

*How does it feel to be  
someone else?*

A study on Identity

Catherine Naël







How does it feel to be someone else ?  
A study on identity

Catherine Naël  
DOGtime Unstable Media  
Amsterdam, January 2023  
Tutor : Q.S. Serafijn  
Graphic Design: C.N. with support  
Cover photo inspired by *The Man who Sold the World* cover album

*How does it feel to be  
someone else?*



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>CHAPTER 1 : ON IDENTITY</b>	<b>9</b>
1.PERSONALITY TESTS	11
QUESTIONNAIRE DE PROUST	11
CHINESE PORTRAIT	14
ENNEAGRAM	15
MYERS-BRIGGS	18
2.ASTROLOGY	22
3.PHILOSOPHERS AND WRITERS	24
DESCARTES	24
RIMBAUD	25
SARTRE	25
RICŒUR	26
NADJA	28
<b>CHAPTER 2 : ARTISTS AND ALTER EGOS</b>	<b>34</b>
SOPHIE CALLE	34
SHERRIE LEVINE	38
DAVID BOWIE	44
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>52</b>



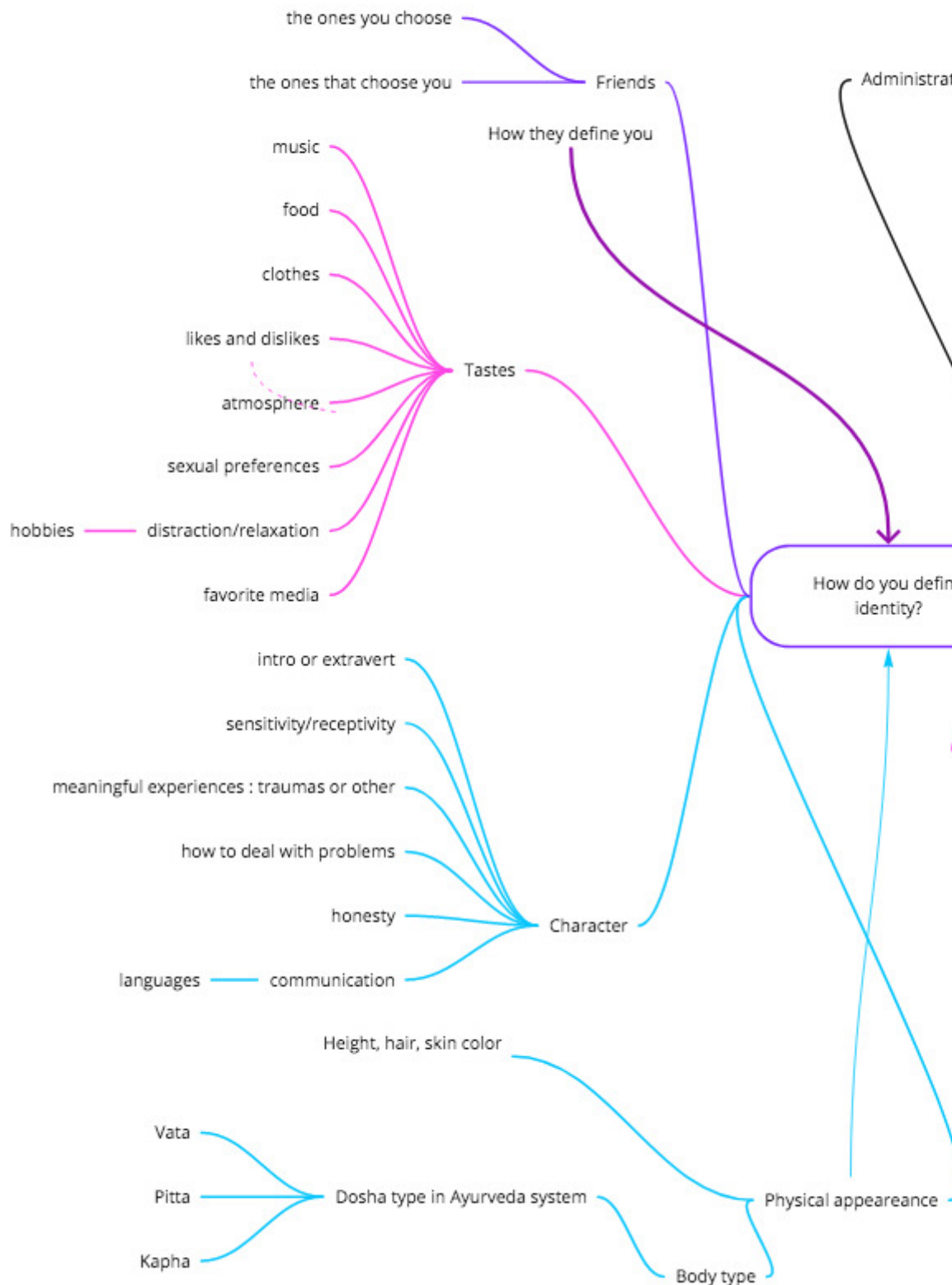


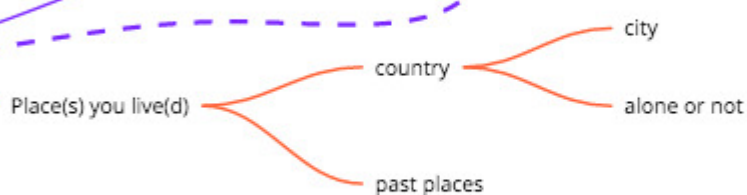
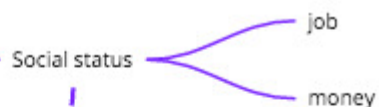
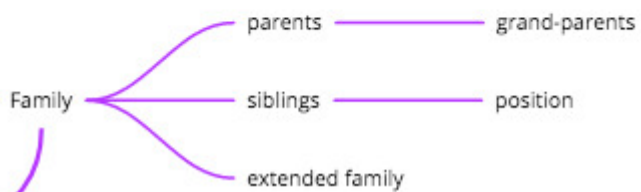
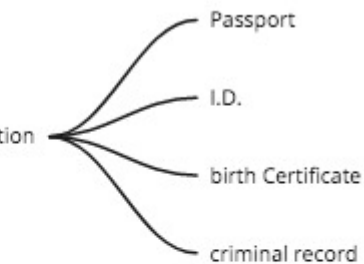
It is out of curiosity that I have always been interested in the life of other people. And I guess it is out of boredom as well. Annoyed in my own environment and feeling a sense of ennui, I started to focus on what others were doing. It started a long time ago, I was watching the neighbors who seemed to have a much more exciting life than mine. They were going out, having friends over to barbecue in their garden, family members joined and danced. The next day, they would go somewhere for the evening, come home, and play music. How frolic!

At school, I had classmates of the same age as me but so different. Their parents had different nationalities, and different occupations. I was attracted to the people who were far from what I knew, not at all to the ones I had interests in common with. I tried to be friends with an Algerian duffer boy, an Italian girl from a large family, a black Jewish girl, a Yugoslavian girl whose father worked at the jail, a mute Polish boy in exile, an ambitious Vietnamese girl, a Jehovah Martinican girl, a Portuguese whose mother worked at the Russian elderly house. All of them seemed to be not so interested in me somehow, therefore I became convinced at that time that their lives were more fascinating than mine. Upon reflection, they probably were more focused than me on their goals and potentially less inquisitive in general.

Over the years, my curiosity widened and I became curious about countries, concepts, books, philosophy, groups and more on how society works, how systems are implemented, and why they fail or not. As a consequence, my interest moved to the unconventional, towards the less frequented road, to the unique, to what fits not and offers a different point of view. As I observed, the human mind likes categorization, it gives clarity and a sense of organization.

This is a subjective personal diagram I made at this moment in time about the different criteria I listed to define identity.





Past lives





## CHAPTER 1 : ON IDENTITY

To start with the explanation of this diagram, the family you were born into or raised is considered as your main influence. As a second influence, enlarging the family environment, I would consider the culture and values you are exposed to in the country you are living, whether that is your parents' culture or another one.

Then the localization you spent your early life, in a small or big city or the countryside, all these aspects would influence your experience and how you perceive your environment. This background shapes your personality and beliefs about people and life to the point that it might still influence your decisions and sometimes hinders decisions in adult life.

In those years you can also make friends for life or remember forever what teachers at school said about you. The judgments you receive when you are still shaping your identity can become of crucial influence. It can also show what is naturally attractive to you, your passions, your innate manner to interact and handle displeasing experiences.

Your physical appearance might also have an impact on what you think about yourself. Others will define you based on the way you look, very quickly. A special feature can cast you as an outsider, for example, red hair, or make you belong to a community despite it being true or not. Therefore the opinion of others will add to the definition of who you are, to the degree that you are whether you are receptive to it or not.

Your character and tastes add to your personality. If you have a twin, you might still differ in your choices, as a need to stand out or choose a different approach to life based on experience and tastes. How you integrate judgments and criticisms from people who might influence you is a matter of maturity. The more you know you are and what you need, the more your social status is clear, the less you can be influenced.



Admittedly, our friends and acquaintances have a definite influence on the development of our personality. People who know us see qualities or defects and they send them back to us, and we choose to accept them or not.

Do we only perceive aspects of a person that suit us or disturb us? What about the mirror effect that reflects the shadow of ourselves? In other words, can we only see the qualities or defects we possess already? When we are talking about someone are we really talking about that person or are we talking about ourselves? Isn't our perception just a filter and therefore reveals the impossibility of really knowing someone objectively?

For administrative purpose, you are a name and some numbers. It sounds simple until you come accross complications that affect your status: marriage, loss, of papers, action against the law, and heritage are a few examples.

