

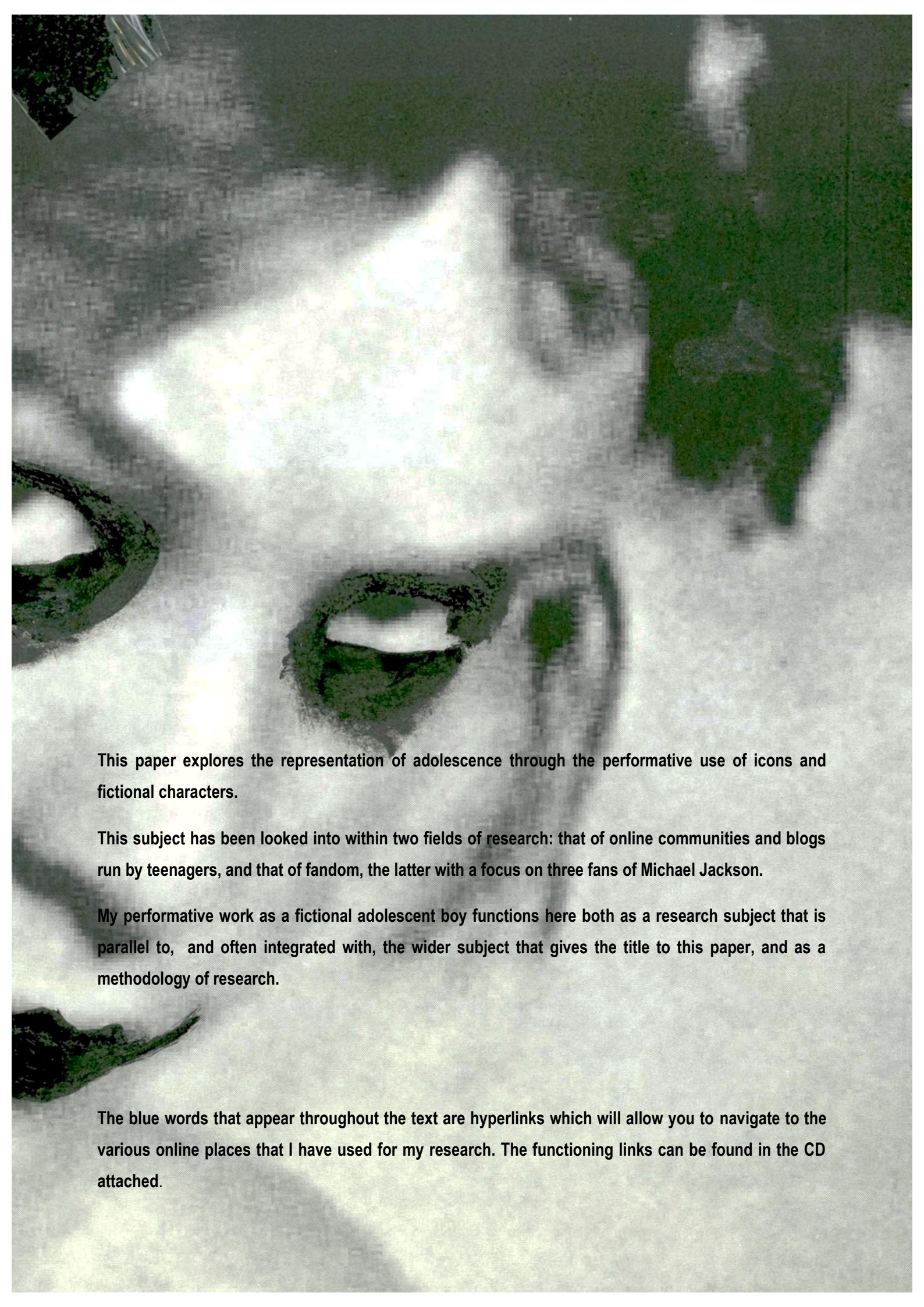


# IMMORTALIZED

A study on the representation of adolescence through  
fictional characters and icons in online  
and fan - based communities

Oscar Benedetta De Alessi  
MA Fine Art 2009



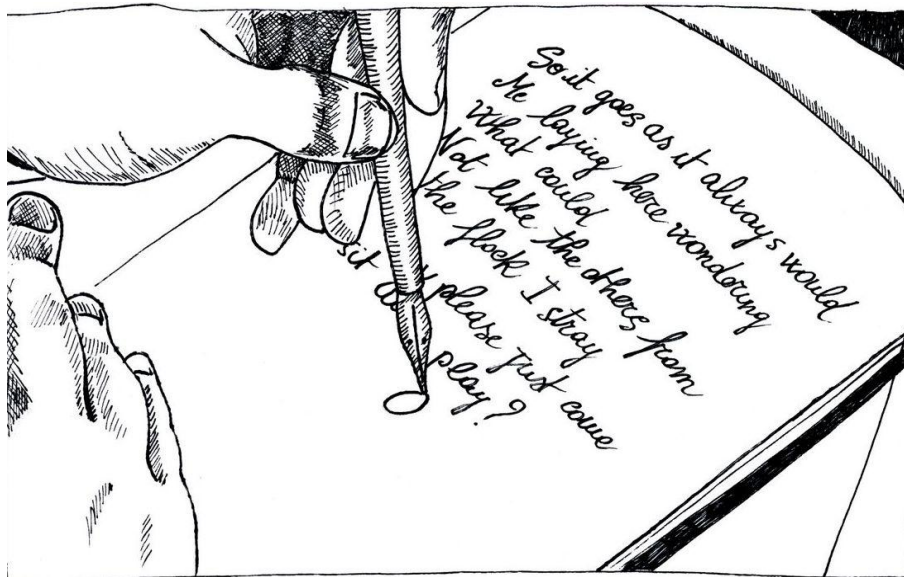


This paper explores the representation of adolescence through the performative use of icons and fictional characters.

This subject has been looked into within two fields of research: that of online communities and blogs run by teenagers, and that of fandom, the latter with a focus on three fans of Michael Jackson.

My performative work as a fictional adolescent boy functions here both as a research subject that is parallel to, and often integrated with, the wider subject that gives the title to this paper, and as a methodology of research.

The blue words that appear throughout the text are hyperlinks which will allow you to navigate to the various online places that I have used for my research. The functioning links can be found in the CD attached.



1.

## THE WERTHER EFFECT (ONLINE)

*'Yes, I am a model poet,' Meredith was saying. 'I am pretending to be someone else'.<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Acroyd, P. (1987) Chatterton, London: Hamish Hamilton, p. 3



The link [www.oscarscar.blogspot.com](http://www.oscarscar.blogspot.com) takes

whoever clicks on it to the internet profile of

a person whose name is Oscar Scar.

We are immediately given some information about

this internet user: he is a male, he is sixteen years

old and his occupation is to be a [full-time daydreamer](#).

We also know that this person is

located in London, and that he

thinks of himself as

being [very confused](#).

We can see a small image on the

left of the text: it seems

to be a [symbol](#) but it is not

recognizable,

it looks like many other familiar

symbols, but it is none of them.

