

Images

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When I was about six years old, my parents told me about Native Peoples who didn't want to be photographed because they believed that with every copy of their image, a part of their souls would disappear. Since then I have always been fascinated by this thought, but only recently I understood that this thought is not as strange as it sounds.

Today some people compulsively make so many selfies that this has led to an official diagnosis: selfitis disorder. In addition there are young people who process a photo of themselves by smart algorithms in an image-processing app and take this to the plastic surgeon with a request to be operated on this image. Thus we are either lived by producing soulless images, or we strive to become an image of an image.

These symptoms are indicative for a more deep-seated problem. By making a copy of an aspect of my existence - a photo, a film, a sound recording, or even a text - my existence goes beyond the immediate here and now. The copy will lead a life of its own. The music of a famous band like the Beatles, for example, leaves its mark on every group of young people who create a few songs with their guitars. That is, sooner or later they will have to resist the comparison. And then these youngsters don't have such a great past as the Beatles, in which they became a soundtrack of millions of lives, which makes them stronger and stronger, after being at the right time at the right place accidentally, a long time ago. Now I think the Beatles are great, but nonetheless. In our culture, thousands of "images" are circulating, in advance ready to cast out any (talented or non-talented) individual or collective or at least to chase them from their here and now.

Check it out

Check it out, if you want to hear Bach's Goldberg variations, there's a good chance that you will fall back on the Glenn Gould recordings of 1955 or 1982. But who is interested in that young, very talented woman pianist who lives only 3 blocks away from where you live, and who graduated cum laude from the conservatory. You may know her because she taught your son at the music school before she decided to opt for more income security. She now works as a Project Assistant in an office. Familiar (cultural) images act as beacons in our fast and changing world. Therefore we perceive them as relatively unchangeable. Entire radio and television channels do nothing but repeat music and films from the past. They offer us both familiar soundtracks of our lives, and the appropriate image libraries. When you think of Tom Cruise, many think of an attractive superhero. As a generation companion to Cruise, it is impossible for me to live up to his images.

The problem lies in the scalability of success. A hairdresser who wants to increase her income must cut more customers. However, a successful artist does not have to run faster than an artist without success. It takes the local band just as much effort to perform in the community centre than it takes Madonna to sing in a mega stadium. Scalability exists by the grace of communication technology (letterpress, photography, radio, ICT etc.). Because there are mega stadiums and corresponding publics, the local artists perform for an empty room in the local community centre.

A successful artist may define, everyone else will be defined. A successful "product" (because of the scalability, chance always plays a role) defines its own success and with that the failure of non-success. If you're successful, you are compared to yourself, assessed on your own merits. In any other case you will be stripped of your individuality by comparing you with beloved images. And you always look like one and so you lose. All those soulless images ruin your here and now. Only now I understand that those Native Peoples were right!