In 1966, Gay Talese wrote « Sinatra has a cold »<sup>1</sup>, a portrait of the singer without the singer. When Gay was told Sinatra had a cold and was not able to give him an interview, Gay spoke to all the available persons who had been in contact with him, more than a hundred, and made a book that « remains one of the most incisive portraits of Sinatra ever created and probably the most renowned, studied and picked-apart celebrity profile in American nonfiction ».

I am not the only person obsessed with the definition of an individual. I have found many attempts to make categorizations with various focuses, such as social or practical, or within a framework such as a study or a job application.

For example, in 1911, the German Photographer August Sander (1876- 1964) produced a series of portraits called « People of the 20th Century » where he wanted to show society during the Weimar Republic divided in seven categories : The Farmer, The Skilled Tradesman, Woman, Classes and Professions, The Artists, the City, and the Last People.<sup>3</sup>

---

1 Gay Talese, *Frank Sinatra has a cold*, New York, Esquire, 1966, re-edited by Taschen in 2021

2 Mark Rozzo, « The greatest ever portrait of Frank Sinatra was missing one thing -Frank Sinatra », GQ magazine 9 April 2021, <https://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/culture/article/frank-sinatra-has-a-cold> (accessed 13 January 2023)

3 Centre Georges Pompidou, exhibition August Sander, New Objectivity, Germany in the 1920s, 11th May-5th September 2022



August Sander: Pianist-Bricklayer-Pastry cook- 1925-1929. Samml./ SK Stiftung Kultur-A. Sander Archiv, Köln.

Over the years, there have been various attempts to try to define someone, given the fact that the human mind likes to categorize.

## 1. PERSONALITY TESTS

Here are some examples of questionnaires or tests that aim at defining individuals. On the English side, around 1860, there was a game called “Confession album”<sup>4</sup> which was adapted by Marcel Proust and known in the 20th Century as “Questionnaire de Proust”<sup>5</sup>.

Marcel Proust, a French writer (1871-1922) is known for his literary work “A la recherche du temps perdu”. He started to write at an early age and was deeply interested in human motivations. He observed with attention his family, acquaintances, friends, and friends of friends to inspire his writing. He filled the following questionnaire at the age of 15.

## QUESTIONNAIRE DE PROUST

<sup>4</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confession\\_album](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confession_album) (accessed 13 January 2023)

<sup>5</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Proust\\_Questionnaire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Proust_Questionnaire) (accessed 13 January 2023)

<b>Questions originales</b>	<b>Version de Proust</b>	<b>Réponses de Proust vers 1890</b>
<i>Your favorite virtue.</i>	Ma vertu préférée.	Le besoin d'être aimé et, pour préciser, le besoin d'être caressé et gâté bien plus que le besoin d'être admiré.
<i>Your favorite qualities in a man.</i>	La qualité que je préfère chez un homme.	Des charmes féminins.
<i>Your favorite qualities in a woman.</i>	La qualité que je préfère chez une femme.	Des vertus d'homme et la franchise dans la camaraderie.
<i>What you appreciate the most in your friends.</i>	Ce que j'apprécie le plus chez mes amis.	D'être tendre pour moi, si leur personne est assez exquise pour donner de la tendresse.
<i>Your main fault.</i>	Mon principal défaut.	Ne pas savoir, ne pas pouvoir « vouloir ».
<i>Your favorite occupation.</i>	Mon occupation préférée.	Aimer.
<i>Your idea of happiness.</i>	Mon rêve de bonheur.	J'ai peur qu'il ne soit pas assez élevé, je n'ose pas le dire, j'ai peur de le détruire en le disant.
<i>Your idea of misery.</i>	Quel serait mon plus grand malheur ?	Ne pas avoir connu ma mère ni ma grand-mère.

<i>If not yourself, who would you be?</i>	Ce que je voudrais être.	Moi, comme les gens que j'admire me voudraient.
<i>Your favourite colour.</i>	La couleur que je préfère.	La beauté n'est pas dans les couleurs, mais dans leur harmonie.
<i>Your favorite poets.</i>	Mes poètes préférés.	Baudelaire et Alfred de Vigny.
<i>Your favorite heroes in fiction.</i>	Mes héros dans la fiction.	Hamlet
<i>Your favorite heroines in fiction.</i>	Mes héroïnes favorites dans la fiction.	Bérénice.
<i>Your favorite composers.</i>	Mes compositeurs préférés.	Beethoven, Wagner, Schumann.
<i>Your favorite painters.</i>	Mes peintres favoris.	Léonard de Vinci, Rembrandt.
<i>Your heroines in World history.</i>	Mes héroïnes dans l'histoire.	Cléopâtre.
<i>What I hate the most.</i>	Ce que je déteste par dessus tout	Ce qu'il y a de mal en moi.
<i>World history characters I hate the most.</i>	Les personnages historiques que je méprise le plus.	Je ne suis pas assez instruit.

This questionnaire was used by modern interviewers in the twentieth century. First by Bernard Pivot in his famous Literary program on French television "Apostrophes", slightly modified. Then by James Lipton, an American interviewer. In an article of the Newyorker in 2016 called « How the Proust Questionnaire Went from Literary Curio to Prestige Personality Quiz » by Evan Kindley, the author describes the impact of this questionnaire on Literature lovers, writers and interviewers.<sup>6</sup>

"The Proust questionnaire's unchanging ritual confers a special kind of prestige, granting the tastes, opinions, and preferences of celebrities a timeless, philosophical appeal."

It gives insights into different facettes of the personality of the questioned.

Although it is very amusing to answer a questionnaire, it reflects only a part of your personality. What you create remains a mystery. Proust expresses it when he quotes Sainte Beuve : "That a book is the product of a different self from the self we manifest in our habits, in our social life, in our vices."<sup>7</sup>

Therefore he acknowledges that the person and the artist are different selves. A famous example is Louis Ferdinand Céline, celebrated for his literary work « Journey until the end of the night », published in 1932, but widely known to be antisemitic. One can like the books and dislike the author for his political views.

## CHINESE PORTRAIT

Another variation of the Questionnaire de Proust is the Chinese portrait, it is an abstract artistic depiction of a person. You complete several sentences of the form "If I were a(n) X, I would be..." to provide insight into the way you feel. This exercise is also used in Language schools to practise the conditional tense.

This is an example :

<sup>6</sup> Evan Kindley « How the Proust questionnaire went from Literary curio to prestige personality quiz » The New Yorker 16 Jul. 2016, <https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/how-the-proust-questionnaire-went-from-literary-curio-to-prestige-personality-quiz> (accessed 13 Januaey 2023)

<sup>7</sup> Marcel Proust, *Contre Sainte Beuve*, Paris, Gallimard, 1954



If I were a song, I would be Bagdad Café, for the emotions.  
If I were an artist, I would be Giacometti because human is fascinating.  
If I were a color, I would be yellow and shiny no matter what.  
If I were a spice, I would be bergamot which ennobles its life in sweet meat.  
If I were a sport, I would be swimming or skydiving, fish or bird.  
If I were a historical year, I would be 2022 because Carpe Diem.  
If I were a writer, I would be Jane Austen for Pride and Prejudice.  
If I were my favourite dessert, I would be a plantain tarte tatin.  
If I were my favourite meal, I would be a boiled egg with truffle. Being a yucca swigs I would dive in with pleasure.  
If I were one of the seven wonder of the world, I would be the hanging gardens in Babylon, green, in the middle of the desert.  
If I were a movie, I would be sci-fi because fiction opens up on another reality.  
If I were one of the 5 elements, I would be win which comes from far and goes somewhere else.  
If I were a sin, I would be greed. According to my job, not being greedy would be a professional fault.  
If I were a fabric, I would be natural cotton which let you breathe.  
If I were a verb, I would be to discover because I'm curious.  
If I were an adjective, I would be generous because giving brings me a lot.  
If I were a jewel, I would be a wedding ring for the story that the ring tells.  
If I were one of the 5 senses, I would be the taste because It is what characterize me.  
If I were a country, then I won't exist because I don't have border.

Closer to us, there have been many systems to assess the personality of employees in the framework of Human Resources for the corporate world.

## ENNEAGRAM

The Enneagram Personality test is a tool for developing your self-awareness and points to your way of handling stress and anger to evolve and receive support from others. In order to discover a simple way to change your behavior, you first need to discover your type. The Enneagram describes 9 types.<sup>8</sup>

Each type is described with an explicit perceptual filter which shows what you

8 David Daniels and Virginia Price, *The Essential Enneagram, the definite personality test and self-discovery guide*. San Francisco, Ed. Harper, 2000

pay attention to and how you direct your energy. Under this filter, there is a belief about what you need in life for survival and satisfaction. When you know your type, you will understand more about the unconscious motivation from which you act on.

This system and knowing your type will, in theory, help you to learn how to bring positive change into your life. It will help the way you relate to yourself and others and give you a wider understanding of the circumstances and issues that you face repeatedly.<sup>9</sup>

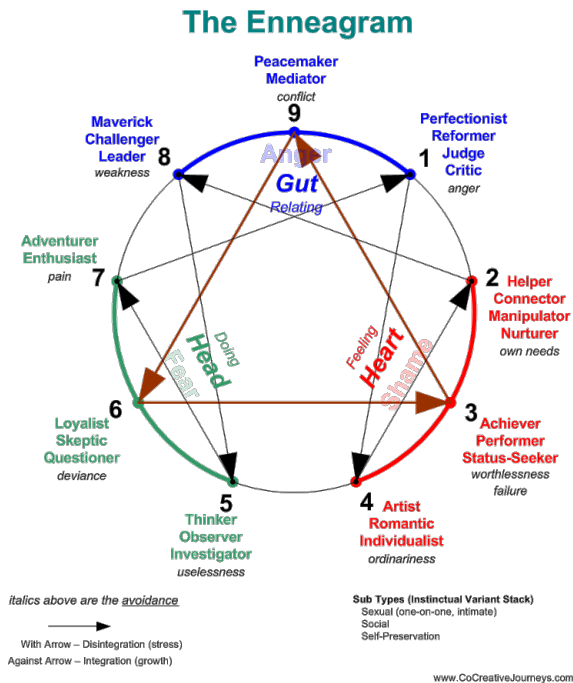
The figure of the enneagram consists of 9 points connected inside a circle. It says its origin comes from antiquity and can be traced back as far as Pythagoras. The symbol was reintroduced by George Gurdjieff and psychiatrist Claudio Naranjo in the 1970s. It was then popularized in the U.S. In the 1980s.

