

Introspection

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Lottie Matthews

Part II : A Theoretical Exploration into the Internal and External Self

Who we are is the crux of human existence, an estranged question in which we all continually exist, explore and define ourselves by. Through either a considered, conscious exploration into the self or everyday occurrences, seemingly fuelled by unconscious decisions, our own individualism becomes a continual constant.

"Personal identity - the answer to the riddle of "who" people are, takes shape in the stories we tell about ourselves. Such stories may not necessarily be the ones we tell others of the public at large; they are the narratives we construct as we orient our present choices and actions in light of our imagined futures and the version of our own pasts that fit with these projects"

(Hinchman and Hinchman 1997 : xvii)

Referencing an age of constant preoccupation with the self and the maintenance of our own independent reality, we can aim to theoretically explore and dismantle the paradigms we exist within by defining the self, consciousness and our own personal identity. This extended piece of research reflects on whether consciousness, the body or our perceived idiosyncrasies are truly our true "self" by exploring how fluid this form is. Referencing how we form a constant internal narrative, reacting to the subjective experiences around us, this exploration aims to detach the constant obsession with individuality and to remove the boundaries that having a persona suggests. Can we question our own narrative portrayal to determine whether or not we are truly are individual? All we are is how we define ourselves, but does this definition matter?

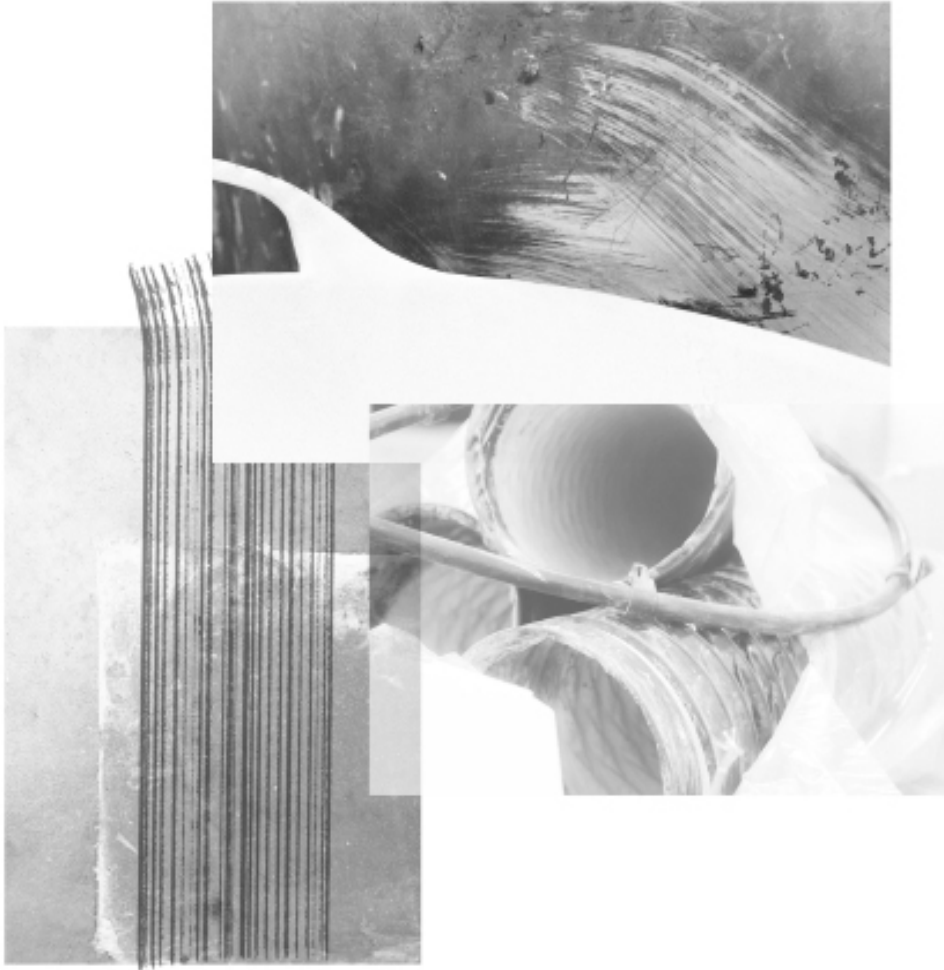
To see the self as two forms, the internal consciousness and the observable public manifestation, we reflect upon the outwardly interpreted persona. French psychiatrist Jacques Lacan originally explored the theory of 'the Other' within the twentieth century. He acknowledged the notion of the self as singular, separate forms and the assumption of individual experiences determined by the way we interact within the environment. From this fundamental truth, he questions that without separation from a peripheral