Scrolling down the page, we

are given more information

about this person's interests:

(uhm...[books](#), [video games](#),

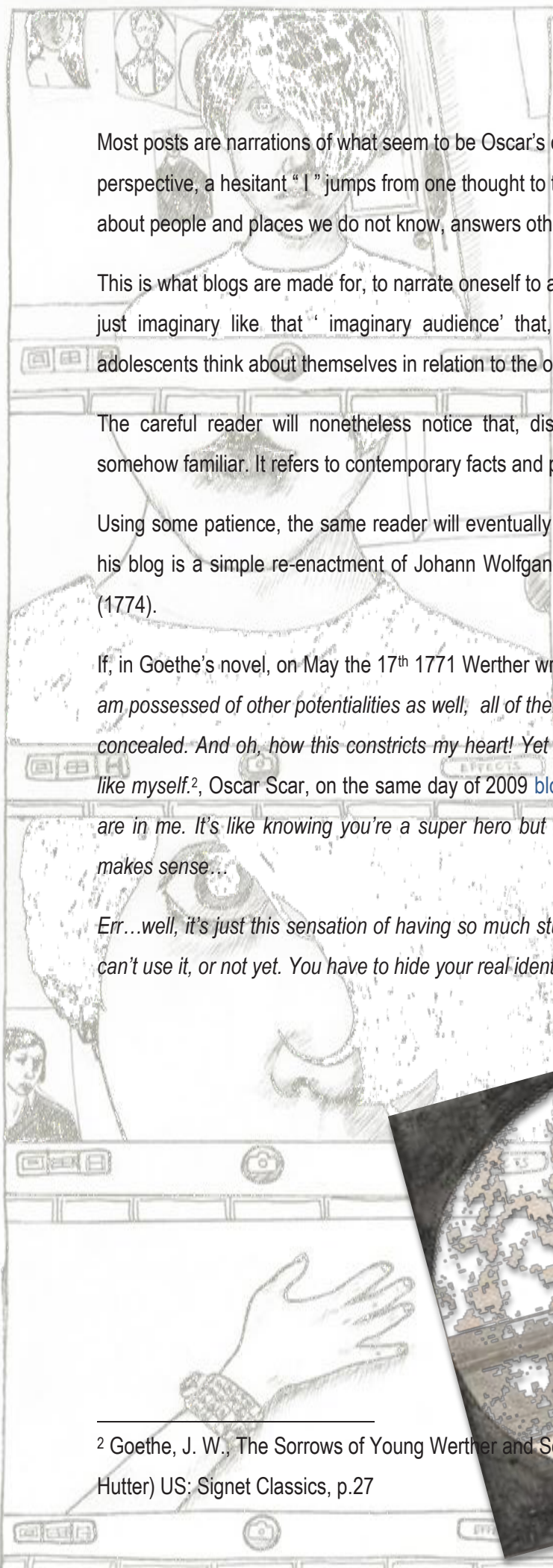
[music](#), uhm...[sleeping](#), [films](#),

[boys](#), [beauty](#)), his favorite

music, films and books.

Right below, we find the link to

[Oscar Scar's blog](#).



Most posts are narrations of what seem to be Oscar's own life experiences: always in a first – person perspective, a hesitant “ I ” jumps from one thought to the other, switches from bliss to depression, tells *us* about people and places we do not know, answers other bloggers' comments.

This is what blogs are made for, to narrate oneself to an invisible audience that is nonetheless present and not just imaginary like that ‘ imaginary audience’ that, according to David Elkind (1979), dictates the way adolescents think about themselves in relation to the others.

The careful reader will nonetheless notice that, disguised under a clumsy adolescent slang, the text is somehow familiar. It refers to contemporary facts and place and yet, it is not ‘new’.

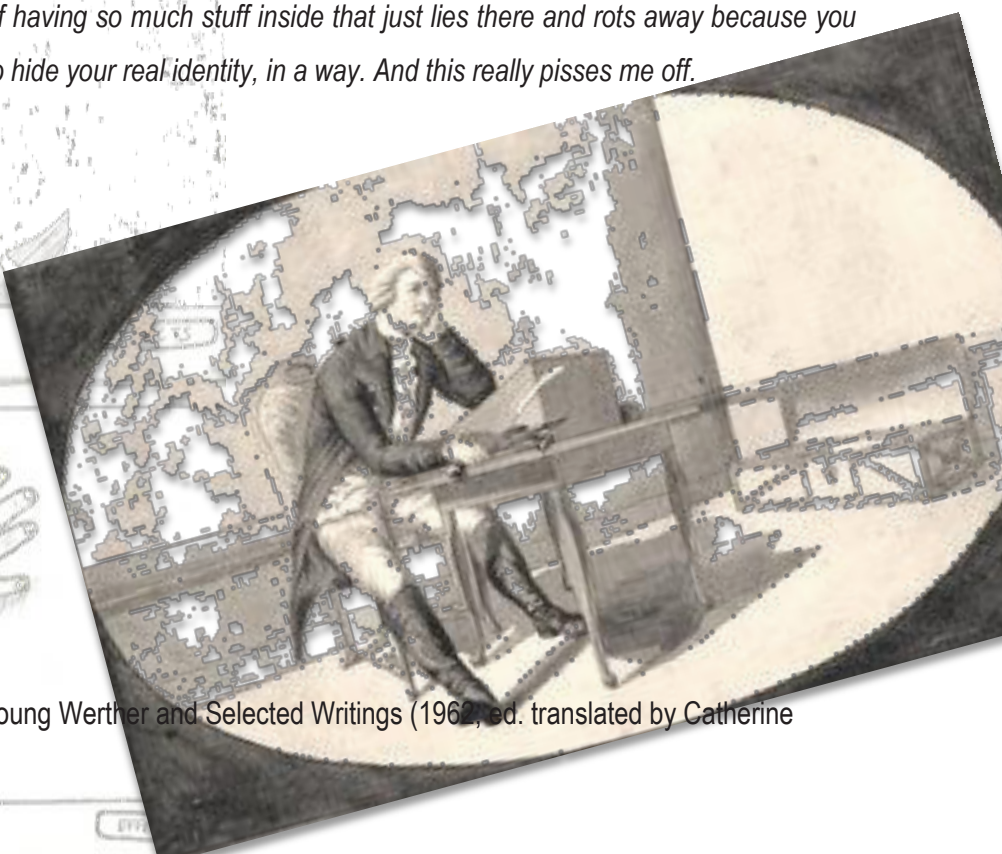
Using some patience, the same reader will eventually realize that what the teenage boy Oscar has written on his blog is a simple re-enactment of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's novel “The Sorrows of Young Werther” (1774).

If, in Goethe's novel, on May the 17<sup>th</sup> 1771 Werther writes: (...) *The only good thing I must not think of is that I am possessed of other potentialities as well, all of them going to waste, and that I have to keep them carefully concealed. And oh, how this constricts my heart! Yet to be misunderstood is the miserable destiny of people like myself.*<sup>2</sup>, Oscar Scar, on the same day of 2009 [blogs](#): *I just have to avoid thinking of all the energies that are in me. It's like knowing you're a super hero but being unable to show that to the world. I dunno if this makes sense...*

*Err...well, it's just this sensation of having so much stuff inside that just lies there and rots away because you can't use it, or not yet. You have to hide your real identity, in a way. And this really pisses me off.*

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<sup>2</sup> Goethe, J. W., *The Sorrows of Young Werther and Selected Writings* (1962, ed. translated by Catherine Hutter) US: Signet Classics, p.27





After having acknowledged this, it will perhaps not make much difference for the reader to know that behind the name Oscar Scar there is not one self, but many selves, not one biography, but many stories. Like in most blogs, identified as well as anonymous surfers can leave a comment on whatever appears on the page, thus interfering, and possibly changing, the original plot. The character Oscar Scar exists exclusively through other characters. It is, in a way, an attempt to personify the very essence of adolescence, if there is one.

But do 'real' teenagers use fiction to represent their own identity? And, if so, how is this applied to the internet, the place where reality is always virtual?

To answer these questions, I have used Oscar Scar to explore various blogs and online communities run by teenagers.