Let us look at the 9 types - you can determine you main type by taking a test, for example on this website : <https://s.bestenneagramtest.com/survey1>

Type	Characteristic role	Ego fixation	Holy idea	Trap	Basic fear	Basic desire	Temptation	Vice/Passion	Virtue	Stress/ Disintegration	Security/ Integration
1	Reformer, Perfectionist	Resentment	Perfection	Perfection	Corruptness, imbalance, being bad	Goodness, integrity, balance	Hypocrisy, hypercriticism	Anger	Serenity	4	7
2	Helper, Giver	Flattery	Freedom, Will	Freedom	Being unlovable	To feel worthy of love	Deny own needs, manipulation	Pride	Humility	8	4
3	Achiever, Performer	Vanity	Hope, Law	Efficiency	Worthlessness	To feel valuable	Pushing self to always be "the best"	Deceit	Truthfulness	9	6
4	Individualist, Romantic	Melancholy	Origin	Authenticity	Having no identity or significance	To be uniquely themselves	To overuse imagination in search of self	Envy	Equanimity (Emotional Balance)	2	1
5	Investigator, Observer	Stinginess	Omniscience, Transparency	Observer	Helplessness, incapability, incompetence	Mastery, understanding	Replacing direct experience with concepts	Avarice	Detachment	7	8
6	Loyalist, Loyal Skeptic	Cowardice	Faith	Security	Being without support or guidance	To have support and guidance	Indecision, doubt, seeking reassurance	Fear	Courage	3	9
7	Enthusiast, Epicure	Planning	Plan, Work, Wisdom	Idealism	Being unfulfilled, trapped, deprived	To be satisfied and content	Thinking fulfillment is somewhere else	Gluttony	Sobriety	1	5
8	Challenger, Protector	Vengeance	Truth	Justice	Being controlled, harmed, violated	To gain influence and be self-sufficient	Thinking they are completely self-sufficient	Lust	Innocence	5	2
9	Peacemaker, Mediator	Indolence	Love	Seeker	Loss, fragmentation, separation	Wholeness, peace of mind	Avoiding conflicts, avoiding self-assertion	Sloth	Action	6	3

<sup>9</sup> « The traditional Enneagram » The Enneagram Institute, <https://www.enneagraminstitute.com/the-traditional-enneagram/#:-:text=The%20Enneagram%20symbol%20has%20roots%20in%20antiquity%20and,-founder%20of%20a%20highly%20influential%20inner%20work%20school.> (accessed 13 January 2023)

This is how they relate to each others. The arrow points to how your type reacts under stress.<sup>10</sup>



For example when personality 1 is stressed they become the unhealthy version of 4 (direction of the arrow in the next diagram), that is to say if they feel as if they are different from others and feel extremely out of place, they become depressed and isolated as a result., they become quite emotional and it becomes difficult for them to control how they feel or react – they often internalize everything and blame their own selves for what is happening. They procrastinate and fall into

<sup>10</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enneagram\\_of\\_Personality](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enneagram_of_Personality) (accessed 13 January 2023)

addictive behavior.

At best, they become closer to a type 7 (arrow from 7 to 1), in other words they start recognize the beauty in “flaws”, they become aware of the ways the way they judge themselves and others. They develop fair objective, and ethical: truth and justice values, a sense of responsibility, personal integrity and see the beauty in everything.

The system is very logical and clear. It gives clues on how to develop qualities  
There are extra 5 general principles :

- 3 laws of behavior: wherever your attention goes, your energy follows, managing attention and energy requires self-observation, self-observation requires continuing practice.
- 3 centers of intelligence : the heart, the head, the body.
- 3 life forces: active force, receptive force, reconciliation force.
- 3 survival behaviors: self-preservation, social, one to one.
- 3 levels of learning and learning: knowing based on habits of mind, knowing based on the consciousness that includes questioning, reflecting on assumptions, and direct learning from a transformational experience that includes intellectual curiosity and emotional openness.

## MYERS-BRIGGS

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) is another system to categorize personalities.

This test defines sixteen types to “find your true strengths” in a workplace. With eighty-three questions, it is a psychological tool created in the 1940s borrowed from Carl Jung’s theory of dominant psychological functions: sensation, intuition, feeling, and thinking. The theory suggests that these functions color how we approach problems solving and interacting with others. Despite its origin in psychological theory, MBTI is traditionally used in business settings.

The questionnaire was developed by Isabel Myers and her mother Katherine Briggs based on their work with Carl Jung's theory of personality types. It is a widely used system nowadays. The two women were fascinated by Jung's theory of psychological types and recognized that the theory could have real-world applications. During World War II, they began researching and developing an indicator that could be utilized to help understand individual differences. Based on the answers to the questions on the inventory, people are identified as having one of 16 personality types.

The first dichotomy is Extrovert (E) / Introvert (I), Jung used these concepts to describe how people respond and interact with the world around them. Extroverts are more action-oriented, enjoy more social interaction, and feel energized after spending time with other people. Introverts are "inward-turning" and are thought-oriented, enjoy deep and meaningful social interactions, and feel recharged after spending time alone.

The next dichotomy is Sensing (S) / Intuition (N). It describes how people gather information. People who prefer sensing pay more attention to reality, particularly to what they can learn from their own senses. They tend to focus on facts and details and enjoy hands-on experience. Those who prefer intuition give more attention to things like patterns and impressions. They enjoy thinking about possibilities, imagining the future, and abstract theories.

Then we have Thinking (T) / Feeling (F). It focuses on how people make decisions based on the information they have from their sensing or intuition functions. People who prefer thinking are more focused on facts and data. They are logical. The other type prefers to consider people and emotions when making a decision. Finally Judging (J) / Perceiving (P). This is about how people tend to deal with the outside world. Those who lean toward judging prefer structure and firm decisions. People who lean toward perceiving are more open, flexible, and adaptable.



After taking the test, here: <https://www.16personalities.com/free-personality-test> you will be defined as one of the 16 types :<sup>11</sup>

MBTI	Name	Qualities
ISTJ	The Mediator	Idealistic with high values, they strive to make the world a better place.
ISTP	The Crafter	Highly independent, they enjoy new experiences that provide first-hand learning.
ISFJ	The Protector	Warm-hearted and dedicated, they are always ready to protect the people they care about.
ISFP	The Artist	Easy-going and flexible, they tend to be reserved and artistic.
INFJ	The Advocate	Creative and analytical, they are considered one of the rarest Myers-Briggs types.
INFP	The Mediator	Idealistic with high values, they strive to make the world a better place.
INTJ	The Architect	High logical, they are both very creative and analytical.
INTP	The Thinker	Quiet and introverted, they are known for having a rich inner world.
ESTP	The Persuader	Out-going and dramatic, they enjoy spending time with others and focusing on the here-and-now.
ESTJ	The Director	Assertive and rule-oriented, they have high principles and a tendency to take charge.
ESFP	The Performer	Outgoing and spontaneous, they enjoy taking center stage.
ESFJ	The Caregiver	Soft-hearted and outgoing, they tend to believe the best about other people.
ENFP	The Champion	Charismatic and energetic, they enjoy situations where they can put their creativity to work.
ENFJ	The Giver	Loyal and sensitive, they are known for being understanding and generous.
ENTP	The Debater	Highly inventive, they love being surrounded by ideas and tend to start many projects (but may struggle to finish them).
ENTJ	The Commander	Outspoken and confident, they are great at making plans and organizing projects.

<sup>11</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Myers%E2%80%93Briggs\\_Type\\_Indicator](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Myers%E2%80%93Briggs_Type_Indicator) (accessed 13 January 2023)

At the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, MBTI testing became highly popular among young Koreans who were using it in an attempt to find compatible dating partners. The craze led to a rise in MBTI-themed products including beers and computer games. One survey reported that by December 2021, half the population had taken the test.<sup>12</sup>

For example INFJ personalities are: Edward Snowden, Nicole Kidman, Cate Blanchett, Martin Luther King, George Harrison, Leonard Cohen, George Harrison, Carl Jung, J.K. Rowling, Leon Trotsky, Claudia Schiffer, Marie Kondo, Goethe...



INFJ mug, coffee mug available on amazon.  
nl

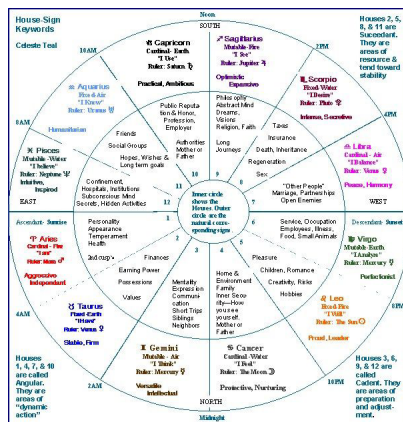
---

<sup>12</sup> Mandira, « MBTI craze in Korea », blog Korea by me, 2 May 2022, <https://koreabyme.com/mbti-craze-in-korea/> (accessed 13 January 2023)

## 2. ASTROLOGY

After the enthusiasm of the 1980s, those personality tests were highly criticised. Adam Grant, an American popular science author and professor specialized in organizational psychology, tweeted in 2018 « The MBTI is astrology for nerds »<sup>13</sup>. Astrology is an ancient system for self-knowledge. Everyone knows their sign. It is based on the observation of the planets from Earth. Nowadays there are thousands of astrologers and schools.

