
IDENTITY AND THE WAYS OF IDENTIFICATION IN MEDIA REALITY

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Abstract

The contribution aims to map the identities and methods for identifying the media interface. It takes notes of how this interface provides options and how these options allow an individual to use them in defining the idea itself. It takes notes of certain stereotypes and roles that have been created within the media exposure and how this status is by media content creators (directors, producers, etc.). Many examples are an important component of how to work with identity and identification in the film industry, which has become an important part of the media world and this results in reflecting the reality itself.

Keywords: film, identity, identification, media, director

1. Introduction

If we consider the act of defining the self, we must take into account the full range of psychological processes that create us. The mere awareness of '*who I am*', '*where I come from*' and '*where my direction is*' brings the process of thinking about themselves, about their own essence of being.

Man is a thoughtful creature and he has always been interested in issues related to his own existence. However, one must be conscious at his best, so to know to answer these questions with clear conscience. Often he gropes and looks for answers around him, in what constantly surrounds him, what should enter into personal experience.

The identity from a psychological point of view is understood as an individual unity and coherence, in which the individual is experiencing himself and feels that he remains himself in the variety of conditions that he gradually experiences in borderline situations, at the moment when a touch of death can come to rest on him. This can be considered as a moment of self-awareness [1].

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2. The identity and method of identifying it

Overall, our time in this world is limited, our existence has a beginning and an end. The very fact that our life ends up with death allows us to use this time to ensure that we capitalize on it in a fulfilling way. Even when one is free, he is constantly confronted with a series of events during the life in which he must make a decision. You could say that he is born into a world that has prepared pitfalls and possibilities for him. It's up to him how to cope with them. A characteristic feature of human existence is '*being in the world*', that is man himself does not choose the conditions of his life alone, but out of his own will he is just thrown into this world and into the hands of fate [2]. From a certain point of view this can be called a kind of a power game.

In the film of Woody Allen *Match Point* the director, through the main character, asks whether it is better to be in your life good or happy. This declares on a scene, which incorporates the full story (initiation and end), and paints it in a classic tennis situation where the ball in a play hits the net. In that moment, the chances are equal. If the ball falls to the opponent's side we won, if on our side, we lose.

Man is constantly evolving throughout the life. He is integrated into the society. As part of the existentialist philosophy it is precisely the society that is understood as an impersonal force, suppressing and destroying the individuality. It takes a human his being and forces conventional ideas, beliefs and tastes on him [3]. *Trainspotting* (director Danny Boyle) reports such a revolt and paradoxically we hear it from the mouth of the heroin user - the protagonist Mark Renton ("*Choose life. Choose a job. Choose a career. Choose a family. Choose a big telly, choose washing machines, cars, CD players and electric opener ...*") who chooses a drug instead of a normal life. The film is therefore a satirical comment on the possibility of personal choice and integration into a specific system.

One feels the fear of death, and it is seeking refuge in a society where he is comforted by the idea that all men must die and thereby suppresses the idea of his own, inevitable death. The very personality and individuality in this case opposes any social group or society. The individual life in a society is however not a real life, it's only a superficial existence of man. The real existence is a matter of fact hidden inside him, but it is not accessible to everyone. Existentialists see the way to her in the fear of death that shows man his true solitude and individuality, because no one can die instead of another, everyone dies for himself [4]. Richard Kelly's *Donnie Darko* contains the idea of an individual who dies alone and it is audible in the film (from the old woman), giving thus Donnie, the main character, the knowledge of realizing his fate.

Existentialists, however, don't leave out that the human nature is shaped in the process of social life and is the sum of social relations. They claim that he himself freely chooses his nature, he becomes such in a way he himself created. One is something not finished, it is a continual possibility, a project. It is aimed

at the future and continuously advances his plans, he is fully responsible for his choices and seeks constant border crossings of himself [2].

The controversy is whether our identity is predetermined and is constantly evolving. There may be views that are dedicated just to this issue. From our perspective, it is accessible to understand the identity as what is in our lifetime, develops in certain intentions and defines our personality.

