

3.5 The Possibilities of Reflexivity

It is the juxtaposition of the authors' specific reflexivities, and their human subjects, that makes for the central tensions in the three texts that were analyzed. As the writers as human media illuminate the equally mediate character of their human subjects, they thematize the very plasticity of human subjectivity. Thus, they unearth very specific possibilities and limits of reflexivity. In "Buddha Boy", for instance, Saunders ends up focusing on the will to control one's own desire which affects both his own and the boy's subjectivity. In "Getting Down to What Is Really Real", John Jeremiah Sullivan examines the very performativity that occupies the core of mediated human interaction, which increasingly spotlights the social component of reflexive subjectivity in mediated cultures. In "Delusion is the Thing With Feathers", Mac McClelland unearths the performative, self-reflexive narrative justifications that inform both her own and her subjects' behavior under extreme circumstances.

The shared characteristics of the writers and their subjects in each case then, concern human nature rather generally. Each text could, thus, be read as an act of human self-examination that initially locates a fundamental similarity marked by performative self-making between writer and subject. This similarity's core characteristic, however, is an equally fundamental difference whose temporal nature carries the possibility for future change. These analyses of human subjectivity's core insight is the very contingent connection between any specific past, present, and future human subjectivity. As a consequence, any "objective treatment" of human subjects—be it by way of institutionalized behavior or technological standardization—that seeks to assert any kind of unity or certainty appears fundamentally futile.

However, in every text analyzed, this radical rejection of objectivity does not result in a sense of loss or nostalgia. Instead, all three writers seem to argue that the human difference also unearthed by the specific limits of reflexivity most fundamentally carries with it the possibilities for change. In Saun-

ders's text, the asserted possibility that the boy could control his desires to such a large degree of course implies the possibility that any other human might be capable of the same. In Sullivan's piece, the mutual awareness of the differences and similarities between audience and performer carries the possibility for a deeper, more humane connection. In McClelland's reportage, the mere acknowledgment of the strong influence of mere narrative self-justification opens the door for more careful future action than the birders' current self-destructive behavior.

Furthermore, on a deeper level, this openness to possibilities for change fundamentally resists the reproduction of human experience. Thus established as singular, temporary and changeable, it also appears irreproducible. In the place of reproducibility as one of the main features of human experience affected by mediatization steps a willingness of the experiencing human subject to engage in a continuous dialogue about the meaning of performative self-making.

Different from the previous group of case studies on experiences of community concerned with the possibilities of change in groups of humans, writers here identify the main potential for such change in individual subjects keenly aware of their reflexive possibilities.

However, importantly, their optimism regarding these possibilities as well as their openness to playfully explore the freedoms of identity construction is contingent upon the material reality of the social world they choose to experience. This is shown in the upcoming final chapter of case studies. U.S. culture and society do not always present these possibilities for individual and collective identity construction. Certainly not by themselves and certainly not to everybody.