This idea has been analyzed by Dan Zahavi in his book "Subjectivity and Selfhood" (2008). Zahavi has acknowledged that: (...) *When I interpret myself in terms of a life story, I might be both the narrator and the main character, but I am not the sole author. (...) As MacIntyre points out: " (We) are never more ( and sometimes less) than the co-authors of our own narratives. Only in fantasy do we live what story we please. In life, as both Aristotle and Engles noted, we are always under certain constraints. We enter upon a stage which we did not design and we find ourselves part of an action that was not of our making. (MacIntyre ,1985, 213).*

*Who we are depends on the stories told about us, both by ourselves and by others. Our narrative self is multiple-authored and under constant revision.*

Zahavi, D. (2008) Subjectivity and Selfhood: Investigating the First – Person Perspective,

[Kieran's Kingdom](#) is a blog created by seventeen - year-old Micky.

This blog talks about the fictional character 'Marc', a twelve - year - old boy who realizes he is homosexual. The narration unfolds as readers are asked by the author to vote for what they think should happen next.

The character Marc himself was created according to the readers' votes. The readers, most of whom are teen boys themselves, are thus given the possibility to become co – authors of Marc's story, therefore giving life to a character that exists from several perspectives at the same time. When asked to talk about the creation of the character Marc, Micky said that:

*Marc comes out of my head!*

*I held polls to decide how old he would be when the story started and also whether guys wanted a blonde or brown haired boy.*

*Well, they went for a 12 y/o with blonde hair.*

*The story is about him growing up and discovering that he's gay.*

*I hope to include some of the things which guys have mentioned in their blogs as being a problem to them in coming out.*

*Maybe we could deal with some of those issues in the course of his growing up.<sup>3</sup>*

In "Kieran's Kingdom", then, fiction is used by a teenager as a way of externalizing his own identity, and to help other teenagers do the same.

Marc's is a coming - of - age story on many levels: the fictional character grows up as his authors do.

Their real life experiences feed Marc's own experiences as a character, and the narration of his story helps the readers to cope with reality.

The character Marc exists thanks to the readers' identification with him.

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<sup>3</sup> From email sent by Michael Luke to Oscar Scar on July the 14<sup>th</sup> 2009 at 10: 58

SUNDAY, 19 JULY 2009

## ICONIC



*As told by...Steve X Mark X Runciman at 18:44*

1 COMMENTS:

OSCAR SCAR said:

He was good, wasn't he?

I was wondering, do you have this thing about identifying with fictional characters and icons?

Is there any of them that, like, you think that perfectly represent your mood or personality?

I, for example, identify a lot with Hamlet, but with lots of other characters as well...it depends on which 'phase' of my life I'm going through!

But then, once I've identified with a character, he 'stays' with me...I'm not sure how to explain this.

It's like when you dream of someone and,

afterwards, that person feels closer to you. In a way, he/she becomes you.

STEVE X MARK X RUNCIMAN said...

Hey!

To reply to your question, I know what you mean. I identify with characters all the time, whether from books, film, whatever. It's usually depending on what sorta place I'm in at the time I read or watch it.

Have you read Jack Kerouac's books ? I really identify with his characters.

Peter Martin in 'The town and the city', Sal Paradise in 'On the Road' Jack Dulouz in 'Maggie Cassidy'.

But, yeah, I begin to feel a bond with the characters, and they do stay with me.

Andrew, another teenage boy I have contacted as Oscar Scar, has been writing a blog called [Confessions of a Broken Heart](#).

This is an online novel divided in episodes where fictional characters, all teenagers, deal with love stories, illnesses, death, depression and school.

The characters invented by Andrew have the particularity of being 'absolutely normal' and of having been represented through photographs of existing teenagers.

Fictional personalities and experiences have therefore been attributed to real people, turning them into characters the readers can identify with.

Furthermore, another layer is added to the narration by the identification of the author himself with one of, or all of, the characters.

As in Kieran's Kingdom, then, the bloggers can make comments on each episode.

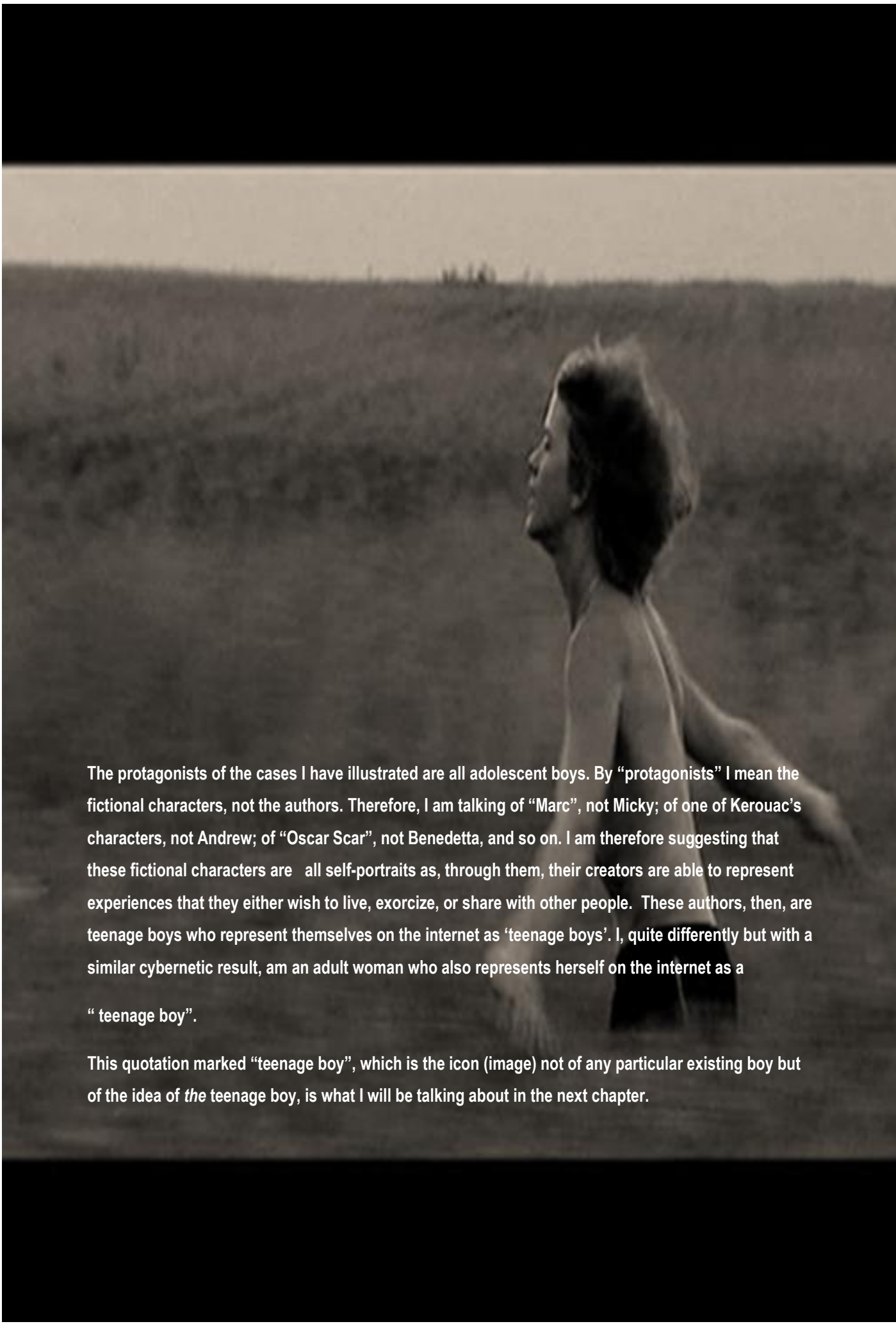
They don't get to intervene in the plot as in the formerly described blog, and yet they can communicate in real time their emotions regarding to what they have just read. This very often is the starting point for discussions where the initial fictional situations become completely integrated in the real life experiences of the readers, turning the confine between reality and fiction into a blurred, almost irrelevant one.