source, how would we conceptualise our sense of self? Therefore, he then sees this entity as "the Other" and that we only have a 'self' due to the separation from this external environment. Because of this we have to assemble concepts and coherence of our sense of self in order to relate it to the Other and subsequently define ourselves against our pre-conditioned language and socialisation. Lacan does this by suggesting that we understand the external world and 'the Other' through the use of language which is the translation of ideas and emotions. (Benson 2012 : 122 - 123)

Who is it that we show the world? In a state of constant individuality anxiety, we are aware of that in order "to participate in society we cultivate a public persona" (Finkelstein 2014 : 2). We use the sense of the Other to form a public manifestation of how we see ourselves, but it exists relationally within the interpretation of social codes and the external world. Identity can be seen as a contingent form, questioning whether specific attributes are acquired through experience, and whilst 'our past influences behaviour' and our own perception of our self, the sequence of occurrences are circumstantial to the 'Other.' How we interpret, form and enact the experiences are still, unconsciously, in relation to the audience, whether this is through the act of hiding or revealing these subjectivities by formulating a social gap to separate or connect both ourselves and the observer.

In this sense "deception and invention frame the production of every individual's ordinary social life" as we become continually alert to the existence of paradox, lying and distorting our own truths. We see ourselves as retaining a "core self" to define our ethics, but are able to invent an identity to suit the fluid character. As Joanne Finkelstein, sociology and cultural studies lecturer, suggests, in actual fact the "true self" is solely a "repertoire of manoeuvres and calculations based on the metro scripts of urban life," (Finkelstein 2014 : 2 - 10) in which we maintain many character types, dependent on specific social locations. This is where we offer the first insight into the performance piece that is identity, a double consciousness, built to conceal truths and exaggerate claims, all whilst maintaining coherence to answer the question "who am I?"

By suggesting that consciousness is 'you,' John Locke develops further into the understanding that "identity cannot be innate" and is therefore formed through experience and memory. Seeing personal identity as defined through relation, Locke, an 17th Century philosopher and physician, acknowledges the constant awareness of who we are. He suggests that through our own mind contradicting our ideas about what we know of our identity and the principle of individuation, we subsequently form the specifications we consciously distinguish



ourselves by. He defines this as "concernment," suggesting we maintain awareness of an 'emotionally entangled attitude toward future and past self.' This relationship of the consciousness, in relation to actions and experiences, explores Locke's ideology that we maintain constant comparison of ideas in relation to our past actions and future persona (Newman 2007 : 192 - 194). This comparative state suggests that the self and personal identity are constantly aware and formed through our thoughts and actions rather than the material act of existing.

Locke acknowledges the continual process of identity development by suggesting that consciousness is dependent on the consistent awareness and questioning of concepts such as time and location. He suggests that when a person has the capacity to "consider it self as it self the same thinking thing in different times and places," therefore forming what he defines as consciousness. This introduces memory theory, by suggesting that "your consciousness extends backwards to some past action" and therefore through awareness and appropriation of subjective experiences, we form a unified narrative. By forming a connected collective of actions, Locke suggests that 'the boundaries of the person, both at a time and over time, are delineated by a web of mental states' through memory (Newman 2007 : 214 - 221).

This idea is that the self at one point in time, synchronic, is not fixed as it is all relative to the successive points of the diachronic, historical, experiences. This is stated as memory takes "synchronic personal identity into an account of diachronic personal identity" (Newman 2007 : 214). Conclusively, the application of memory theory suggests a continually developing self is constantly changing, never a fixed state. Locke's theories therefore conclude that the self as we see it is dependent on subjective experience, time and memory - therefore all our thoughts are created from the stimuli that is given to us externally which are then formed into a cohesive narrative of events. As we separate the self into a process of subjective experience which forms the internal consciousness, we then deliver ourselves outwardly through an external portrayal.

