

TITLE

Layers of self-deception. The censored chapter of our lives.

“With all that which a person allows to appear one may ask: what is meant to hide? What about it divert the eyes from? How far does he deceive himself in his action?” – F. Nietzsche, The Dawn

Our subjective experiences are not always straightforwardly and transparently self-consistent. Self-deception is very human, and we are inclined to deceive ourselves because our tendency is to try to deny and escape from what we don't want to admit. But mostly, we lie to ourselves because we want to be a certain way.

The discussion of self-deception is more than just another intricate subject of philosophy. It is an existential concern, morally problematic, that is making us strangers to ourselves. It affects our behaviour to the extent of becoming an obstacle to self-knowledge. Every aspect of self-deception, starting with the definition is a matter of controversy. What are the thought processes that lead us to self-deception?

My work questions the relationship with *the self* which is arguably the most important. It is the foundation of our character and reveals how we interact with the world.

SUBJECT AREA, AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Exploring new channels of visual expressions of *the identity*

My main area of investigation is the complex interaction between art and human behaviour, perception, and aesthetic appearances. My study focuses on the projected image, the *perfect picture* – opposed to the inner *gestural, kinaesthetic image*. I am interested, in visual terms, about the split of the subconscious mind, a kind of intrinsic research an experimentation, an alchemy of the soul.

My work looks at our relationship with self in the context of a society which is also concerned about who we are as human beings and how we interact with each other.

Art offers a place where we can think about our thought processes. It extends a self-reflexivity where we are constantly questioning, not just moving through life accepting things, using the same masks or avatars of deception. **How can we become better versions of ourselves?** I want to ask vivid questions about the significance of *deconstruction and reconstruction* of ourselves.

The aim of the project

Self-deception is such a common theme yet so profound and tremendously difficult to grasp and unfold.

My ambition is to open a visual discourse and widen a possible inner debate around my area of investigation and to develop an awareness, conceivably to be scratched of all layers and find the *gold* beneath.

The aim of the project is to investigate and substantiate the importance of an inner dialogue. To hold up the seven Essene mirrors that might help define the true self or at least certain aspects otherwise ignored or repressed. To deconstruct and reconstruct *the self* in terms of understanding the ingredients, or the pieces that makes us who we are, and put them back together improved, enhanced and substantially more aware of the true resonance of ourselves.

Objectives

To collect and classify relevant information about self-reflexivity and inner dialogue through research and experimentation.

To devise a method of producing a stream-of-consciousness outcome using the narrative techniques of interior monologue.

To develop a method of approach, through experimentation using disparate fragments of text and narrative, colours, and textures, in a dialogue with one another for the purpose of producing the relevant visual discourse.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Ideas and concepts

What define us? What makes us who we are? According to C.G. Jung, *the Persona* represents the social mask that each of us *wear* in our social interactions with others in society – the personality that we try to portray to others.

In this regard, my interest grows to research the amalgamation of our being, and the expansion of self to the interpretation of the whole concept. But *how can one confront the unconscious? How can we truly know ourselves?*

Both Sigmund Freud and Carl C.G. Jung referred to the *unconscious* as having the most important role in personality and behaviour. Expanding Freud's idea of *personal unconscious*, C.G. Jung included in the human psyche three other components: *the shadow*, *the sexual archetype*, designated as *anima* (men) and *animus* (women) and *the collective unconscious*, the latter believed to be a unique component that contains all the knowledge and experience that humans collectively share.

Another question we often ponder is *What is our purpose?* or more generic *What is the purpose of life?* Jung believed that most of our sufferings come from the distress of the human psyche. To start looking for answers we must first go back to the ancient temple of Apollo in Delphi on which forecourt was inscribed "*Know thyself*". In Plato's *Phaedo Dialogues*, Socrates explains that wisdom can only be attained after death for is only then the mind (*the psyche*) is liberated from the distractions of the body. Therefore, Socrates argues for the immortality of the soul. Yet, in another platonic interpretation "*knowing thyself*" is a matter of freeing from the allegorical cave and crawling into the light of genuine knowledge. From Nietzsche's perspective one must recognize and embrace individuality, own unique perspectives, and creatively define oneself.

Regardless of the many interpretations of the "self" when we begin the inner dialogue, we take a step forward in becoming the better – authentic – versions of ourselves, overcoming the identity crises through decompression of inflicted boundaries and breaking up the stereotypes imposed by society, education, and cultural frames.

One of the most explicit portrait and visual narrative of C.G. Jung's archetypes is Ingmar Bergman's *Persona* (1966) and although as an art film is open to interpretation, it is cultivating a mindful awareness of the C.G. Jungian core concepts.

The film burns on the face of Bibi Andersson.

