

Chapter 26

Social Networking and Identity

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ABSTRACT

The realisation that social networks in cyberspace create a different virtual setting where a Technoself can be created by the way an individual shape their self (body and identity) to their own as well as society's liking, elicits a notion that there was once either an ideal era of bliss or a Utopian promise of universal self-realisation. From a communicative perspective, this chapter propagates how social networks and identity are consequences of the accelerating rate of change and the subsequent 'cyber revolution'.

INTRODUCTION

The [online] person thing intrigues me. It's a chance for all of us who aren't actors to play [with] masks. And think about the masks we wear everyday. (Multi User Domain participant in Turkle 1995:257).

The main thrusts of communicative perspectives and current research emphasising the increasing importance of the Technoself, especially on the 'cyber stage' of cyberspace further reiterated and ratified through previous research by Barker (2008) culminated in the 'discovery' of the theatrical self, also labelled the 'Beyond self' (or Technoself) as a logical flow following Levinas' notion of the 'I' (the self, the ego), the 'Other' (which is difficult to make sense of because it is

a metaphysical face without an actual face) and the 'Third' (the way you look at yourself in the eyes of the other and 'correcting' the Other as a result). The main premises were based on the argument that a new formulation of the Beyond-self can be invoked in the cyber beyond modernist era, not only to facilitate social interaction among members, but more significantly to influence the way in which members create an identity through the presentation of this self to create a Technoself through the use of theatrical metaphors to the Others – whether this self is real, constructed, staged and/or masked.

It is hence argued that the creation of an identity through the presentation of the Technoself can be seen as an imperative facet of the *modus operandi* of informal social networks, virtual communities or settings, reflecting the complex social web in which the Technoself is acted and acted upon, embedded and entangled in complex

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disperses needing to respond to various critiques and elements in the emergence thereof. It will be indicated that, what an appropriate Technoself requires, is allowing the emergence of implicit, narrative and embodied knowledge (material and non material) to create an overall self which present an integrative self – a self that is constructed, masked, staged and/or real. Based on this, it will be deduced that the Technoself is produced based on expressions of the life-world own self to create an identity which presents the contextual living action as experienced by the own self on cyber stage. Any theatrical environment or ‘theatre of life’ where roles are enacted through the presentation of this self, the audience can be evoked to a ‘suspension of disbelief’, the uncertainty as what is actual or real and what is fictional, acted, constructed, staged and/or masked. In social networks, the Technoself is probably represented, if not real, at least familiar or almost real. In terms of the theatrical approaches, the agent as actor implies an element of impersonation, which brings with it deception (persona/mask) which is usually expected by the audience.

This chapter therefore links to the overall objective of the handbook as it indicates how the presentation of the Technoself through interpretative communicative analogies can be seen as a deliberative process to reveal a constructed, staged, masked and/or real self and identity in social networks. The creation of identity through the presentation of this self will be critically analysed through investigating broad concepts and theories of social networks, identity and the dramaturgical setting or cyber stage taking into account the roles we play and act as well as linking it to a plethora of possible new paradigms for enacting oneself in social networks, drawing explicitly on some premodernist, modernist and postmodernist philosophical and beyond modernist perspectives. It will be argued that the beyond modernistic theory is not a metatheory, but the beginning of a virtual theory concerned to validate its own critical standards. It might also be pos-

sible to consider the realism of these theoretical descriptions to ensure the connection to the reality of experience, communicative praxis in everyday life and the quest in surge of the Technoself. In order to understand the Technoself in this real life-world, initial understanding of the collective meaning of the performer (actor) on cyber stage in which both the actor and those acted upon belong to the same ‘universe of discourse’ is needed. The masking of the real self in cyberspace is therefore not confined to the setting, but an act embedded in the context and embodied self as experienced in everyday life – in quit essence the symbolically constructed virtual Technoself and identity in social networking in cyberspace.

The above issues set the scene for the purpose of this chapter which further explores and outlines in broad and tentative terms the presentation of the Technoself in social networks in cyberspace through analogies with theatrical metaphors to create a techno-identity. Firstly, based on a discussion of key terminologies, the main theoretical approaches to social networks and identity, the chapter will combine a modified categorical communicative imperative with deliberative drawing on various philosophical and communicative paradigms. A brief exploration of the historical origins of the presentation of self will be presented in terms of various theoretical philosophical perspectives documented over time from the premodernist through to the modernist and postmodernist eras, after which some aspects of the approaches will be selectively investigated. This will form the platform for the theatrical performance discussions by briefly tracing the presentation of the self in the work of Aristotle (350 BC), the European Enlightenment thoughts of Kant, the contemporary thoughts of Ricoeur, Habermas, Bourdieu through to Kierkegaard, Sartre and Burke and ends with a strong focus on Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical perspectives presented in his well-known book entitled *Presentation of self in everyday life*. The main premises are based on the argument that the idea

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