An interesting example of downloading other identities was the project of the artist Nikki S. Lee, who used photography as a field within which she just plays with identities in her projects (1997-2001), combining the ethnography empirical study of culture and art performances. In this work, not only watches but also appropriates the styles of certain groups and subcultures (punks, transvestites, skateboarder yuppies, etc.). In order that Lee can penetrate into these diverse groups she adapts their clothing, behaviour, hairstyle. She does not try to fool people into believing her that she actually belongs to one of the groups, but this interesting experimentation is toying with the idea of identity falsification through cultural performances. By introducing herself to each member of the groups into which penetrates and explaining her artistic intention in the next few months, she gets gradually adopted among them. Once the artist becomes a part of the group, she lets herself photographed by someone in her new social environment and these photos are then exhibited as a part of her art project. It is surprising how convincing these images work and operate and it does not seem at all that someone poses in these informal snapshots. They look at the most authentic way and thus as if proving the success of its performer merger with the environment. Despite this, Lee clearly stands out in these images, despite the ease with which she appears on them and where her Oriental ethnic-identity is visible. Her performance, however, clearly points out the performance of the others in the picture, the codes under which certain social groups and subcultures are clearly recognizable. Lee, by creating the identity that is not entitled to her automatically, shows the postmodern idea that identities are formed through performance. She herself claims that her performance paintings develop her own identity, which she defines as a constantly changing set of relationships [5].

The distribution of subcultures can be seen in the now already classic teen movie *Clueless* (director Amy Heckerling) where one of the characters and the audience are presented in a rapid succession in the school yard. This model was later taken over by other teenage films a few years later. A similar, *Never Been Kissed* (director Raja Gosnell) even addresses the transposition of identity that was addressed by Lee. The main character in the administration of Drew Barrymore, working as an editor, must pass as an eighteen-year old student for the role of the reports to describe life at a high school. The turning point occurs when the main character remembers the years when she was unpopular and tries to change this fact in a newly established situation. The film is based on a similar concept as the Czech film by Milan Steindler *Vrat' se do hrobu!* (*Go back to the grave!*), where a poorly paid sociologist, who was cast by the

director himself, gets behind the grammar school desks again and assumes the identity of the student.

This is not unlike what Oldrich Lipsky presented in *Marečku, podejte mi pero!* (*Marecek, Pass Me the Pen!*), and so a group of factory workers must once again get behind the school desks if they want to think of a promotion. The attendance of evening classes at industrial school is the source of many humorous situations, but the film mostly highlights the fact that although it is a group of elderly people, not many of the conditions and stratifications of students in the class (type as mug, sloppy, dude, etc.), have changed much in those few years. The acceptance of this identity - in this example the student, only proves its development.

Joe Pistone, hero of the film *Donnie Brasco* (director Mike Newell) infiltrates himself into a criminal organization in order to solve the case of the FBI, he is working for. Thus he lives in hiding for several years and assumes the identity of a mobster, along with their principles, lifestyles and values. The problem arises at the moment when he realizes he does not know whose side he stands and which identity is a matter for him (as strong loyalty also binds him to one of the gangsters). So the possibility of choice stands out in front of him and he decides himself... similarly as Sonny Crockett in *Miami Vice* (director Michael Mann).

If this confusion of identities played out inside the individual (what is good and what is bad) as in the movie *Face/Off* (director John Woo), we have a classic Hollywood layering of figures on the good cop and bad criminals (embodied by the actors John Travolta and Nicolas Cage). The image stands on the exchange idea of faces between the main characters, so other characters around them do not know who they're dealing with. Only the audience knows that they are confronted with the exchange of identities between two different characters performed by the changes of the physical character, of the individual mailboxes.

Branislav Malik in its publications *Mediamofóza sveta (Mediamorphosis of the World: Philosophical, anthropological, social and political aspects of the current media)* has defined this division of identities:

- **Awarded:** Identity in this sense, is what we have been given by the destiny and what we were deposited at the same time to confirm and defend. Such awarded identity is certified by the process of crystallizing - separation from their surroundings and their denial. It may also be called a classic, as all its other modalities can be defined as some alternatives to it.
- **Identity as a construction:** Identity that does not focus on itself, but especially on its exterior. It is therefore not as in the first case, supported from within and threatened from the outside, but it is a function of the outside.
- **Obtained identity:** Identity is here constituted by an act of signing onto something that will give her temporary contours. The very identity in this sense is not what I have, but what I identify myself ex post with.

- **Plural (situational):** It is constituted by the addition of situationally updated partial identities. Identity in this sense is rather a convention than any real entity [6].

These identities can, in fact, mutually overlap and Malik even says how our life manifestations have been reduced to ‘playing’. We act our life as a theatrical or a film role. In fact we do not live, but we only act to be living. Our whole life has been narrowed down to just one single role - the role of the actor. The situation is even more complicated because we act our life playing as a metaphor in the number of meta acts [6, p. 67].

3. Body as an important carrier of the psychological meanings and a part of the identity

The body is the basic building block of the physical shell of a man. As the body changes during the years of life, so has also changed the body imaging in historical periods. The difference between a female and a male body is obvious, like the access to these two components [7]. The body is the package that identifies us, envelops our soul. Today we know that how we feel within us greatly affects the physical side and just reflects on the body.