However, we consistently feel a need to cohesively unite our experiences, taking on subjective, external events and occurrences to form a narrative. By referencing the public self and private self, do we really have two distinctive narratives? Or is one internal and the other just our own self-aware over-exaggeration of the same narrative, curated and edited to deliver towards an audience? John Niles discusses the idea that we as individuals are 'homo narrans' in which 'who I am is the story I tell you' (Wireless Philosophy 2016). This brings into play the acknowledgement that we deliver and

share our perception of self, meaning our identity becomes relative to the interaction of selves. This forms the idea that there is a separation between the personal, detached narrative and the process of interaction by acknowledging that the individual experiencer is present and involved during it's continual creation and formation. This relationship of experience and memory is then altered as the individual becomes the "author" and "active shaper" of the narrative they deliver (Hinchman and Hinchman 1997 : xix). Without the need for acknowledgement and interaction with an external relative then individuality as a concept would not exist.

The narrative identity is therefore one of both an interior and exterior form, even if for our own private processing and understanding of our subjective experience, or to subsequently deliver in an idealised form to an external audience. We need to contain our ideas, interpretations and experiences into a cohesive, fluid pattern and therefore "construct a version of reality or a narrative, and to present certain things as logical and natural, and by extension other readings as illogical, nonsensical, or invisible" (Kidd 2015 : 22).

If our identity is all defined by externalisation and forming a unified narrative of self, then we are unrestricted with who we can "be". We are fundamentally aware of the idealised view of the self we wish to deliver, but there is no point in the individual self if there is nothing to compare or align ourselves against. The mere action of individuality needs to, in some ways, accept the calculating and opportunistic elements of it's form, moving us from "self-representation to self-presentation" (Kidd 2015 : 63) . This is when the exterior world comes in to play, and we have to realise that "everyone is acting" (Finkelstein 2014 : 25). To do this, we follow the fundamental roles of society, engaging within social scripts, relative to our own interpretation, judgement and comparison of others. This is through use of the symbolic interactionism, a sociological perspective in which meaning is dependent upon the process of social interaction subjective to the situation, and the information communicated through shared understanding of the semiotics. We are all responsive to other's interior selves, speculating on their own identity construction, in acceptance that they too are judging our own.

We can then become accepting that "personation requires performance" therefore identity is "a public display more than a private state of being" (Finkelstein 2014 : 26). If we are constantly pre-occupied in a process of observation, surely every element of ourselves that we portray is evaluated, formed and created for our own personal account? When calculating social performances there is a constant awareness of the 'fragility of the moment'



and therefore we use our rules of engagement to control elements of each social encounter. Therefore, as Joanne Finkelstein suggests, "we learn identity from the reactions of others," (Finkelstein 2014 : 97) constricted within a layer of semiotic codes and socially accepted relative forms. The fact, however, that we are all socialised into this state of incomplete construction, explores that there is a continual unreliability of the social reality, fragile and reliant solely on narrative recount and appearances.

How we associate to others is relational to our interpretation and use of semiotics to understand the multiple complex discourses that are "constructed, used and interpreted within different contexts." Within identity, "ordinary people [use] their own stories and experiences as source materials, and in so doing [provide] individual perspectives and expressions of their interior worlds." Semiotics is "an understanding that the words, language and other signs which we use in our everyday and social contexts help to shape our reality," (Kidd 2015 : 20) which is continually part of our socialisation and acceptance into the exterior world.

"We should all be encouraged to think about how our own contexts, ideas, prejudices and inevitably partial world-views filter into and frame the representations we construct, shaping the codes and conventions that we utilise in order to construct meaning therein"

(Kidd 2015 : 22)

Through exploring these ideas, we firmly explore the state that identity is fundamentally a social surface, restyled and invented dependent on circumstance and our interpretation of what we absorbingly see as our core fixed essence. We become accepting of the fact the human self is a fragmented and unstable form, and the personal self maintains a subject and an object. Without the ability to form a stable unconscious, we then project these insecurities onto a fluid, relational and constantly adapting "identity." We remain completely unaware of "what exactly is concealed and what is being revealed?" (Finkelstein 2014 : 94) therefore the self becomes a fundamental argument between unity and continuity.