The position of the Sun is considered « your sign », but you should consider the position of the Moon as second in importance.

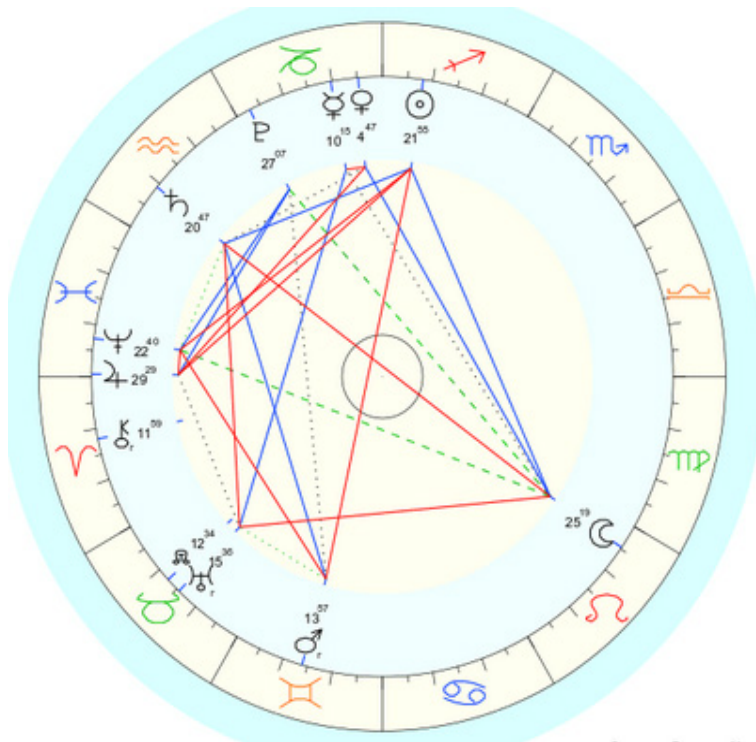


For Indian Astrology, the Moon is actually the most important. Further, we usually represent the position of Mercury (thinking), Venus (Love), Mars (Action), Jupiter (Expansion), Saturn (Restriction), Uranus (Originality), Neptune (Universality), Pluto (Transformation). We can add Chiron (Wound) and other asteroids and points

<sup>13</sup> Adam Grant, twitter, posted 17 Apr. 2018, <https://twitter.com/adammgrant/status/986255991548280832>, [accessed 13 Jan. 2023] and “MBTI, if you want me back you need to change too”, Medium.com, 17 Nov. 2015, <https://medium.com/@AdammGrant/mbti-if-you-want-me-back-you-need-to-change-too-c7f1a7b6970> [accessed 13 January 2023]

such as the Black Moon and the Nodes of the Moon. To the signs and the planets, we add the 12 houses and the aspects (the « easy » ones in blue, the « difficult » ones in red, and the minor ones in a different color)

This is the chart of today:



It is a symbolic system that needs to be interpreted. It combines mythology, psychology, and an explanation of the dynamics of the world. It also involves prediction through transits. In addition, it explains why you get along with some people and why not with others, namely synastry compatibility. It is a flexible system in the sense that anybody can learn something from it, at any level of understanding. To be an astrologer you need to have observed the movement of the planets and their consequences on life. Surely, you need to experience an important transit of Pluto to be able to talk about this energy, not only read

about it from books.

You can use Astrology to make predictions and recognize patterns. It gives clarity about your personality, your competencies, your path in this life and how to reach your goals.

Mundane astrology or political astrology observes cycles and their impact on World events. It gives meaning to our experience and it explains the dynamics at play in life while respecting our free will.

Above all, it is a fantastic tool for self-knowledge.

### 3. PHILOSOPHERS AND WRITERS

Philosophers and the concept of identity - in short -: Descartes, Rimbaud, Lacan, Sartre, and Ricœur, they all discussed identity within the framework of their reflection.

#### DESCARTES

Descartes, a French philosopher (1596-1650) is famous for his formula “ Cogito ergo sum”: I think therefore I am or I am thinking therefore I exist.

The formula does not state the concept of doubt which is intrinsic to Descartes's thought. For him, it is necessary to know that doubt exists and gives shape to existence. His reasoning argues that thought and sensation are what make reality and give the possibility to think, which is what makes persons different than animals. For him, philosophy should not be abstract, it should stimulate people to question what is real and what is imagined.

For Descartes, the experience of doubt is a necessity in order to have a complete idea of the Truth, which is existence. For him, the ego is a thinking body that defines identity.

## RIMBAUD

Later in time, this concept opposes the proposition of Rimbaud “Je est un autre”, which outlines that it is impossible to be in the present and at the same time to adhere to its thoughts. For example, when writing in a diary, you can write only about what happened in the past and what you think will happen in the future. It is impossible to grasp the exact moment you are in, and it can lead to endless frustration.

Rimbaud wrote these words in 1871 when he was 17 and was acknowledging his vocation as a poet. He was referring to the part of him that was becoming a poet. This part of himself can not be ignored any more, he sees himself becoming a writer. « The other » can also be interpreted as the person becoming an older version of oneself, or the realized part where all the potentials took place in the tangible reality. The poet, and by extension the artist, is a recipient for expressing all the feelings of others who do not have this capacity. It also refers to the ability to transform oneself endlessly.

As we know the baby has no awareness of individuality, it makes one with its mother. The mirror stage is a concept in the psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan. It raises tension between the image and the subject. That stage is the beginning of individualization. The child begins to realize that it is an independent entity, which leads to the development of a personality. The baby can talk about itself in the third person as part of the early process of individualization that leads later to accept the image as a representation of itself.<sup>14</sup>

## SARTRE

For Sartre, the look of the other on you is the main factor in the constitution of the identity. He takes as an example the political question of the Jewish identity:

<sup>14</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mirror\\_stage](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mirror_stage) and “The Mirror Stage, an introduction to Lacan’s Theory”, essay published 5 Nov. 2022, <https://studybounty.com/the-mirror-stage-an-introduction-to-lacans-theory-critical-thinking/>, [accessed 13 January 2023]

“Le juif est celui regardé comme tel par autrui” in *Reflexion sur la question juive*, 1946. You become what others see in you.

## RICŒUR

Paul Ricœur (1913-2005) worked extensively on the concept of identity, who is “je”? Who is the real subject? The discovery of the “je” is a thinking process. As an attempt to grasp this complex notion, he developed the concepts of *Idem* and *Ipse*.<sup>15</sup>

Ricœur introduces a key distinction between those two kinds of identity in relation to selfhood.

*Idem* identity is the identity of something that is always the same, something which never changes, parts of my personality that remain identical. The *Ipse* identity is sameness across and through change, it is me through experience and how I evolve.

Self-identity involves both dimensions: I am and am not the person I was ten years ago.

In addition, Ricœur adds the concept of Narrative identity. It is not just about the identity of the characters in a story or history, but with the larger claim that personal identity in every case can be considered in terms of a narrative identity: what story does a person tell about his or her life, or what story do others tell about it?

In narrative identity, the person is not merely the one who tells the story, or merely the one about whom the story is told, but she appears both as a reader and the writer of their own life. Thus, the individual is both the interpreter and the interpreted, as well as the recipient of the interpretations.

One of the consequences is how the narrative identity affects our perception of how we consider autobiographies, memories, and history.

---

<sup>15</sup> Paul Ricoeur: *Three volume study of narrative : Time and Narrative* 1984-88 University Press of Chicago, 2014, Paul Ricoeur : *Soi-même comme un autre*, Paris, Seuil, 1990

An autobiography is the story of a life, and like any other narrative is selective and biased. Moreover, an autobiography is in the precise sense of the term a literary work and as such is based on the gap, at times beneficial, at times a handful between the retrospective act of writing, of inscribing experience, and the daily passing of time. Such a gap distinguishes autobiography from the diary. With this concept of Narrative identity, "I" is enriched by life and by all the elements I choose to integrate to give meaning to my life. It allows me to think of myself as a character who is able to gather all kinds of aspects and give sense to them. It allows flexibility and cohesion. The focus is not on being truthful or accurate anymore. It allows me to write and shape my life. It allows others to describe me. My life has become the sum of all the stories told.

NADJA



About *Nadja* by André Breton.

*Nadja*<sup>16</sup> is an important text in the history of the Surrealist movement. This is a title that is classified as number 50 in the list of memorable books of the 20th Century by Le Monde.<sup>17</sup>

It is a book that impersonates the Surrealist movement as it defines and exemplifies the ideas carried by the movement and is written by its leader and theorist André Breton.

The first part of the book is called “Who am I?” and displays the author's beliefs and how they are applied in daily life in his writing, his poetry, and his general attitude towards life. He then tells the story of the meeting with Nadja, which, according to him explains and demonstrates surrealist values. The character of Nadja (later, in 2009, was identified as Léona Camille Ghislaine Delacourt (1902-1941)) is mysterious and for a long time, nobody really knew if she was real or not.<sup>1819</sup>

It tells the story of their meeting over the short period from 4th to 13th October 1926 where they fascinated each other. She tells him about her life, and pictures of her drawings are integrated in the book with photos by Breton. We, readers, are aware of the tragic ending of Nadja who ended up her life in a mental institution and died of malnutrition. This meeting was therefore tragic, and fateful but also remarkable for the creative input that came out of the two characters involved. Breton wrote his most famous book and experienced a deep reflection and called himself into question whereas Nadja started drawing.