**Sherry Turkle describes the act of participating in the various interactive places on the world wide web as something that *has much in common with script writing, performance art, street theatre, improvisational theatre – or even commedia dell' arte*.**

***But (these places) are something else as well.***

***As players participate, they become authors not only of the text but of themselves, constructing new selves through social interaction. One player says: "You are the character and you are not the character, both at the same time."***

Turkle, S. (1995) *Life on Screen: Identity in the age of internet*, New York: Touchstone, p. 10

A black and white photograph of a young man with long, wavy hair, seen from the side. He is standing in a field of tall grass or reeds, looking off to the left. The background is a flat, open landscape under a pale sky. The image has a grainy, artistic quality.

The protagonists of the cases I have illustrated are all adolescent boys. By “protagonists” I mean the fictional characters, not the authors. Therefore, I am talking of “Marc”, not Micky; of one of Kerouac’s characters, not Andrew; of “Oscar Scar”, not Benedetta, and so on. I am therefore suggesting that these fictional characters are all self-portraits as, through them, their creators are able to represent experiences that they either wish to live, exorcize, or share with other people. These authors, then, are teenage boys who represent themselves on the internet as ‘teenage boys’. I, quite differently but with a similar cybernetic result, am an adult woman who also represents herself on the internet as a “teenage boy”.

This quotation marked “teenage boy”, which is the icon (image) not of any particular existing boy but of the idea of *the* teenage boy, is what I will be talking about in the next chapter.



## 2.

### TO DIE WILL BE AN AWFULLY BIG ADVENTURE.<sup>4</sup>

*I knew it from our games. In the tragedies we played we were always killing and dying. That's all they were about. Tamás was always preoccupied with dying. But try to understand, if it's at all possible: not death, annihilation, oblivion, but the act of dying.<sup>5</sup>*

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<sup>4</sup> Barrie, J. M. ( 2005) Peter Pan or The Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up, Milan: Feltrinelli, p. 128

<sup>5</sup> Szerb, A. ( 1937) Journey by Moonlight, London: Pushkin Press, p. 40

In her book 'The Boy' (2003) Germaine Greer describes boys as *volatile, unpredictable and vulnerable*. Greer continues saying that *a male teenager is more likely to attempt suicide than not. [...] His vulnerability is made more acute by his own recklessness and spontaneity.*<sup>6</sup>

Adolescence is a process and, as Mary Douglas suggested, *danger lies in transitional states, simply because transition in neither one state nor the next, it is indefinable.*<sup>7</sup>

The word 'transition' suggests a movement forward, but also 'through' time and place. It suggests the act of thrusting, a violent, passionate act, rather than simple proceeding. The teenage mind is dangerous because it is a potential mind, a mind which is swept by a desire that is as overwhelming as it is vague and unnamed.



Death, or rather, the theme of death, is a constant presence in the adolescent mind because, similarly to sexuality, it is posed as a certainty, and yet, it is unknowledgeable. During the teenage, thus, the idea of death needs to be represented, named, performed and, as everything 'teen', needs to be so in a loud, exaggerated way.

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<sup>6</sup> Greer, G. (2003) *The Boy*, London: Thames and Hudson, p. 21

<sup>7</sup> Greer, G. (2003) *The Boy*, London: Thames and Hudson, p. 21

It is interesting to note in relation to this that the most internet widespread contemporary youth subculture, Emo, a culture which celebrates the ideas of suicide, depression and romanticism, has been defined as: A specific sort of teenage longing, a romantic and ultimately self – centered need to understand the bigness of the world in relation to ‘you’.<sup>8</sup>

Boredom, described by Schopenhauer as the *tame longing without any particular object*,<sup>9</sup> is the prerogative of the teenage, a time saturated with a desire that is as intoxicating as it is vague, its target being yet undefined or, perhaps, being desire itself.

The ‘desire for desires’ matches with the object of identification, when this is an improbable one, such as a super – hero.

If Emo is the contemporary *Sehnsucht*, then the Emo teenager is a 21<sup>st</sup> century Romantic hero ( or anti – hero) whose characteristics require a certain level of *permanence in time*<sup>10</sup> in order for the character to become recognizable as such.

In a realm where each of the character’s epithets possess *at once a descriptive and emblematic value*<sup>11</sup>, the fact of the character always being a boy will assume relevance. Again, it will be the archetypal figure of ‘the boy’ (which has little to do with anatomical gender) that is to be taken in account. One of the characteristics I am most interested in is the ephemeral nature of boyishness, the fact that the archetypal boy cannot survive. He is typically struck down on the eve of manhood, whether he is Adonis gored by a boar, Orpheus dismembered by the Meneads, Hyacinthus brained by a discus deflected from its true path by a lovesick god.<sup>12</sup>

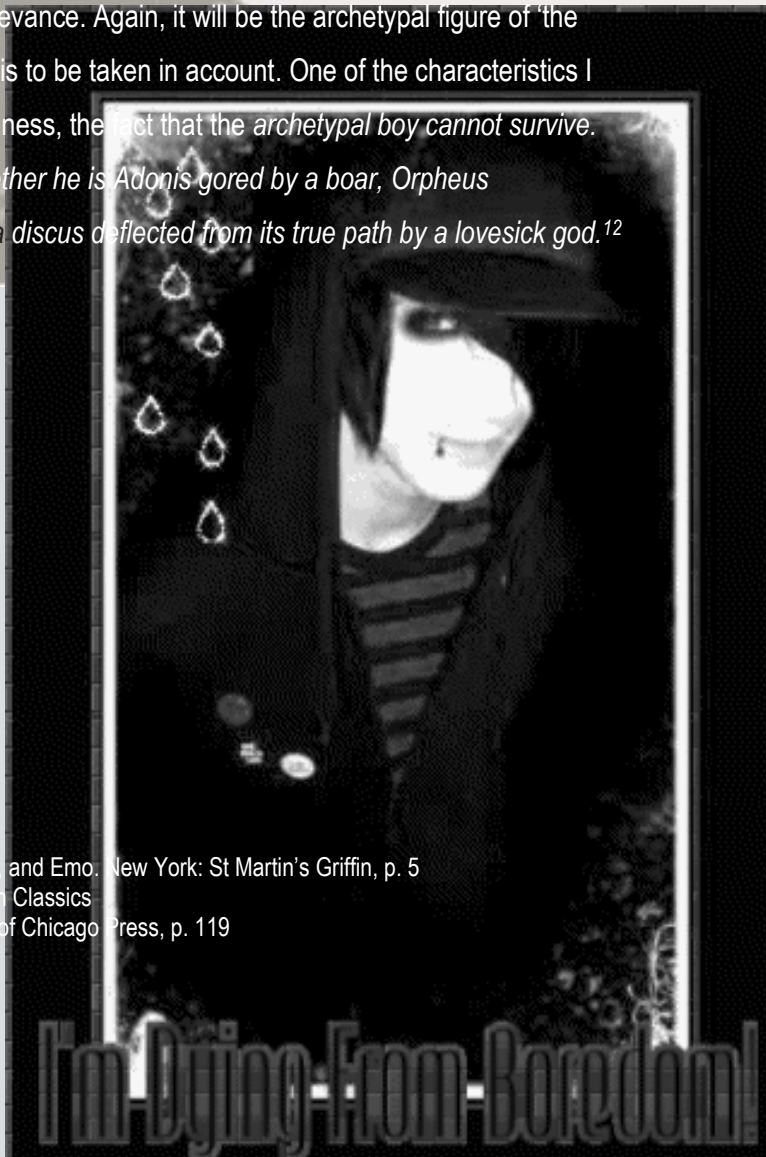
<sup>8</sup> Greenwald, A (2003) Nothing Feels Good: Punk rock, Teenagers, and Emo. New York: St Martin’s Griffin, p. 5

<sup>9</sup> Schopenhauer, A. (2004) Essays and Aphorisms, London: Penguin Classics

<sup>10</sup> Ricoeur, P. (1992) Oneself as Another. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, p. 119

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>12</sup> Greer, G. (2003) The Boy. London: Thames and Hudson, p. 35



I further explored this subject with the (ever in process) project "[The Werther Effect](#)".