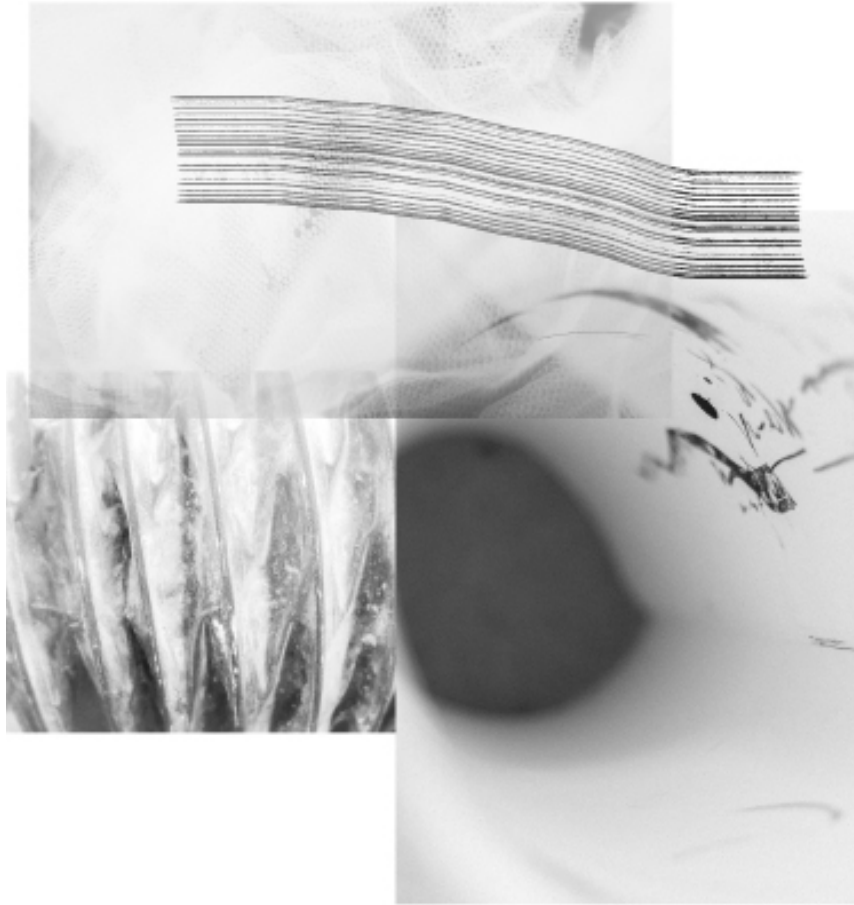
Despite our identities being based on social interpretation of an idealised narrative and a cultivated public persona, we as individuals feed our identity anxiety through the constant search for a "secular voyage into the privacy of the interior". We are aware that we are singular beings, and hold our own "individual imagination" and with this cultivate a sense of there "being an interior realm that is always separated from the interiors of others" (Finkelstein 2014 : 92). This is relational to Locke's

theories as there is one self, one body, one mind, a fixed individual form that has its own subjective experiences. Can we therefore define the interior as the self, and the identity as the exterior form?

Rene Descartes, 17th century French philosopher, approaches the idea that "the self is the subject of thought or self-awareness" which becomes an object of reflection through development and self-control. He establishes his theory that the mind and body are separate entities, dichotomising the body as a tangible, material form and the mind, or 'soul' as a collective of ideas and thoughts. This concept was drawn initially from fourth century Greek Philosophy, but Descartes developed on the dualism through the exploration into the brain's pineal gland as the "seat of thought" or ideas and consciousness, in which the two material and immaterial states co-exist (Benson 2012 : 20). By transpiring that there is a separation between the physical and mental self, Descartes opens a complex discussion into whether the self is a physical or detached form.