Within the Surrealist movement that Breton theorized, he had experienced psychic automatic writing, observation of reality to create poetry, and the verges

---

<sup>16</sup> André Breton, *Nadja*, Paris, NRF, 1928

<sup>17</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Le\\_Monde%27s\\_100\\_Books\\_of\\_the\\_Century](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Le_Monde%27s_100_Books_of_the_Century), [accessed 13 Jan. 2023]

<sup>18</sup> Sir Joanan Rutgers, “De inspiratiebron van Andre Breton”, 8 Nov.2021,

<https://www.nederlands.nl/nedermap/beschouwingen/beschouwing/150380.html>, [accessed 13 January 2023]

<sup>19</sup> Hester Albach, *Leona héroïne du surréalisme*, Arles, Actes Sud, 2009

of madness. He had attended medical school where he had had a keen interest in mental illnesses. She represented a case that matched all of the surrealist elements to transform reality.

The story of Nadja is not only about the meeting of a man and a woman but triggers moral questions related to love, help, manipulation, poetry, projection and identity.

Nadja appears as an idealized woman, the one that will reveal her lover to himself. Before he met her and while being married since 1921, Breton was looking for a woman “beautiful and naked that he would meet in the woods”. He was a fan of the comedian Blanche Derval where he saw in her eyes languor, despair, finesse and cruelty. Breton was attracted to the eyes of women and that is how he noticed Nadja at the crossing between the bookstore l'Humanité and the Opera on a late afternoon in October 1926. He described her eyes as “ses yeux de fougère” and she will draw him a pair of eyes she called “fleur des amants”.



André Breton, *Nadja*, Paris, NRF, 1928

They met by coincidence in the streets of Paris, the ideal setting for a surrealist like Breton who took daily walks observing and looking for coincidences. She had something special that he noticed. It is said later in the book that she enjoyed confusing men and Breton saw a waiter dropping a plate because he looked at her.

She explains that she chose her name because it is the beginning of the word “Hope” in Russian. He accepts to listen and follow her in her world. He sees her

as a free spirit, an Air type of spirit, the type that stays with a human for a time. At their first meeting he asks her “who are you?” and she answers “I am the wandering soul”. This joining is a realization of a surrealist act led by “Le Hasard”, a mix of fate, randomness, accident and chance. It includes the element of insanity, represented in the personality of the female character Nadja. It brings together these elements where poetry, love, mystery and loss of control gather in one single event. Breton sees recurrent signs in their meeting. When he is asking her where she is going, she mentions she sees a star as a direction and that he will reach a star. The Star is the 17th card of the Tarot that depicts a naked woman pouring water under a starred sky. He named his last book “The 17th Arcana”.

Nadja starts to love him but he realizes he does not have the same feelings toward her. In the second edition of the book in 1963, he removed the mention of the night they spent together in a hotel. According to him, she was the annunciation of the true love he met after her, who is referred to in the last part of the book. It looks like this meeting shook him, Of course, we do not know what really happened, and we should assume that Breton is honest in his feelings and writing or did he manipulate someone who was mentally fragile and in a precarious situation ? We will never know.

The first part of the book called “Who am I?” demonstrates the experience of merging that seemed to have been traumatic to the point that he wondered about his own identity. From this experience, he will write a book whereas she will die of hunger and madness. She had written to him “you will write a novel about me”. In her letter of 30th November 1926, she says: “this letter is the end of my breath and the beginning of yours”.

In his defense, we know he tried to help her. He sold a painting to give her money, and he sent her to good doctors but he never met her again.

It was not easy for him to start writing about this adventure. Breton did not like descriptions and that is the reason why he insisted on integrating his own photos

into the novel.

From this story, we can see that both had projections of each other. Breton saw the interaction with Nadja as a surrealist act that led him to creation, Nadja fell in love with Breton and saw him as a possible savior. Since she was in a precarious situation, she was more in need of material support. What is interesting is the demonstration of the fusion based on the desire to know the other person at the very start of meeting someone new. Fusion until the other person shows as an individual and is acting in a manner that demands some distancing from the original desire of fusion. At one point, Breton must have realized that Nadja was mentally unstable, given his interest in madness and background as a doctor. When and what did he decide based on this information? He certainly had to take some distance. Did he privilege his own creative input at the cost of abandoning her? Did he try to hide some elements of his behavior to make the story more acceptable? Did he use her to comply with his theories? Or is it just a very common love story of a man leaving a woman he does not love?

When we observe the writing of Breton<sup>20</sup>, we see that it was a difficult process to write this story. It is considered an autobiographical book and we see that he tried to be the closest to authenticity, to be close to himself, to be true to his feelings. He received many letters from women saying “Nadja it is me”. He has been criticized for editing the book in 1963. At that moment he did not remember her name very well “Helene Delcour” he thought.

The personality of this woman, was so strong that it inspired a book, created a myth, and appealed to many authors. She is the subject of books, studies, and art exhibitions.

To name a few :

Patti Smith quoted the last sentences of Nadja on her album Radio Ethiopia in

---

<sup>20</sup> Camille Renard, “La véritable histoire de “Nadja” de Breton”, 9 Jan. 2020, France Culture <https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceculture/la-veritable-histoire-de-nadja-de-breton-9689844> [accessed 13 January 2023]

1976.<sup>21</sup>

An exhibition at the Venice Biennale in 2002 <sup>22</sup> called Nadja.

In a work on characters for a 4th year DOGtime project, I made one of my characters say :

“I feel that Surrealism is still alive although it sounds old, it comes from the '20s and the word was invented by Apollinaire. Countless exhibitions refer to this movement. I have always felt some personal attunement to this poetic art form. My father looked like André Breton. One day by coincidence I entered the courtyard where Breton used to live, 13 rue Fontaine.”



Photograph by author, Paris, 2020

In a recent article of Le Monde « Le surréalisme ne connaît pas la crise » <sup>23</sup>, pub-

<sup>21</sup> Carmen Lobo “André Breton’s Nadja”, 6 Feb. 2014, Art and Thoughts, <https://artandthoughts.fr/2014/02/06/andre-bretons-nadja/> (accessed 13 January 2023)

<sup>22</sup> La Biennale di Venezia, 2022, <https://www.labiennale.org/en/art/2022/witchs-cradle/nadja>, (accessed 13 January 2023)

<sup>23</sup> Roxana Azimi, « Le Surréalisme ne connaît pas la crise », 21 September 2020, Le Monde, [https://www.lemonde.fr/argent/article/2020/09/21/le-surrealisme-ne-connaît-pas-la-crise\\_6052985\\_1657007.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/argent/article/2020/09/21/le-surrealisme-ne-connaît-pas-la-crise_6052985_1657007.html),

lished in September 2020 in the section « Argent », it is explained that Surrealist paintings have had at the moment a tremendous success in the art market, and it specifies that especially women surrealists are very appreciated : Dorothea Tanning, Leonora Carrington et Remedios Varo. For the Art market, the reference remains artists quoted by Andre Breton in his book « Surrealism and painting ».<sup>24</sup>

## **CHAPTER 2 : ARTISTS AND ALTER EGOS**

SOPHIE CALLE

---

[accessed 13 January 2023]

<sup>24</sup> André Breton, *le Surréalisme et la peinture*, Paris, NRF, 1928

In 1984, I was awarded a three-month scholarship to Japan. At that time, I was in a relationship with a friend of my father. He broke up with me instead of meeting me at the end of the three months. The pain was dreadful. That is how my book “Exquisite pain”<sup>25</sup> took shape. I asked other people to tell me about the most painful day of their lives. And it worked. After three months, I was cured. Comparing my pain to the one of others had healed me.

My interest in the life of other people remained over the years. In my work “Blind”, I wrote the text for people who can not see.

With my kind of experimental personality, you can imagine that I struggled a lot in personal relationships. It was part of the painful experiences of my life. I made a film with my ex-husband “No sex last night” and then he divorced me. However I have a lot of friends.

I think I would have liked to be an actress, I could then live the life of my characters, but I am happy I am an artist, a photographer and a writer now. I became a character myself when my friend Paul used me in one of his books. In the end, it does not matter if it is truth or fantasy. My life is my performance. Both are ritualized. I love to hear stories, I collect them.

I always used my own name, it is very important to me. I even collected authors with the same name as me. “Calle” means street and “Sophie” means wisdom, the wisdom is in the street. But I change all the time, I can even become invisible when I follow people in the street, I am also a copy of so many people that experienced the same situations as me. In a way, that is what makes me a universal artist. Anyone can recognize something of their own life in my work. Everybody has experienced a break-up for example.

What others say about me is that I set arbitrary constraints and that my personal themes are personal identity and intimacy, that I use confessions to manipulate, and that I seduce the viewer in order to have him complicit in the act of watching or participating. I disregard boundaries, hierarchy and privacy and I investigate

---

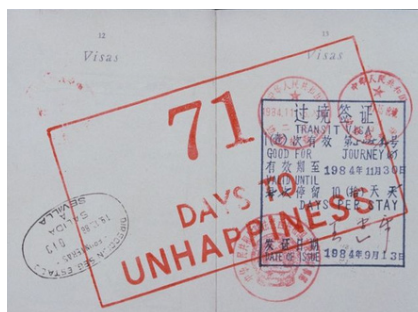
<sup>25</sup> Sophie Calle, *Douleur exquise*, Arles, Actes Sud, 2003

provocative and controversial methods for confronting my emotions and psychological life.

It is a fact that I started my early projects by being fascinated with chance events, by being a voyeur of other's lives, and by dealing with personal relationships. I have been an observer, a stripper, a stalker, a spy, a feminist tracking the absence, taking notes on others' behavior, showing their disappearance or death, I am secretive but open as well. I absorb, hope, analyze, document, and write about what I see or do not see.