Having chosen the painting "Death of Chatterton" made by Henry Wallis in 1856 as an icon of romanticized death, I started contacting a group of teenage boys whose profiles I found on an Emo/Goth - oriented online community called [Vampire Freaks](#). I then asked each of them to take a photograph of themselves posing as the character portrayed in Wallis's painting.

While I have so far received only [one](#) entry, I am, and was from the beginning, more interested in the ambiguity and riskiness of a project for which I can only rely on the cooperation of complete strangers.

By avoiding to give any direction on how the photograph should be taken, I let the performers interpret the image as they want and, therefore, I let them create their own character, a *new* character which nonetheless still bears the *sameness* of Chatterton's icon.

May 08, 2009, 09:33am  
[Replied]  
yea sure ill do it if you want

-----[Original Message]-----  
[OscarScar] : May 08, 2009, 12:27pm  
>Hi,

I am a London based artist, I found your profile and t  
you could perhaps being interested in taking part to t  
project I've got.

I am interested in the relationship between today's ro  
and teenage culture and the Romantic period both in  
literature.

My idea would be this:


I'd send you an image of 19th century painting or phc  
portrait. You should then take a photo of you self as  
(obviously, though, keeping your usual style/clothes)  
position or expression of the character portrayed. Th  
your photo back to me.

do you think you'd be intereste

I would like you to know that I'm not trying to "use"  
being for shallow artistic reasons. I'm interested what I am  
and my work (as a good person) is always sincere  
personal. I'm just saying this because I understand it  
allowing it "artists" treat people as a curious specimen  
cult or fashion.  
if you want to know more about my work, go check o  
[www.obdealeless.com](#)  
[www.obdealeless.blogspot.com](#)  
[www.myspace.com/obdealeless](#)

thx  
Oscar B





But let's focus on Apfel, the one boy who sent me the photograph.


His action can be analyzed under two different points of view:

1. Apfel, the *performer* and, as such, the signifier of 'Thomas Chatterton', who, in this case is not the person who lived at some point in the 18<sup>th</sup> century but the ( always already dead) character whose representation we are familiar with.
2. Apfel as a representative of his own identity as a male, a teenager, or a skater, which makes of the photograph a self – portrait and, therefore, puts in question the idea of 'posing as Chatterton' on the premises that, in a photograph, any position assumed can be considered a performance (if, for instance, the poser holds his head with his hand he could be posing as Dürer's "Melancholy"). This perspective can nonetheless be argued if one considers what already being said regarding the concept of a character as *sameness* (Ricoeur).

In both cases, Apfel's identity ( self – identity) is added to Chatterton's identity ( the *permanence in time*<sup>13</sup>) as a representation of Romanticized death and, thus, it *betrays itself under the identity of the same and so prevents assigning the identity of character purely and simply to that of the same.*<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Ricoeur, P. (1997) *Oneself as Another*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, p. 117

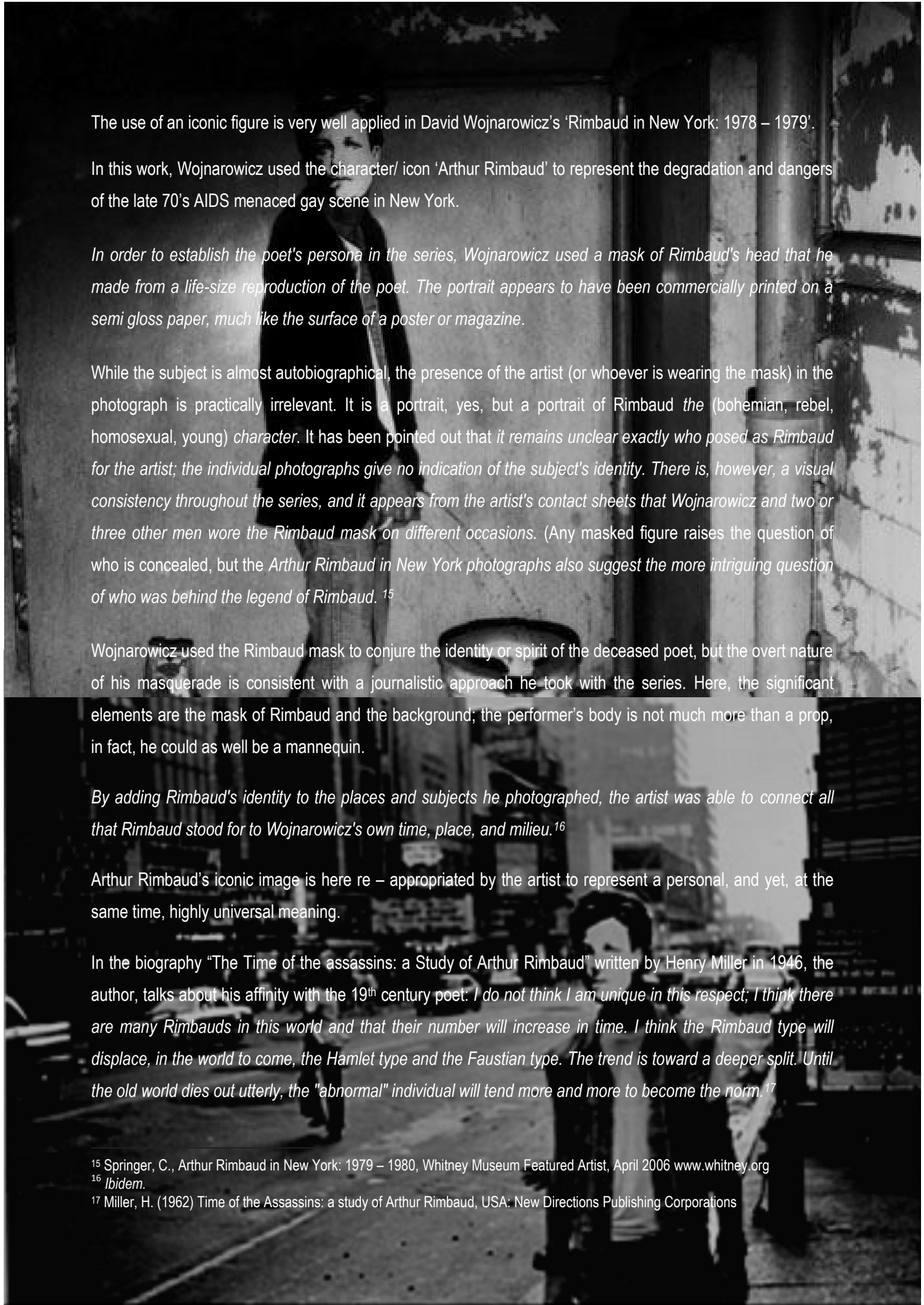
<sup>14</sup> Ibidem. p. 119



The presence of Chatterton as an icon is merely suggested, and Apfel the boy, is the undisputed protagonist of the photograph; he is what we see when we look at it. In this case, then, Apfel is both the icon (the image) and the performer.

Apfel (the boy) was asked to use Chatterton (the icon) as a reference for his performance. I, as the person who ideated the project, was motivated by my, always already failed, wish to identify with what the icon Chatterton represents. As soon as the boy Apfel sent me the picture I had asked for, he became Apfel the icon, that is to say, the image which represents my wish for identification as much as the icon Chatterton does.

The title of this project, “The Werther Effect” echoes the series of copycat suicides which had reportedly took place among young men after Goethe’s novel “The Sorrows of Young Werther” was released. I was mainly interested in portraying the continuity of the theme of Romanticized Death in the Emo and Goth subcultures, the substitution of diaries with video diaries and webcams, and the layers of co – authored fictions present in the photograph produced.