We have to accept the knowledge that we are independent entities, and although our identities are delivered within comparison to an external Other, we fundamentally hold our own independent interpretations. All experience is subjective, and we can process this through our own unique biology and historical perspective. This is relational to John Locke's memory and body theory by suggesting that you will always maintain a consistent personal identity because you share the same physical shell and those elements therefore form a concrete self, without a body you are not in existence. This sense tends to be generally disregarded as a fixed truth by philosophers, such as discussed by Descartes with the idea that the brain and "soul" actually form your true self, seeing the body as a solely a "material, mechanical machine" (Benson 2012 : 20).

However as the "machine" is in existence and experiencing the external events, it is the cell and physical receptor for the self (Hurlburt and Schwitzgebel : 4). John Locke divides experienced ideas into those of sensation and reflection, and concludes that the process of experience is formed through the senses. This is a very physical relationship as "we apprehend our sensory experiences first; our judgments about the external world flow indirectly, derivatively, from a primary and more secure knowledge of our own consciousness." Therefore, do we subsequently use this unconscious, fleeting and intangible contact with the external, "auditory experience, emotional experience, somatic experience, conscious thought and imagery and taste" (Hurlburt and Schwitzgebel : 42 - 49) in order to transpire into a state of introspection and relate experiences to the 'I'?