Do you get an idea of who I am now? Don't you see something that resonates with you? Have you never had the idea to follow someone? Are you not tired of your own life and think the life of others is more exciting? Are you not tired of making decisions and therefore of following the decision of someone else to avoid thinking? Have you not had strange behaviors to attempt to connect with others? Have you not looked for ways to connect to a place? Have you not taken photographs to have proof that something happen? Have you not tried to follow rules and become surprised at where they led you?

I did all this for you, me as Sophie Calle.



Sophie Calle is defined as an artist, a writer, a cineaste, and a character of

Sophie Calle, *Doaleur exquise*, Arles, Actes Sud, 2003

Sophie Calle, *Doaleur exquise*, Arles, Actes Sud, 2003



a novel<sup>26</sup>. Her artistic practice is determined by her changing personality. She sometimes took the identity of a common person, sometimes she used her artist name Sophie Calle, sometimes she asked other people to give her their stories, sometimes she used her life, sometimes the life of others. Most of the time it is her reality exaggerated to the point it becomes a shared universal experience. Her life is her art.

In her book "Exquisite pain", she collects stories of "The most painful experience of your life". This theme is inspired by her own when she describes she was in love with a man when she earned a scholarship for Japan for three months. She was supposed to meet him after these 3 months but he broke up with her as he had met someone else while she was away. It seemed to her that her trip to Japan was meaningless compared to the devastating experience of the break-up that became her project.

Why did she ask other people to share a similar devastating experience? I assume to feel some connection, to share some common feelings while she felt particularly lonely. The question is: Am I alone in the world to have these awful feelings? Do others feel that too? The action to gather them in a book with photos of the documents she received is the work of art.

Sophie Calle is also a photographer. But a photographer of a special kind, a photographer that takes bad photos. For her, the quality of the photo is not important. The worst it is, the more authenticity it carries. The photo is used as a document, an illustration to add to the veracity of the story, the message underlying the photo is "Look! I am not lying, this is proof !"

In her work "The sleepers" she takes photos of her empty bed that was used by strangers. The intention is "I show what we don't see".

In her work with blind people<sup>27</sup>, she writes and takes a photo of what they imagine and can not see.

Images are references or traces for her.

---

<sup>26</sup> Paul Auster, *Leviathan*, New York, Viking Press, 1992

<sup>27</sup> Sophie Calle, *Aveugles*, Arles, Actes Sud, 2011

The next question is “is she then the author of her work?”

SHERRIE LEVINE

Sherrie Levine (born 1947) is an American artist: photographer, and painter part of the Appropriation Art movement that appeared in the U.S. in the late 1970s. Other appropriation artists include Louise Lawler, Vikky Alexander, Barbara Kruger, and Mike Bidlo. The center of this movement was New York's East Village. The main characteristic of Appropriation Art is its capacity to use cultural images in a narrower context for interpretation. In other words, they use objects that already exist with hardly any changes, only the context changes. We immediately think of the readymades of Marcel Duchamp. This practice is linked to modern art and the cubists, it encompasses the practice of the surrealists who made art with common objects. We can interpret it as an extension of reference in a work. "In 1889, Van Gogh created 20 painted copies inspired by Millet's black-and-white prints. He enlarged the compositions of the prints and then painted them in color according to his own imagination. Vincent wrote in his letters that he had set out to "translate them into another language". He said that it was not simply copying: if a performer "plays some Beethoven he'll add his personal interpretation to it... it isn't a hard and fast rule that only the composer plays his compositions".<sup>28</sup> Andy Warhol used commercial images to turn them into repetitive painting reproductions. Gerhard Richter transformed black and white photos. Jeff Koons made large use of common objects such as vacuum cleaners or balloon sculptures to turn them into different objects out of a different medium while clearly showing the source of reference.

Appropriation embraces thus "reproductions, remakings, reenactments, recreations, revisionings, reconstructings, etc. by copying, imitating, repeating, quoting, plagiarizing, simulating, and adapting pre-existing names, concepts, and forms." It is a normal consequence of the daily accessibility of art. Nowadays it is easier and easier to find a copy, an image on the Internet, in the immensity of the digital world and use it as one pleases. In terms of judicial aspects, we talk about "fair use" where some of the inspiration belongs to an artist and some is

<sup>28</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Appropriation\\_\(art\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Appropriation_(art)), (accessed 13 January 2023)

part of public use such as balloons. The law nowadays is much more strict while having remained in a grey zone for many years. In the 1970's it was therefore still possible to produce objects and images made from previous objects and images. Of course, the more famous the reference, the more successful you could become as a benefit of the appropriation.

Sherrie Levine brought to light the issues of ownership and meaning through her work on photographing representative artists such as Walker Evans (American photographer), Constantin Brancusi, Vincent van Gogh, and Edgar Degas among others. She interrogates what ownership means « We know what a picture is but a space in which variety of images, none of them original, blend and cash ». She points out that images can be familiar and unfamiliar, original and copies, recognizable and yet strange, there but somewhere else.

Her most famous appropriation work is her photos of Walker Evans about the Great Depression. She rephotographed his images not from print but from a catalog and exhibited her photos with no manipulation. «After Walker Evans 4 »<sup>29</sup> was an exhibition in 1981 where artists, by reshooting famous images, including commercials and more renowned artists, were playing with different positions such as viewer, actor, manipulator and creator. « The series, entitled After Walker Evans, became a landmark of postmodernism, both praised and attacked as a feminist hijacking of patriarchal authority, a critique of the commodification of art, and an elegy on the death of modernism. » By rephotographing, Levine shows the paradoxes of the originality and authenticity connected to the medium, and by extension, she also reveals how we see art beyond the image by adding value connected to the genius of idolized male artists, and how this value is monetized in the art market.

In photography, there is no « original » since multiple prints exist. By addressing these questions to the viewer, she refers to Barthes when she says « A painting's meaning lies not in its origin, but in its destination. The birth of the viewer must

---

<sup>29</sup> The Met, Art Collection, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/267214>, [accessed 13 January 2023]

be at the cost of the painter ». It echoes Roland Barthes' death of the writer. The owners of the Walker Evans saw a copyright infringement but bought all the photographs to give them 10 years later to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

If we observe other works she made.



*Large Gold Knot 1, 1987 and White Knot*  
Whitney Museum of American Art

Sherrie Levine used plywood, used for the transportation of goods, to create art. That is, she used a material designed for a special purpose to detour its goal use for making her art. Just as Andy Warhol did with his series, she produced several variations of the knots. Moreover, in this sense, she imitates Marcel Duchamp who used bottle holders, bicycle wheels, and urinals and hardly adjusted them to show them in a gallery context.

She also made a polished urinal called « Fountain », which then added an echo to the work of sculptor Constantin Brancusi.



Sherrie Levine - *Fountain (Buddha)*, 1996 The Barbara Lee Collection of Art by Women

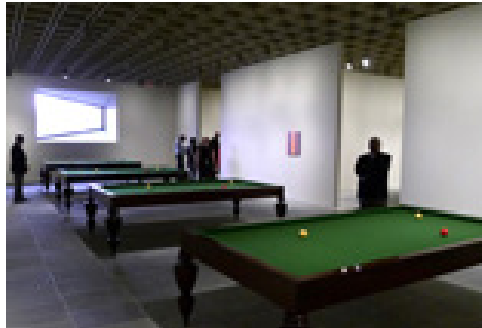
After, she made a serie called *La Fortune (After Man Ray)* inspired by a painting of Man Ray.



*La Fortune*, Man Ray, 1938



Sherrie Levine *La Fortune (After Man Ray):4* and *La Fortune (After Man Ray):1* 1990



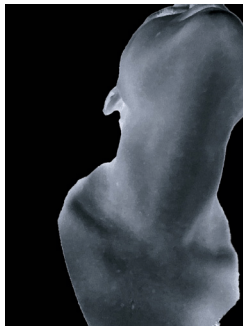
Installation view in "Sherrie Levine: Mayhem,"  
Whitney Museum of American Art, 2011

Sculptures or 3D objects that were inspired by a 2D painting. It is an installation of 4 billiard tables. The tables create the exact 3 balls in the same arrangement

as Man Ray's. That is the first part, the second part is that it gives the feeling of being in a gentlemen's club and that is the point of Levine's work: to revisit male artists. The legs of the tables call feminine forms and Man Ray used female body shapes to create his photographs. Levine questions our assumptions about male artist creativity and their domination in art history.<sup>30</sup>

30 San Francisco Museum of Art, SFMOMA, <https://www.sfmoma.org/artwork/96.493.A-H/>, (accessed 13 Ja. 2023) and Jerry Saltz, "Sherrie Levine, it's payback time", 2012, Artnet, <http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/features/saltz/sherrie-levine-whitney-museum11-21-11.asp>, (accessed 13 January 2023)

Without questioning the male gaze, I made a series of photographs in my second year of DOGtime that I called « Hommage to Ray ». I attempted to imitate Man Ray's style as a desire to merge with the piece, being the object, the viewer and the artist.



Studying Sherrie Levine gives us a deepening comprehension of the power of the image. Her questioning raised the issue of discussion about authorship, quotation, originality, and legality. It is particularly appropriate in the age of the Internet where images are easily available. Thousands of reproductions of Art are usable and at hand for inspiration.

DAVID BOWIE

*David Bowie and the experience of Ziggy Stardust.*



David Bowie (1947-2016) was a very famous singer, musician, songwriter, and actor known and appreciated worldwide. He was born in London as David Robert Jones. Throughout his career, he used several Alter Egos, the most famous being Ziggy Stardust. He explained he used created characters to overcome his natural shyness of being on stage at the very start of his career <sup>31</sup>. In an interview in 2004, he stated that he didn't like to perform at the time and the theatrical devices helped him to get on stage (learning mime, using makeup and costumes, etc). Let us see in this part how the creation of characters influenced his creative process and let us try to see how we can identify the boundaries or lack of thereof, between him as an artist and his alter egos.