© auralcrave.com (Mattia Bonasia, Ingmar Bergman's *Persona*: The Soul and the Mask, cinema as a theatre)



CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT

Revealing the inner state, the shadows

Cindy Sherman's "*Beauty beyond appearance*" was at the very beginning the main source of inspiration for **Layers of self-deception** for it clears the dominant Western imaginary, with all its recurring and competing patterns: aggressive consumerism, the cult of perfect appearances, the compulsive need for identity rearrangement. The main theme of Cindy Sherman's creation is the transformation of social identity and the unveiling of the hidden face, through the emphasis on the deconstruction of stereotypical corporeality, whether we are talking about the glossy body, the body struggling with aging or the body-mechanism.

Another case is the work of German artist Rebecca Horn, where the transformation takes place through extensions of the body - the cocoon she wore suggesting the fragility of the fallen body from Paradise, extensions of black, criminal fingers, reminiscent of both the black widow devouring her partner and his Metamorphosis.



Rebecca Horn, «Finger Gloves», 1972
Photograph: Achim Thode | © Rebecca Horn

THEORETICAL CONTEXT

By not being aware of having a shadow, you declare a part of your personality to be non-existent. Then it enters the kingdom of the non-existent, which swells up and takes on enormous proportions...If you get rid of qualities you don't like by denying them, you become more and more unaware of what you are, you declare yourself more and more non-existent, and your devils will grow fatter and fatter."

Carl Jung, Dream Analysis: Notes of the Seminar Given in 1928-1930

In our everyday life, we never have the time or the motivation to take self-deception seriously; therefore, our mind fabricates whatever it wants. We believe it, we are not questioning it, we do not self-reflect simply because it is easier and much more comfortable. **Why would we point the finger back to our self?**

Taking a step back from cognitive sciences and a closer look at the cultural orientation and modern performative approach the discussion of the *perfect picture* is divided between the body and the soul. There is a trend in highlighting the outer nature of experiences opposed to the shadow, the archetypes, the inner self. Ultimately, can the outer body become inner self and vice versa? Can the *Persona* be stripped of all the layers of self-deception?

Identity is a complicated concept nevertheless it plays a central role in our behaviour, social interactions and finally, in art. The term "*identity*" as we use it today, refers to a social category or socially distinguishing features of an individual. Our culture is informed by various forms of artistic endeavours and cultural studies. Our ethnic background, our personal experiences inform who we are. Nevertheless, I argue that the complexity of our *identity* – as a subject of research - must be deconstructed and reconstructed through the lens of *the collective unconscious* and on the other hand, through *the Shadow* archetype – **the unconscious aspect of one's personality** that the *conscious ego* does not identify.

METHODOLOGY

On that account, I will contextualize the idea of deconstruction and reconstruction through self-reflection and introspectively exploring the stream of consciousness – my own thoughts, emotions, decisions, and behaviours.

It is well known that it is probably one of the hardest things to describe or to be properly aware of the stream of consciousness, because when we turn attention to ourselves, we won't find precise, concise ideas.

Probably the most famous example is James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), a complex evocation of the inner states of the characters Leopold and Molly Bloom and Stephen Dedalus. Therefore, initially recording and then assemble the stream in writing and drawings is the first method of contextualizing.

To achieve my aim of investigation I will transform the flow of writings into collages – self-portraits – and later progressively extend into installations.

Using different methods and mediums already demonstrated by other artists (i.e., Cindy Sherman [*experimenting with identities using cinematic conventions in photography*], Rebecca Horn [*physical extensions of the body*], Tracey Emin [*the intricate emotional personal experience and raw presentations of the most intimate corners of life*] Paula Rego [*drawings that mirror the complexity and rawness of the inner self*], Sarah Lucas [*kinesthetics photography*], and others), and combined with my concept and techniques developed from previous work with photography, sculpture, collages, drawings and so forth, I am keen to develop a **new approach** that is, at least, directly relevant for my practice and for the pieces of art I aim to produce.

I am aware that there is no limit on research of the human psyche. One of the problems I may encounter is the massive quantity of information therefore, I must set boundaries that are relevant to my proposal.

Besides the main theoretical research – as a starting point - i.e., Carl Jung, I will be focusing on (past and contemporary) artists who have directed their practice to the human body and introspection.

Least but not last, I will document all my research and experimental artwork in an online space (a website/blog) which will form content of a physical book to provide as a visual documentary of my journey.

PREDICTION OF THE FINAL PRESENTATION

I imagined **Layers of self-deception** as a trilogy. An intertwined relationship between body and self in three stages. A matrix of seemingly disparate fragments of text and narrative, colours, and textures, in a dialogue with one another. A constant rolling process of enfolding oneself.

The final presentation will consist of a body of work composed of three parts (The *Persona*, The *Shadow*, The *Psyche* i.e., the *mask*, the *unseen*, and the *self*) Each body of work may be composed of different combined mediums; however, they will be presented together either as a *three-part body of work* or an installation.

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