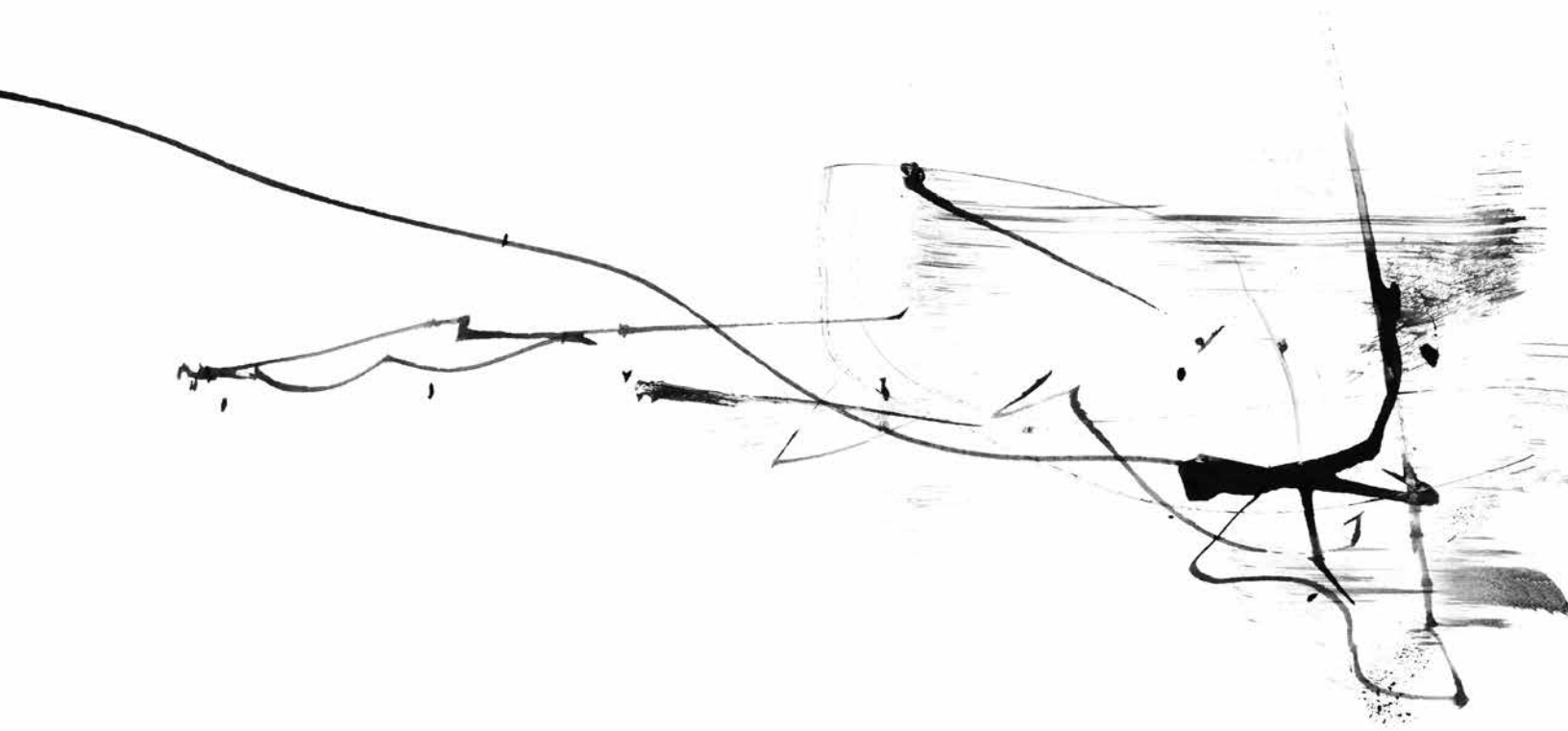


However, if we accept the self as our interior interpretation of external stimuli in order to form a cultivated public identity, we need to question why do we constantly obsess over forming a cohesive narrative identity? There is a definitive acknowledgment throughout this research of an internal and external relationship, but why does society follow this pre-occupation reliant on interaction? We need to reference and become aware of the knowledge that individuality anxiety is primarily a state within Western societies, as Finkelstein dubs a 'privileged introspection' (Finkelstein 2014 : 137).

Identity is widely acknowledged as becoming a constant phenomenon post-industrial revolution, through the need to encourage a constant inner reflection for continuing a cycle of secular orientation surrounding the individual rather than a collective. In this sense, identity is relative to consumer, as it becomes sold as a commodity. This element of consumer market "reduces everyone to an abstract individual equality" (Craib 1998 : 3) which expands the "daily requirement to perform an identity" (Finkelstein 2014 : 12). As the focus shifted from collectivism during the mid-17th century, society began to converge towards the political and capitalist system of contemporary, secular democracy and the "ideology of individualism." The process of individualisation is primarily a capitalist social construction, becoming the fundamental orchestration of the self within the neoliberal order. Sociologist and psychotherapist Ian Craib describes "the self [as] modern society in it's reflexivity, a constant questioning and reconstruction of the self is a lifetime project," (Craib 1998 : 2) and opens the idea of the endless pursuit for the fruition of self.

Due to the internal expansionist dynamic of capitalism there is a offering and ambition to the "possibility" of totality, the whole sense of self and completion. We are misled to believe there is a freedom that we are intended to experience, and therefore we maintain a perpetual attempt to achieve a dialectical understanding of social life, despite accepting that everything is a self-conscious act. Therefore by rejecting, ignoring or simply lacking in exploration do we make it easier for ourselves to fit the modernistic mould of societally accepted individuality anxiety?

The antithesis of postmodernism's phenotype reflection is shown through normotic individualism, conforming excessively to the social norms of behaviour, without the awareness of one's own subjectivity. Unaware of the subjective nature of their own narrative and consciousness, the inner and external human experience is confirmed by the wider societal predetermination. In this sense, for some Craib suggests this capitalist ideology only advocates "the pursuit of conformity and societal acceptance at the expense of individuality" (Craib 1998 : 1 - 17). Post-modern





conceptions of identity rely on the constant re-creation of a narrative, constantly aware of the presence of the self, which is not a criticism but a fundamental acknowledgement. Modernity allows us to become part of the "objective" culture opposed to "subjective" (Craib 1998 : 4). However if all there is the continual pre-occupation of the self, we can comment on the fact that for the general norm there is no fundamental totality or answer to 'who we are?' Theoretical authors, Lewis and Sarah Hinchman, however, see the act of narrative formation as a liberating factor against the most pre-made models of capitalism. By suggesting "storytelling becomes ... an act of resistance against dominant "Cartesian" paradigm of rationality," (Hinchman and Hinchman 1997 : xiv) they open up the idea that we can fundamentally become free within the avenues we define ourselves by, only once we become aware and reject the constructed model.

Conclusively, we are only our own self in relation to others, preoccupied with identity as a work of construction, forming ubiquitous self-representations. We have to acknowledge that there is a constant duality in our self - "if I think about myself, I am divided, experiencing and experienced at the same time." To understand and relate our internal self, we have to refer to the external, and co-exist along side the dual state. By exploring the "'I' phase for organisation and reaction" (Craib 1998 : 4) of subjective experiences, interactions and stimuli, we reflect back onto our consciousness and self for the awareness and validation of ideas, but these are all seen unconsciously in relation to previous experience.