In the first place, like many other artists, he changed his real name, too common, to another patronym.

In the 1960s there was a singer called Davy Jones. David Jones' manager Kenneth Pitt suggested he used a different name. He liked the name Mick Jagger because it suggested danger, a dagger and he was fond of the character of Jim Bowie famous for his ability to use a knife. He believed that the surname Bowie suggested cutting to a deeper reality.

That is how David Jones became David Bowie. The change of name was a first attempt towards edginess and passing a threshold.

Before Ziggy Stardust, his most famous alter ego, we can consider Major Tom as the first persona he embodied. Major Tom appeared in « Space Oddity » in 1969 as an astronaut in space. He came back in « Ashes to Ashes », « Hello Spaceboy » and « Blackstar ». In the song "Ashes to Ashes" (1980), Bowie reinterpreted Major Tom as an oblique autobiographical symbol for himself. Major Tom is described as a "junkie, strung out in heaven's high, hitting an all-time low".<sup>32</sup>

Ziggy, who appeared in 1972 in the album *The Rise And Fall of Ziggy Stardust And The Spiders From Mars* was a variation on the theme of the alien, this time

<sup>31</sup> David Bowie '04 talks Ziggy Stardust, John Lennon, Aleister Crowley  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zX0ZVQhEnEc>, [accessed 13 January 2023]

<sup>32</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Major\\_Tom](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Major_Tom), [accessed 13 January 2023]

the character fallen to Earth. The inspiration for the creation of Ziggy came from different directions: The Texan psychobilly singer Legendary Stardust Cowboy and Vince Taylor for his thin look, to which we can add the interest of Bowie for Japanese theatrical creations at the time.<sup>33</sup>

«As conveyed in the title song and album, Ziggy Stardust is an androgynous, alien rock star who came to Earth before an impending apocalyptic disaster to deliver a message of hope. After accumulating a large following of fans and being worshipped as a messiah, Ziggy eventually dies as a victim of his own fame and excess. The character was meant to symbolize an over-the-top, sexually liberated rock star and serve as a commentary on a society in which celebrities are worshipped.»

Bowie's story was that humanity was in its last five years and Ziggy was sent to deliver a positive message but unfortunately was destroyed by his excesses and his fans.

In the Rolling Stones interview<sup>34</sup>, he explained that « Ziggy starts to believe he is a prophet of the future starmen. He takes himself up to incredible spiritual heights and is kept alive by his disciples. When the infinities arrive, they take bits of Ziggy to make themselves real, because in their original state they are anti-matter and cannot exist in our world. And they tear him to pieces on stage during the song « Rock'n Roll suicide »(...) At first, I just assumed that character on stage then everybody started to treat me as they treated Ziggy: as though I was the Next Big Thing, as though I moved masses of people. I became convinced I was a messiah. Very scary. »

Bowie decided to put an end to Ziggy during a live concert on 3 July 1973, at London's Hammersmith Odeon in front of 3,500 fans. Before that last concert, Bowie had been touring as Ziggy for 18 months. Due to the intense nature of his touring life, Bowie felt as though maintaining the Ziggy persona was affecting

---

33 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ziggy\\_Stardust\\_\(character\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ziggy_Stardust_(character)), [accessed 13 January 2023]

34 Mikal Gilmore, "David Bowie:How Ziggy Stardust fell to Earth", 2 Feb. 2012, Rolling Stones Magazine, <https://www.rollingstone.com/feature/david-bowie-how-ziggy-stardust-fell-to-earth-183340/>, [acc.13 January 2023]

his own personality and sanity too much; acting the same role over an extended period, it became difficult for him to separate Ziggy Stardust from his character offstage.

“I couldn’t decide whether I was writing the characters, or whether the characters were writing me, or whether we were all one and the same.” He was afraid this confusion would lead to madness, and there was nothing he feared more.

When he left the Odeon that night in July, he intended to leave Ziggy Stardust behind, but he would also leave behind the most important deed of his life: He had provided a model of courage to millions who had never been embraced by a popular-culture hero before. He helped set others free in unexpected ways, even if he couldn’t do the same for himself.<sup>35</sup>

Not wanting to be stuck as Ziggy forever, Bowie killed off the character to become Aladdin Sane.<sup>36</sup> This album came out in April 1973, a harder, nastier persona inspired by the dark decadence of America. But « A lad insane » felt like « Ziggy goes to America ».<sup>37</sup>



[https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/david-bowie-personas-alter-egos-ziggy-stardust\\_uk\\_5a55eafde4b0d614e48b13f0](https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/david-bowie-personas-alter-egos-ziggy-stardust_uk_5a55eafde4b0d614e48b13f0)

Soon after, Bowie debuted his third persona, The Thin White Duke, in 1975-1976, a mad aristocrat whose look closely resembled Bowie’s humanoid alien character

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.rollingstone.com/feature/david-bowie-how-ziggy-stardust-fell-to-earth-183340/> [acc.13 January 2023]

<sup>36</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aladdin\\_Sane](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aladdin_Sane), [accessed 13 January 2023]

<sup>37</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Thin\\_White\\_Duke](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Thin_White_Duke), [accessed 13 January 2023]

Thomas Jerome Newton in *The Man Who Fell To Earth*. The Duke eventually landed Bowie in hot water for his more controversial statements on Nazis, which he attributed to the character. The style of the Duke, for the album « Station to station » in 1975 was a mad aristocrat in a cabaret, an Aryan superman.

After the Duke, David Bowie went into heavy detoxification from drugs and started a new phase where he tried to get back to himself. It was quite a journey and he reinvented himself enriched by all these personas.

In the first part of his life, it seemed that Bowie was trying to run away from himself. It took him a long time to be at peace with who he was.

In 1993 he said in an interview: « One puts oneself through such a psychological knowledge in trying to avoid the threat of insanity. You start to approach the very thing you're scared of... There were too many suicides in my family for my liking... As long as I could put those psychological excesses into my music and into my work, I could always be throwing off ».

One explanation his fans dug can be found in his family background, which is documented in articles that mention his relationship with his mother and her environment.<sup>38</sup>

His mother Margaret Burns had 5 siblings and a troubled family from Kent: her sisters suffered from mental disorders and she herself thought she was borderline.

One maternal aunt was schizophrenic and another was lobotomized for her 'nervous disposition. Bowie later said: 'Everyone says: "Oh yes, my family is quite mad..." Mine really is.'

Margaret had a son Terrence, born in 1937, David Bowie's half-brother, who became schizophrenic. The brothers were close and Terry introduced him to music, Buddhism, and poetry but sadly he killed himself at the age of 47, David

---

38 Sidney "David Bowie and his complicated relationship with his mother" 16 Oct. 2022, Unofficial website of the Velvet Underground, <https://www.velvetunderground.com/david-bowie-and-his-complicated-relationship-with-his-mother/#:~:text=David%20Bowie%20was%20born%20David%20Robert%20Jones%20on,his%20mother%20and%20her%20second%20husband%2C%20Trevor%20Bolder> [acc. 13 January 2023]

was terrified to become insane like his brother.<sup>39</sup>

Bowie said he built Terry up into something more than a brother 'I invented this hero-worship to discharge my guilt and failure, and to set myself free from my own hang-ups,' he later said

One of David Bowie's favorite books was « The Stranger » by Albert Camus where the main character is indifferent and emotionally detached. This particularity appealed to David who described himself as disconnected even to himself.<sup>40</sup>

In 1972 he expressed in an interview in Rolling Stones « I'm a ... very cold person. I can't feel strongly. I get so numb. I find I'm walking around numb. I'm a bit of an iceman ». This is in contrast with the many passions he inspired in people of all genders.

With our limited understanding from the outside and looking at those experiences far in time, we can conclude that creating those creatures helped him to understand who he was and to find peace. His experiences echoed in millions of people who also struggled with their background, and with the pressure of society while longing to truly be themselves. The visual and societal impact of the career of David Bowie is therefore not to be contested.

In a larger scope, creating an alter ego is an empowering act. It is you but it is a part of you that you usually do not allow to have access to show, or it can bridge the gap between who you are now and who you want to be « fake it til you make it ». It takes you to the person you would like to be.

39 Alison Boshoff, "The lonely boy devoted to his tragic brother: ALISON BOSHOFF reveals how midwife who delivered Bowie insisted to his mother that he had 'been on Earth before'", 12 Jan. 2016, Daily Mail, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3394953/The-lonely-boy-devoted-tragic-brother-ALISON-BOSHOFF-reveals-midwife-delivered-Bowie-insisted-mother-Earth-before.html> (accessed 13 January 2023)

40 The Bowie Book Club (collective), 30 August 2021, "The stranger by Albert Camus", <http://www.bowie-bookclub.com/episodes/2021/8/30/the-stranger-by-albert-camus>, (accessed 13 January 2023)

It can help you to deal with a difficult reality. For example, you could ask yourself « what would my Alter Ego do in this situation ? » instead of reacting on the spot. The distance you create helps to overcome negative emotions. Moreover, you can pretend you overcame your problems with the persona you created pointing towards a future where everything is solved. It also allows you to take more risks since it is your alter ego that takes the challenge.

Steve Kamb author of *Level Up Your Life: How to Unlock Adventure and Happiness by Becoming the Hero of Your Own Story* explains that his love of video games inspired him to gamify his life. The avatars that players use are alter egos, and as an extension, you can create an avatar in your real life as a part of you get that takes on tasks you do not enjoy or that seem difficult for your real personality. This is what he says :

“By day, I’m Steve Kamb, a full-time blogger and all-around goofball who smiles way too much and spends too much time at his computer. Every afternoon though, I transform into the rebel version of myself: a Vibram-wearing, ripped t-shirt-uniformed machine of a rebel that will exercise anywhere and everywhere in a city. I wear a permanent scowl on my face...”