The use of an iconic figure is very well applied in David Wojnarowicz's 'Rimbaud in New York: 1978 – 1979'.

In this work, Wojnarowicz used the character/ icon 'Arthur Rimbaud' to represent the degradation and dangers of the late 70's AIDS menaced gay scene in New York.

*In order to establish the poet's persona in the series, Wojnarowicz used a mask of Rimbaud's head that he made from a life-size reproduction of the poet. The portrait appears to have been commercially printed on a semi gloss paper, much like the surface of a poster or magazine.*

While the subject is almost autobiographical, the presence of the artist (or whoever is wearing the mask) in the photograph is practically irrelevant. It is a portrait, yes, but a portrait of Rimbaud *the* (bohemian, rebel, homosexual, young) *character*. It has been pointed out that *it remains unclear exactly who posed as Rimbaud for the artist; the individual photographs give no indication of the subject's identity. There is, however, a visual consistency throughout the series, and it appears from the artist's contact sheets that Wojnarowicz and two or three other men wore the Rimbaud mask on different occasions.* (Any masked figure raises the question of who is concealed, but the *Arthur Rimbaud in New York* photographs also suggest the more intriguing question of who was behind the legend of Rimbaud.<sup>15</sup>

Wojnarowicz used the Rimbaud mask to conjure the identity or spirit of the deceased poet, but the overt nature of his masquerade is consistent with a journalistic approach he took with the series. Here, the significant elements are the mask of Rimbaud and the background; the performer's body is not much more than a prop, in fact, he could as well be a mannequin.

*By adding Rimbaud's identity to the places and subjects he photographed, the artist was able to connect all that Rimbaud stood for to Wojnarowicz's own time, place, and milieu.<sup>16</sup>*

Arthur Rimbaud's iconic image is here re – appropriated by the artist to represent a personal, and yet, at the same time, highly universal meaning.

In the biography "The Time of the assassins: a Study of Arthur Rimbaud" written by Henry Miller in 1946, the author, talks about his affinity with the 19<sup>th</sup> century poet: *I do not think I am unique in this respect; I think there are many Rimbauds in this world and that their number will increase in time. I think the Rimbaud type will displace, in the world to come, the Hamlet type and the Faustian type. The trend is toward a deeper split. Until the old world dies out utterly, the "abnormal" individual will tend more and more to become the norm.<sup>17</sup>*

<sup>15</sup> Springer, C., Arthur Rimbaud in New York: 1979 – 1980, Whitney Museum Featured Artist, April 2006 [www.whitney.org](http://www.whitney.org)

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>17</sup> Miller, H. (1962) Time of the Assassins: a study of Arthur Rimbaud, USA: New Directions Publishing Corporations



### 3.

## MYTHIC BEING

*Well, he says, I'm him. That I'm a reflection of him. He says where he lives strange things go on all the time. Magic things, evil things. I guess I'm starting to believe what he says. Because he's so confident, and I'm always confused<sup>18</sup>.*

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<sup>18</sup> Cooper, D. (2000) Period, New Grove Press, p. 41

Tuesday, 28 April 2009

## WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?

.....I'm starting to doubt I even exist.

How can I be sure I exist, in fact?

Maybe I'm just the figment of the imagination of someone living on another planet?

Maybe I'm the ghost of someone who lived two centuries ago?

Maybe I wasn't born in England?

Maybe I'm not a male?

Maybe I'm not even human?

Posted by Oscar Scar at 09:19

### 2 comments:

Micky said...

If you're not then I'm not. that would mean that Pete, my Partner, wasn't. that wld mean that all the people where he works aren't. That wld mean that they didn't make wot they say they do.

so no aeroplanes.

If there are aeroplanes U must exist.here and around now.

03 June 2009 13:05

Is it truly possible to represent a changeable, confused self as through the solidity and uniqueness of an icon, then? Is adolescence not precisely the time when the strictly first – person perspective of the Romantic hero meets the fragmented self of a Postmodern society?

Victor Jeleniewski Seidler has defined the fundamentally de-centered postmodern mentality as opposed to the modern conception of a unique self the nature of which is already given. Seidler explains that the postmodern self *is fragmented and exists in pieces. Freedom lies in being able to create identities out of whatever discourses are culturally available to us. So it is that we 'are' what we present ourselves to be. There is no inner nature that we are seeking to give expression to. There is no truth about ourselves that is waiting to be discovered beneath the surface of appearances. There is no longer a sense in which we can be false to ourselves, for there is no truth that can be waiting to be expressed.*<sup>19</sup>

Despite this, the character Oscar Scar seeks to find a personal 'truth' that, in its illusory uniqueness, becomes very much like Borges's *The Vindications*<sup>20</sup>, and does not, perhaps, even exist; the journey is a circular one and Oscar's quest, the aim of which is to find out who he *is*, is always already a failed one. Oscar's biography is a coming of age novel that fails to lead the main character to adulthood. Oscar is, in this sense, almost condemned, not too differently from a mythological figure, to exist through other characters' faces and lives.

But this 'masquerade' is perhaps always already the truth.

Therefore, his life is *Hamlet's* life. The letters he writes to his (imaginary?) lover are *Arthur Rimbaud's* letters. His gender is ambiguous, just like Virginia Woolf's 'Orlando'. The representation of the self, or of a self, is ultimately more important than what lies behind it.

This position recalls what Susan Sontag's "Notes on Camp" (1964), where she describes the concept of 'Camp' as *Being-as-Playing-a-Role. It is the farthest extension, in sensibility, of the metaphor of life as theater.*<sup>21</sup>

If life is a stage the characters must have a director. The characters, alternatively, must be the directors themselves.

By taking up 'roles' and allowing oneself to be saturated by another, it is possible to look at oneself from an external perspective.

By stepping out of the first person perspective, and adopting a third person point of view, then, it is possible to act both as main character and as director, or author, of the play.


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<sup>19</sup> Jeleniewski Seidler, V. (1997) *Man Enough: Embodying Masculinities*, London: Sage Publications, p. 11 - 12

<sup>20</sup> Borges, J. L. (1998) *The Library of Babel*, in *Fictions*, USA: Penguin Books, p.69

<sup>21</sup> Sontag, S. ( 1964) *Notes on Camp*. Online resource at: [Susan Sontag: Notes On "Camp"](#), accessed 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2009



A close-up, high-contrast image of a manga-style character's face. The character has vibrant blue hair and a single visible green eye. The image is partially obscured by a semi-transparent grey box containing text.

The concept of multiple authoring, previously mentioned in relation to Micky's blog "Kieran's Kingdom", is very well embodied by Annlee, the protagonist of the project "No Ghost Just a Shell", initiated in 1999 by Philippe Parreno and Pierre Huyghe.