Perhaps one of the most resonant views is one of 16th century Renaissance author and diplomat, Baldassare Castiglione, who evaluates the complexity of identity and portrayal through an almost comical approach. He accepts that "masking oneself in the public arena [is] a necessary part of being social" but sees this as not a form of deception, rather a talent within exhibiting a "social performance." This is fundamentally how we can accept and endure the fixed truth of our identity being a faux construction. Instead he took the approach to "mock those individuals who mechanically enacted social parts" and instead encourages us to see our identity as a free act, understanding and welcoming "the freedoms inherent in every performance" (Finkelstein 2014 : 94)

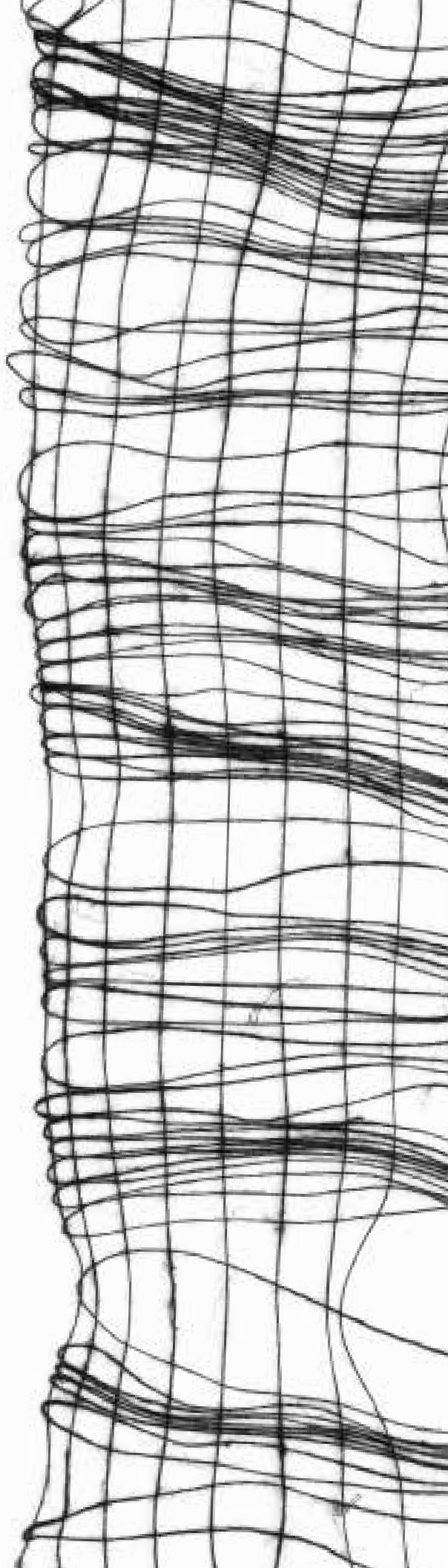
We are all self-seeking performers, and even form an internal narrative because we are unable to remove ourselves from external stimuli, interpretation and pre-occupation with the "individual." As novelist John Banville notes in his fictional book 'The Untouchable' - "you must never stop acting, not for an instant, even when you are alone, in a locked room, with the lights off and the blankets over your head" (Finkelstein 2014 : 67). To

me this suggests, that we are not solely acting to the external, the Other or in comparison, but also to ourselves and our own internal consciousness. Despite the process of experience, emotionality and subjectivity, by seeing yourself through comical interpretation and submitting yourself to the construction of individuality anxiety, we can remove the pressures of maintaining coherence and the need to deliver an idealised self.

Dismantling the preoccupation with individualism by suggesting that every part of the self is subjective. Consciousness is formed through experience and we all aim to construct an independent reality when in truth, we are all as un-individual as each other. Despite being a primarily pessimistic and nihilistic conclusion, we can accept the understanding that through the removal of continual individuality anxiety, we can instead replace crisis with self-awareness, and open ourselves to accept an existential view and analysis of the self.

“By learning to perform, the individual fabricates a life”

(Finkelstein 2014 : 93)







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"End of Act One, Scene One"

Lottie Matthews