We see that Alter Egos can have a mission, whether it is to save humanity or just a stronger version of ourselves used to accomplish a task such as exercising. The clothes and the mindset of this avatar are important as it brings you directly in touch with that part of yourself. Of course, its name must be carefully and meaningfully chosen. You can choose a special phrase to call it and to transform it into your chosen personality for the transition of becoming.

There are many positive aspects of having an alter ego - as long as you keep the awareness of not becoming this person full time – it can help you to overcome shyness, it can motivate you to get out of your comfort zone, it can help you to develop a facette of your personality. It brings you distance and insights, it brings you in contact with qualities you want to acquire, and it makes your life more fun.

Here are some examples of numerous artists that used alter egos :

Writers :

As author and character :

Ernest Hemingway → The stories of Nick Adams.

Hergé → Tintin

J.K.Rowling → Hermione

As author and pseudonym, for personal, political, or promotional reasons : <sup>41</sup>

J.K.Rowling → Robert Galbraith

The Bronte sisters → Currer, Lewis, and Action Bell

Amantine Aurore Lucile Dupin → George Sand

Romain Gary → Emile Ajar

Characters :

Norman Bates in Psycho → his mother

Docteur Jekyll → Mister Hyde

Singers :

Jim Morrison → The Lizard king (a poem he wrote called, "The Celebration of the Lizard King" that included the line, "I am the lizard king / I can do anything.")

Beyoncé Knowles → Sasha Fierce (Sasha as being fun, sensual, glamorous, and aggressive. Beyoncé let Sasha out when she was on stage. This alter ego protected Beyoncé's self-identify as someone who was reserved and very ladylike)

Paul McCartney → Paul Ramon (in the 1960 tour in Scotland with Johnny Gentle & the Silver Beetles ; and also for a 1969 recording with Steve Miller, "My Dark Hour".)

Artists :

---

<sup>41</sup> Alva Yaffe, "Him, Her and Them: Artists and their Alter Egos", <https://musicoholics.com/best-of-the-best/him-her-and-them-artists-and-their-alter-egos/>, [accessed 13 January 2023]

Marcel Duchamp → Rose Sélavy (« Eros c'est la vie »)

Lucy Schwob → Claude Cahun (lesbian surrealist)

Jean-Michel Basquiat → SAMO (Same Old Shit)

Joan Jonas → Organic Honey (in a video)

Wanting to be someone else is a very common idea. You can have this experience by taking drugs, immersing yourself in an intense activity, traveling or moving abroad, or even considering gender change. Simply becoming anonymous is also a very simple available option.

The process of the experience will enrich your life. As an artist, it will open opportunities to learn about yourself and extend your practice. It is a chance to develop one's identity and originality through a creative process easily accessible to anybody that supports the old adage « know thyself »



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### BOOKS:

- ALBACH, HESTER, *LEONA HÉROÏNE DU SURRÉALISME*, ARLES, ACTES SUD, 2009
- AUSTER, PAUL, *LEVIATHAN*, NEW YORK, VIKING PRESS, 1992
- BRETON, ANDRÉ, *NADJA*, PARIS, NRF, 1928
- BRETON, ANDRÉ, *LE SURRÉALISME ET LA PEINTURE*, PARIS, NRF, 1928
- CALLE, SOPHIE, *DOULEUR EXQUISE*, ACTES SUD, 2003
- CALLE, SOPHIE, *AVEUGLES*, ACTES SUD, 2011
- DANIELS, DAVID AND PRICE, VIRGINIA PRICE, *THE ESSENTIAL ENNEAGRAM, THE DEFINITE PERSONALITY TEST AND SELF-DISCOVERY GUIDE*. SAN FRANCISCO, ED. HARPER, 2000
- PROUST, MARCEL, *CONTRE SAINTE BEUVE*, PARIS, GALLIMARD, 1954
- RICŒUR, PAUL, *THREE VOLUME STUDY OF NARRATIVE : TIME AND NARRATIVE 1984-88* UNIVERSITY PRESS OF CHICAGO, 2014
- RICŒUR, PAUL, *SOI-MÊME COMME UN AUTRE*, PARIS, SEUIL, 1990
- TALESE, GAY, *FRANK SINATRA HAS A COLD*, NEW YORK, ESQUIRE, 1966, RE-EDITED BY TASCHEN IN 2021

### ARTICLES:

Mark Rozzo, « The greatest ever portrait of Frank Sinatra was missing one thing - Frank Sinatra », GQ magazine 9 April 2021, <https://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/culture/article/frank-sinatra-has-a-cold> (accessed 13 January 2023)

Evan Kindley « How the Proust questionnaire went from Literary curio to prestige personality quiz » The New Yorker 16 Jul. 2016, <https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/how-the-proust-questionnaire-went-from-literary-curio-to-prestige-personality-quiz> (accessed 13 January 2023)

« The traditional Enneagram » The Enneagram Institute, <https://www.ennea->

graminstitute.com/the-traditional-enneagram/#:~:text=The%20Enneagram%20symbol%20has%20roots%20in%20antiquity%20and,founder%20of%20a%20highly%20influential%20inner%20work%20school. (accessed 13 January 2023)

Mandira, « MBTI craze in Korea », blog Korea by me, 2 May 2022, <https://koreaby.me.com/mbti-craze-in-korea/> (accessed 13 January 2023)

Adam Grant, “MBTI, if you want me back you need to change too”, Medium.com, 17 Nov. 2015, <https://medium.com/@AdamMGrant/mbti-if-you-want-me-back-you-need-to-change-too-c7f1a7b6970> (accessed 13 January 2023)

Sir Joanan Rutgers, “De inspiratiebron van Andre Breton”, 8 Nov.2021, <https://www.nederlands.nl/nedermap/beschouwingen/beschouwing/150380.html>, (accessed 13 January 2023)

Carmen Lobo “André Breton’s Nadja”, 6 Feb. 2014, Art and Thoughts, <https://artandthoughts.fr/2014/02/06/andre-bretons-nadja/> (accessed 13 January 2023)

Roxana Azimi, « Le Surréalisme ne connaît pas la crise », 21 September 2020, Le Monde, [https://www.lemonde.fr/argent/article/2020/09/21/le-surrealisme-ne-connaît-pas-la-crise\\_6052985\\_1657007.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/argent/article/2020/09/21/le-surrealisme-ne-connaît-pas-la-crise_6052985_1657007.html), (accessed 13 January 2023)

Mikal Gilmore, “David Bowie:How Ziggy Stardust fell to Earth”, 2 Feb. 2012, Rolling Stones Magazine, <https://www.rollingstone.com/feature/david-bowie-how-ziggy-stardust-fell-to-earth-183340/>, (acc.13 January 2023)

Sidney “David Bowie and his complicated relationship with his mother” 16 Oct. 2022, Unofficial website of the Velvet Underground, <https://www.velvetunderground.com/david-bowie-and-his-complicated-relationship-with-his-mother/#:~:text=David%20Bowie%20was%20born%20David%20Robert%20Jones%20>

on,his%20mother%20and%20her%20second%20husband%2C%20Trevor%20Bolder (accessed.13 January 2023)

Alison Boshoff, "The lonely boy devoted to his tragic brother: ALISON BOSHOFF reveals how midwife who delivered Bowie insisted to his mother that he had 'been on Earth before'", 12 Jan. 2016, Daily Mail, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3394953/The-lonely-boy-devoted-tragic-brother-ALISON-BOSHOFF-reveals-midwife-delivered-Bowie-insisted-mother-Earth-before.html> (accessed 13 January 2023)

The Bowie Book Club (collective), 30 August 2021, "The stranger by Albert Camus", <http://www.bowiebookclub.com/episodes/2021/8/30/the-stranger-by-albert-camus>, (accessed 13 January 2023)

Alva Yaffe, "Him, Her and Them: Artists and their Alter Egos", <https://musicoholics.com/best-of-the-best/him-her-and-them-artists-and-their-alter-egos/>, (accessed 13 January 2023)

WIKIPEDIA 2022-2023

"Confession Album". Last edited on 25 May 2022 at 17:00 (UTC).

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confession\\_album](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confession_album)

"Proust Questionnaire". Last edited on 12 December 2022, at 08:20 (UTC).

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Proust\\_Questionnaire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Proust_Questionnaire)

"Enneagram of personality". Last edited on 24 January 2023, at 01:56 (UTC).

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enneagram\\_of\\_Personality](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enneagram_of_Personality)

"Myers-Briggs type indicator". last edited on 26 January 2023, at 23:00 (UTC).

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Myers%E2%80%93Briggs\\_Type\\_Indicator](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Myers%E2%80%93Briggs_Type_Indicator)

“Mirror Stage”. Last edited on 22 January 2022, at 23:16 (UTC).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mirror\\_stage](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mirror_stage)

“Ziggy Stardust (Character)”. Last edited on 19 January 2023, at 20:10 (UTC).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ziggy\\_Stardust\\_\(character\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ziggy_Stardust_(character))

“Major Tom”. Last edited on 16 January 2023, at 06:27 (UTC).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Major\\_Tom](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Major_Tom)

“Aladdin Sane”. Last edited on 10 January 2023, at 03:44 (UTC).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aladdin\\_Sane](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aladdin_Sane)

“The Thin White Duke”. Last edited on 16 September 2022, at 18:51 (UTC).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Thin\\_White\\_Duke](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Thin_White_Duke)

“Appropriation (Art)”. Last edited on 21 January 2023, at 19:53 (UTC).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Appropriation\\_\(art\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Appropriation_(art))

## PODCAST

Camille Renard, “La véritable histoire de “Nadja” de Breton”, 9 Jan. 2020, France Culture <https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceculture/la-veritable-histoire-de-nadja-de-breton-9689844> [accessed 13 January 2023]