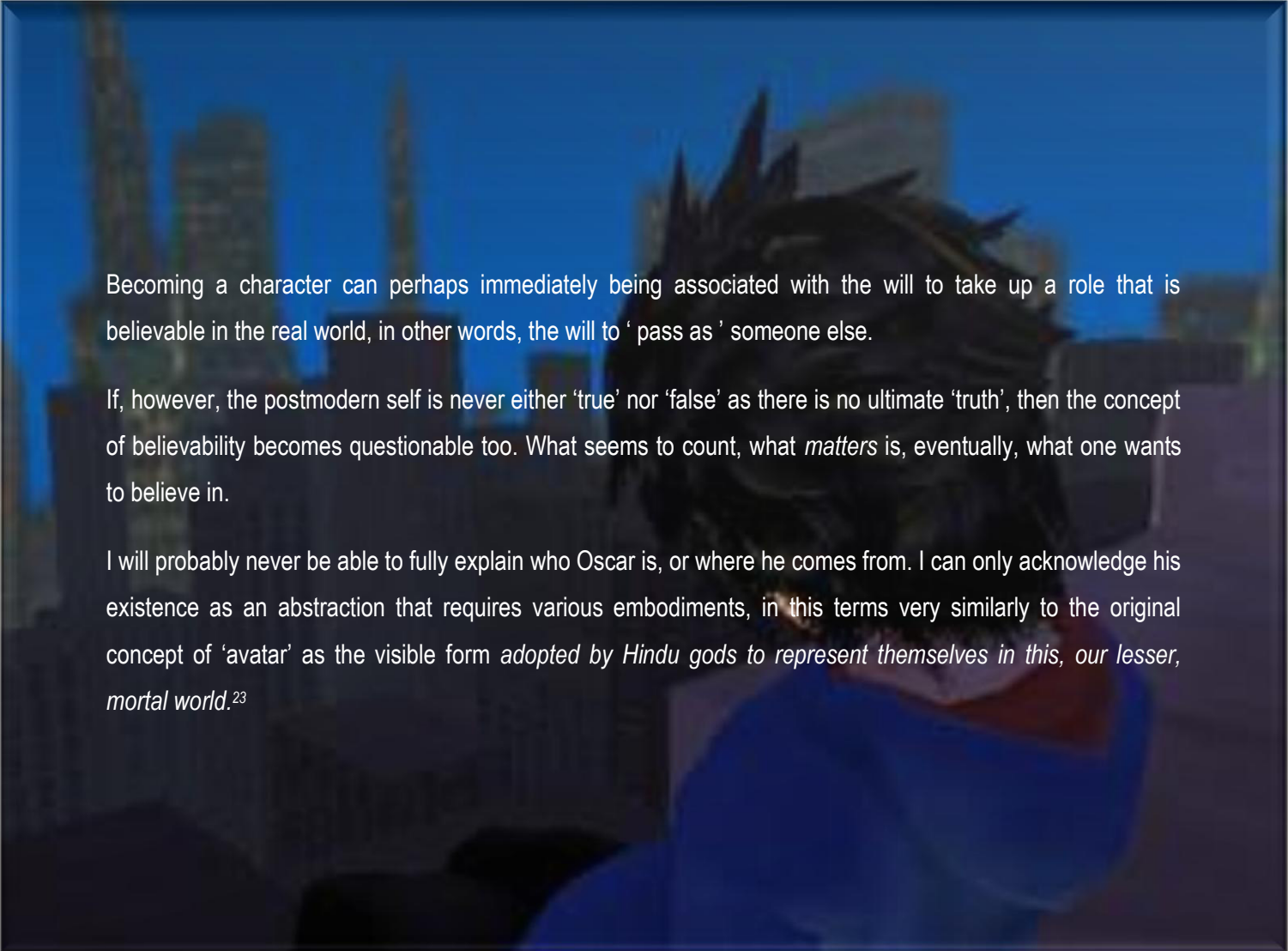
The two artists acquired the copyright of Annlee, an unknown manga character which, lacking any strong qualities, was condemned to disappear very quickly.

The "No Ghost Just a Shell" project, which was intended to go on for a number of years, *offered Annlee free of charge to a series of artists, commissioned by the initiators, to be used for their 'own' stories.*<sup>22</sup>

By doing this, they allowed the character to survive, and acquire her voice and qualities, through a number of different authorships. Annlee was in this sense liberated by her original static role as a manga character and acquired 'believability' as a new, complex in her being fragmented, character.

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<sup>22</sup> Text taken from the kunsthalle zurich press release, <http://www.mmparis.com/noghost.html>, accessed 4 June 2009



Becoming a character can perhaps immediately being associated with the will to take up a role that is believable in the real world, in other words, the will to 'pass as' someone else.

If, however, the postmodern self is never either 'true' nor 'false' as there is no ultimate 'truth', then the concept of believability becomes questionable too. What seems to count, what *matters* is, eventually, what one wants to believe in.

I will probably never be able to fully explain who Oscar is, or where he comes from. I can only acknowledge his existence as an abstraction that requires various embodiments, in this terms very similarly to the original concept of 'avatar' as the visible form *adopted by Hindu gods to represent themselves in this, our lesser, mortal world.*<sup>23</sup>



<sup>23</sup> Cooper, R, Spaight, T. (2007) *Alter Ego*, London: Chris Boot, introduction.



When Adrian Piper was asked to talk about “Mythic Being” (1975), a project for which she created her male alter ego, the artist listed a series of possibilities regarding the nature of such ‘being’.

The Mythic Being is, or may be:

- *an unrealized but possible product of the particular history of events I in fact underwent, a necessary alternative to the limits of my sense of self.*
- *An abstract entity of mythic proportions whose history is a matter of public knowledge and whose presence and thoughts are dispersed over the totality of individuals who apprehend him in the voice.*
- *A non material art object, unspecified with regards to time and place, the bearer of an infinite number of properties, the number and quality of which are circumscribed by my own life, and acquired with my growth into a different person.*
- *A product of my own self-consciousness, and unlike other pieces I have done in not being the generator of my self-consciousness.*
- *A therapeutic device for freeing me of the burden of my past, which haunts me, determines all my actions, increasingly habituates me to the limitations of my personality and physical appearance.*
- *A conceptual problem.* <sup>24</sup>

The desire to re – invent oneself as a “mythic being” is comparable with the need, recurrent especially during adolescence, to identify with an idol. The phenomenon of fandom and that of ‘impersonation’ will be looked into in the next chapter.

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<sup>24</sup> Piper, A. Mythic Being, 1975



#### 4.

### I WANNA GROW UP, I WANNA BE A BIG ROCK AND ROLL STAR.<sup>25</sup>

*We all want transcendence. To be filled, haunted, possessed by a supernatural presence. To be intimate with the Greatness; saved from anonymity. So we baptize, even drown ourselves, in the star's holy charisma – that golden aura which is a legend of our own humdrum roles.<sup>26</sup>*

<sup>25</sup> Marilyn Manson, Lunchbox, from the album Portrait of an American Family, 1994

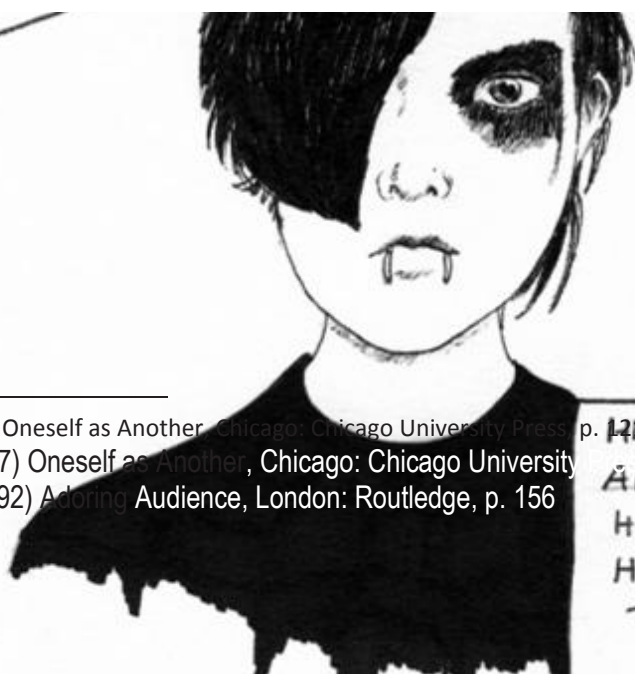
<sup>26</sup> Vermorel, F. (1983) The Secret History of Kate Bush (& the strange art of pop), UK: Omnibus Press, p. 61



Ricoeur (1992) proposed the notion of *acquired identifications by which the other enters into the composition of the same*. To a larger extent, he further explains, the *identity of a person or a community is made up of these identifications with values, norms, ideals, models and heroes, 'in' which the person or the community recognizes itself*. Recognizing oneself 'in' contributes to recognizing oneself 'by'. The identification with heroic figures clearly displays this otherness assumed as one's own, but this is already latent in the identification with values which make us place a "cause" above our own survival.<sup>27</sup>

The identification with heroic figures<sup>28</sup> Ricoeur talks about is as present in 19<sup>th</sup> century Romanticism as it is in contemporary pop culture. If the hero is

the celebrity, the icon, the fan is that who longs to become, and completely merge himself with, the icon. The *becoming* is precisely that 'desire for desire' which constitutes an impossible identification, the type of obsessive identification fans want. For this reason, the stereotypical fan is a teenager. Lisa E. Lewis, in her book "Adoring Audience" (1992) suggests that: *fandom is overwhelmingly associated with adolescence or childhood, that is, with a state of arrested development or youth-oriented nostalgia, not mature adulthood*.<sup>29</sup>



HE TOOK THE WHITE PAINT AND STARTED PUTTING IT ON HIS FACE. HE HOPED HE WAS GOING TO BE SIXTEEN FOREVER.