It is interesting to see how the body was looked at in the past. That was slightly animalistic, a container, which is a sign of human mortality and immanence. Therefore, so that one could - as a thinking being and not merely as a physical being – aspire to divinity or its secular manifestations (to leave her femininity and immanence), this body had to be suppressed or transcended through a pure thought.

The body becomes a commodity that is designed to attract, as many recipients, to it as possible and through it, that is to give contents by presenting it. This can be seen especially in the field of visual images where the body is visible in advertisements or as a part of audio-visual works. Body as an item is of great importance because of its display and the display form also attacks our senses. Consider just a form of advertising where the body is often stylized, bringing us a clear signal by the means of communication. Perhaps it is best seen in cosmetics, perfumes, where a clear motive of physicality, sexuality and seduction is present (the message hidden in them is obvious and that ‘*to succeed with the opposite sex*’) without distinction as to whether the advertising is directed primarily to women or men, as several gender differences are wiped out. Although they are wiped out it is amazing that many codes have the same validity. These codes are often fixed in us, our subconsciousness and with constant repetition (or frequent imaging), they have become familiar to us (we have managed to adopt and decode them). New demands are constantly put on male and female models, just the display format changes or ‘*is amended*’.

Many world famous directors make advertisements for famous fashion brands (which can work both ways, by filming videos or ads and then later making feature films) [8].

Martin Scorsese (Chanel), Darren Aronofsky (Yves Saint Laurent), Nicolas Winding Refn (Gucci), David Lynch (Christian Dior), Roman Polanski (Prada), Wong Kar-Wai (Lacoste) ..., they all have already tried to shoot commercials. Such spots usually have a form of a short film (Lynch for Dior, Polanski for Prada), or a short version for media is made out of it. Many of them, however, have a classic form of short advertisements (Kar-Wai for Lacoste), which is mainly intended for commercial purposes. Although the target of this ad is clear again, it is interesting to see how the typical author's manuscript of the director blends in this form of commerce, demonstrating just another overlaying of the art world with a consumerist world where the body in the hands of the artist becomes another expressive element bearing meaning.

The directors and consumers are aware of this fact and apply these to create new fashions and the new ads. The cult of the body is mixed with admiring famous people (politicians, athletes, actors, etc.) and the use of their person (body, face, identity – what they represent) becomes carriers of meanings. Actors have contracts and become the look of a fashion brand (Ryan Reynolds for Hugo Boss, James Franco for Gucci, Scarlett Johansson for Dolce & Gabbana, etc.), which is also related to the identifications of the recipients with the idea of the given product, which is depicted on the basis of familiarity, popularity (actor known in advertising) in terms of suggestions, sometimes the direct opposite sets (although from a certain point of view it does not have to be the opposite). If we look at the advertising spot for the fashion chain H&M, where the renowned American singer Lana Del Rey sings the hit *Blue Velvet* by Bobby Vinton, the primary initiative is the allusion to the film *Blue Velvet* by David Lynch, which corresponds with the processing benefiting from this film. For many viewers, however, the primary will just be the singer Lana Del Rey, copying the actress Isabella Rossellini part of the movie *Blue Velvet*. Singer Lana takes in this case the identity of the actress (a typical phenomenon for singers, extending in their videos), her body becomes the bearer of meanings (movement, vocal), which is shrouded in fashion dress (another significant element) and speaks to the audience in order to get identified (the viewer has to purchase a fashion product - Commerce). The line between the artistic tone, commercialism and expression is wiped out. The viewer in this case becomes a participant, elaboration remains in his mind, he is thinking over (he can picture the scenes from the film, to which reference is made) or he can sing a song along...

American actor Mark Wahlberg began his career as a model for lingerie brand Calvin Klein (in poses declaring a sport body), so that later under the name Marky Mark begins rapping and recording some music albums. Today, however, he is known as an actor, acting in numerous critically acclaimed films (*Boogie Nights*, director Paul Thomas Anderson, where he could apply his showbiz experience and film like this to some extent paraphrases of his career), or *The Fighter* (director David O. Russell) and was subsequently nominated for an Oscar for his supporting role in the film *The Departed* (director Martin

Scorsese). The question is which of the presented identities of Mark Wahlberg is more known (actor, model, singer) to a today's recipient.

