

Wilderness House Literary Review 6/4

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Social Networking and Gregor Samsa's Smile

Social Networking – the Surface and its Double

Facebook: define yourself before others define you. There has always been an undeniable urge to control how others perceive you. Now, one can stake one's place on a page or pages of the Internet and expose all of themselves that they wish to expose. Rather than having the intended effect, this creates a person and their double. The person who one hangs around with, is one's co-worker, classmate, cousin, etc. paste their individuated stake on the Internet, allowing others to see the part of their personality that they want the world to see. How one acts in public, at the office, in school or with friends, is their initial surface layer, there is now an electronic layer atop this. Essentially this is the surface and its double.

But what does this say about society? A society comprised of people who not only worry about how they are perceived when they are amidst some element of the public – whether with friends, working, at school, etc. – but also when they are ostensibly alone (but tapped into the social web). The funny thing is that now with iPhones, the immediacy of creating a perception of an event – a party, lecture, dinner, or just hanging with friends – can simultaneously be pictorially defined and congealed as a representation of what socially is (or has just) occurring. Perhaps with only some hyperbole, one could say that this media is so hot in McLuhan's sense of the term, that the aristocratic ball of the 18th century which Facebook and other social networks have transformed our lives into (those of us from teenage years to early to mid-forties, in at least America), is an ever occurring event. Even work, where if one has the access and freedom to use their iPhone camera, can be part of the aristocratic gabbing ball where everyone can comment on, "like" it, or "share" with others.

Gregor's Smile

If Gregor Samsa, the large awkward beetle from Kafka's short novella, *The Metamorphosis*, were alive today and unable to make work for some time, even if he didn't have access to an iPhone, he would surely have access to a camera. He could take pictures of himself in the mirror, email them to his parents (who otherwise would ceaselessly be banging on the door), his friends and boss. Before they could make fun of him, he could post his innermost thoughts on Facebook or Twitter and even make self-deprecating jokes about himself before his family could. He could send pictures to the welfare agency and immediately get unemployment. Essentially he could vegetate in indolence between the Internet and television for potentially years (which depending on the kind of beetle could range between weeks and years).

In short, today's Gregor Samsa would have no existential dilemma..... because today's Gregor wouldn't remember how he lived fifteen years ago (did you have a computer then?) as a person who dealt with a myriad of problems rather than reflecting them onto a social network and practically negating them. Finding a meaning to existence that has no inherent one is a joke: reflexive sociality and voyeuristic reality (from Second Life to om-

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nipresent “reality” television). If not this, just as most people become hyper-social through this medium, some become its antithesis – alienated in the extreme. This exists in the West but especially in countries peering in, not necessarily ones that are rich in their own culture but rather ones that have aspired to like the West (Slavoj Žizek suspects this is a major impetus for religious fundamentalism in Muslim countries) but failed due mainly to internal corruption and autocratic rule....the fall back is religious fundamentalism and jealousy of the West’s perceived Heaven on earth.