

The Only Authentic Expression of Self is Gastrointestinal

Written for George Risk and Jerry Lewis

“Ultimately, expressivism promotes an ethics of individualism... as well as the concept of metaphysical dualism in that it conceptualizes a separate inner dimension of the mind to which each individual has sole access... What follows is a description of the historical and cultural roots of the expressivist strand of the “default” model of the self through the accounts of the inward turn of Protestantism and Romanticism, the post-Freudian psychological man, and the concept of authenticity.

...

The product of Psychoanalysis as a post-religious ethic, is the psychological man who becomes his own religion —a religion in which taking care of oneself is the ritual and health is the ultimate dogma....

...

In *The Ethics of Authenticity* (1991)... Charles Taylor... claims that an ethic of authenticity was born at the end of the eighteenth century by building on earlier forms of individualism, namely, Descartes' metaphysical dualism..., John Locke's political individualism... and Romanticism... The notion of authenticity developed out of a displacement of the moral agent in this idea: rather than being in touch with the “right thing to do,” we are in touch with our “true selves.” ... (Taylor, 1991).

....

The inward turns of the confessional self, Romanticism, and psychological man have in contemporary American consumer society been turned outward as personal values, or sets of values, manifested in the notion of taste. In a post-Romantic and post-psychoanalytic society, the act of expression is no longer reserved for artistic creation; expression can now be achieved through what we decide to buy from among the huge set of possibilities... (Guignon, 2004)“

— Rami Gabriel, *Why I Buy* (2013)

[overheard at the Chicago Museum of Science and Industry in the *Body Worlds* exhibit]

Young Boy: [crying and yelling]

Mother: It's ok honey... This is what's inside you.

Young Boy: [through tears] But I don't want it to be inside me!

"It is the music of yourself. Yes, you are music too. Everyone is supposed to be playing their part in this vast Arkestra of the Cosmos."

— Sun Ra

Coupled with either nihilistic or necessitous preoccupations, Gabriel's description of our cultural landscape is accurate, and I would argue its problematic nature goes beyond just when it is expressed through consumerism. It is the vast set of images that mediates all social relations, including how individuals relate to themselves. It influences everything from the political to the intimate. These images are designed to release dopamine, coupled with economic desperation we all become addicts: hyper-stimulation → arousal addiction. It is the phenomena of experiencing and reflecting on our own lives as if they were movies, from Romantic Comedy idealism to Campbellian stories of heroic struggle told with dramatic special effects. We expect our lives to be as thrilling as these stories, we give value to our experiences when they reflect spectacular events.

Alienation from each other and our own bodies is part of this. When we are separated from ourselves and each other a void of insecurity is created that is to be filled with the consumptive activities. Like the little boy in the museum we become frightened when we are confronted with the functions of our bodies and we actively avoid experiencing ourselves. This is most evident in women's beauty and hygiene products. i.e. the tampon applicator that physically separates a woman from herself and the douche that implies an inherent in uncleanliness.

In this situation, we find ourselves doing all sorts of absurd things. We play emotional games with our sexual partners, buy sports cars we can't afford, compulsively document ourselves, join cults, and spend relatively significant amounts of time deconstructing and arranging recordings of our own burps.