Here we come to the fact that people have fixed before a person solely on the basis of certain surface properties. Old known that at a meeting we often judge according to the first impression is gaining general application. But do not forget the hidden intellect that we have an opportunity to discover later and not to separate the psychical aspect from the physical one. Take for example the so-called *ugly laws*, which were in some North American cities, among others in Chicago, valid until the mid-seventies of the 20th century. These laws prohibited a 'vile-looking' - mutilated, sick, maimed or 'unsightly' people go around. They could only be in institutions or stay at home. For a ridiculous fee to act in the performances, where they appeared as so called toys of nature or monsters and the audience went to see them as a circus attraction or as medical and scientific curiosities (visible for example in the movie *Freaks* (director Tod Browning), which had major problems with the censorship at the time of its launching). While, in some cases, the society ruled out the subjects who showed a difference deemed as ugliness as worthless, sometimes they were hailed as individuals abounding in special moral, spiritual and mental abilities. This was the case of Joseph Merrick, a Briton living in the Victorian era, who became the main character of the film *The Elephant Man* by David Lynch. Merrick was known as 'elephant man', because of its extreme faces, and the disfigurement of the body (he suffered of the so called *Proteus syndrome, neurofibromatosis*, therefore, a genetic disorder forming an uncontrolled growth of nerve cells, as those affected developing the unsightly skin cancer). After many years of tyrannical abuse and suffering in circuses and alms houses, the significant physician Frederick Treves and the Princess of Wales made friends with and in London he was put into the Victorian society, where he became, in a way, a cult figure, distinguished and admired for its cultivated soul and mind that, as all believed, were hiding in his deformed body [5, p. 380].

Deformation, physical metamorphosis and unclear identity elements are characteristic for the overall filmography of the Canadian director David Cronenberg. He began his career with bloody horror images that got him awareness and according to many statements thanks to them (from a commercial point of view) in later years he could pass smoothly into the waters of a more artistic film. While the early filmography was dominated by a powerful aspect of physicality, later it focuses more on the psychological impact of the hero and the related psychic survival connected with it, although it does not forget to use the body, like in the movie *Eastern Promises*. This story focuses on Nikolai Luzhin, who works as a driver for a Russian criminal organization *Vory v zakone* (*Thief in law*), operating in contemporary London. They are characterized by their body tattoos, according to which another member of the group can identify where he belongs in the hierarchy, and what was his past (type of tattoo reveals whether an individual was in prison, which takes the post, religion, etc.) It is this element that the director uses in the critical juncture of the story that is insecure and gives the viewer a reminder of the older director's images in a scene from the sauna.

Nikolai acts as an ambiguous character and his identity also seems ambivalent, the reasons will be explained at the end of the story. The character was created by American actor Viggo Mortensen, who seemingly accounted for the director's alter ego (not to mention the same hairstyle that has the main character in the film and also the director has been wearing for several years). Their collaboration began on the film *A History of Violence*, where Mortensen played the character, at the first glance of an ordinary family man Tom Stall, who operates a small town family snack bar. His life changes when at one time he disposes of a pair of thugs threatening his life. After this incident the person is the focus of the media when he becomes a local hero. Thus, however, he draws the attention of the people from his past, and Tom is thus confronted with his true identity and must face the consequences when he alienates from his own family and must resolve this internal problem. It is seen that the character of Tom is trying to forget the past, he forgot it respectively (freed it from memory) because of relief to the conscience. He adopts a new role as the patriarch of his family (husband, father), from where the story of the film begins, to let draw a line under his violent past. In this sense, it has a relative knowledge of role playing in his life that shifts to more and more metarols. He plays the role of a settled man in front of his family, but his identity is connected with violence and the actor Viggo Mortensen plays the role of Tom, when within the preparation he receives his character traits. It is known that the actor Mortensen uses methodical acting in the preparation of the film, derived from Stanislavsky's theatre method (based on a complete identification with a given character). He used this perfectly well as the preparation for the *Eastern Promises*, when, for some time, he resided in Russia for the purpose of acquiring the local accent and understanding of the culture.

Mortensen, however, is familiar to many viewers from the notorious *The Lord of the Rings* (director Peter Jackson) and is characterized particularly as a star (or face) of the show business (typical for actors), which they can later again get confronted with in connection with an ad, magazine covers, or a film (that is by many aspects of media interface) through which the identity (or any of the identities) of the player shines directly to us.

4. Conclusions

Current man is confronted relentlessly with the media world of which he becomes a part of it. As an integral part of that he perceives his own person and how the media world functions. One component of that world is media content that creates a certain picture of embedded habits and tasks that correlate with media environment identification. We pointed out terms linked with identity and we presented a classification of identities. We used cinema as a way of explaining how to elaborate on identity and with the help of specific examples we discovered how identification may work. We introduced the effort of media content creators who form, and sometimes break, the new rules of media functioning. Opposing the old rules may drive to reimagination, what could help

with identification in the end. This process is dependent from various transformations. Those are yet other elements resulted of media influence and have important role in the depiction of reality.

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