way in which an individual offers himself for recognition and, in the same measure, earns the possibility of self-recognition. Fragmentation does not mean the failure of the modern self, but is an unavoidable condition of possibility that all of us must cope with. Being fragmented is not (and it has never been) the problem; instead, the problem is how to live in a fragmented state and, after all, manage to give a sense of belonging, an identity, to a trajectory linked to a self, to oneself.

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