<sup>27</sup> Ricoeur, P (1997) *Oneself as Another*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, p. 121

<sup>28</sup> Ricoeur, P (1997) *Oneself as Another*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, p. 121

<sup>29</sup> Lewis, L. E. (1992) *Adoring Audience*, London: Routledge, p. 156

In the video *Portrait of Oscar Scar as Per Yngve Ohlin aka Dead*, leader of the black metal band Mayhem from 1988 to 1991 Oscar Scar, using the camera as a mirror, paints his face in order to look like the black metal singer Dead, whose photo is visible in the background.



The video finishes as soon as Oscar Scar has painted his whole face, there is no end product but the process itself.

As a confused teenaged male, Oscar Scar must be a fan. His fascination with romanticized death, or Death as a literary topic, has led him to be interested in heavy metal, and, in particular, in the figure of [Dead](#), for the mere fact that he committed suicide at a very young age and in a most theatrical way.

The failure of Oscar Scar's attempt to be a *reflection of him*<sup>30</sup> is always already implicit.





Fandom is thus associated with a state of uncertainty, need, and emotional unbalance. Most fans are also in a contradictory position: each of them wants to be “the one”, he or she dreams of meeting his or her idol and to be “the chosen one”; at the same time, though, very often fandom implies a community, it involves a continuous need for contacts with people who are *similar* to you.

Wanting to understand more about the obsessive desire to become else, and drawing inspiration from my own teenage passion for Michael Jackson (passion that has recently been brought back by his sudden death), I decided to contact a number of Michael Jackson impersonators, and to ask them to tell me one memory of their choice related to their adolescence. I deliberately avoided to refer to Michael Jackson in my question, as his presence in the life of these people is already implicit.

In the next pages I have gathered the emails exchanged between myself and the impersonators who agreed in contributing to this project.

## DOCTOR MOONWALKER

--- On Thu, 4/30/09, O.B. De Alessi  
<shadowdealessi@yahoo.it> wrote:

From: O.B. De Alessi <shadowdealessi@yahoo.it>  
Subject: Re: from London  
To: "Doctor Moonwalker" <doctormichaeljackson@yahoo.com>  
Date: Thursday, April 30, 2009, 3:53 AM

Hi,

here is what I would like to ask you:

'Could you describe to me the first memory that comes to your mind related to your adolescence?'

feel free to write as much as you want and in any format/ style.

thanks!

OBD

Hmmm....that's a good question!

My first memory that comes when it comes to adolescence is really wanting to perform. I love to be on stage, reading poetry and doing plays and singing in the choir, and I felt the need to perform off the stage as well. I remember always being the center of attention with friends and family, telling stories and doing voices and being a general ham. I've always felt the draw of being in front of people and entertaining them, I feel comfortable doing so, I don't get stage fright. I just feel at home on stage and having a lot of people watching me. I suppose having that as a first memory of being a little one allowed me to follow that vision into being an adult, which leads me to be who I am now.

Da: Doctor Moonwalker <doctormichaeljackson@yahoo.com>  
Oggetto: Re: from London  
A: shadowdealessi@yahoo.it  
Data: Venerdì 1 maggio 2009, 12:16



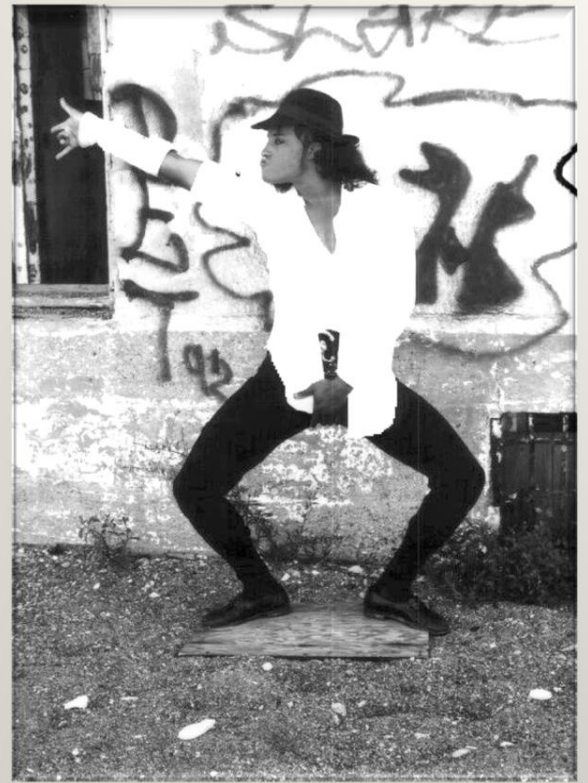
## RICO MJ

**Date:**

04 May 2009, 21:14

**Subject:** RE: from London

OK, Sorry it took so long to get back to you, let's see the first thing come to mind related to my adolescence, Ya know I had a really normal childhood, I grew up in Chicago but spent all my summers with my grandparents in Michigan which were some of the greatest years of my life, cause we spent time there being children away from the big city and everything that came with that. The most painful thing for me growing was the death of my siblings at such a young age, I lost a brother who was killed at the age of 13 a sister passed when she was 13 of, I forgot the disease and another sister passed after giving birth to a child she was older though, so of course when I made it pass 13 I was pretty relieved LOL so I think growing up for me was not all peaches and creme but for the most part it was lots of death around me now that I think about it, but U know what? I've learned to xcept that, that's a part of life and other then that I remember the rest of my life being a Michael Jackson impersonator. I think doing the impersonation helped me to get over the past, without that part of my life, I don't know, I don't think I would be here right now.




## JASON JACKSON

Jason has been a Michael Jackson impersonator since an early age. Since then, he has created the "Michael Jackson Experience", his own tribute show to the pop star. In reply to my question, he told me to take a look at his [website](#), as the answer to what I had asked could be found there. So I did, and I found the answer to my question in the following lines:

*Jason (who suffered from cancer as a child) was on his way to have yet another Cancer treatment, however this particular day, he never forgot. For the first time, Jason heard "Don't stop 'til you get enough" blaring from the car radio. It was this day that changed Jason forever. He fell in love with the song and soon after with the dance moves from Michael Jackson's "Billie Jean" Television performance. The way he danced and moved was electrifying. This is what made Jason get up and try some moves of his own. From that moment on, Jason began to dedicate time to imitate Michael Jackson's every move.*





Character impersonating, even if the character in question is real, always already involves a layer of fiction, as the impersonator. Ultimately, then, the idol, or rather, his simulacrum (posters, t-shirts, films, music) is only a prism which absorbs and channels each fan's desires, which are thus merged in the flux called 'fandom'.

While concurring with Lewis on her statement that *by participating in fandom, fans construct coherent identities for themselves*.<sup>31</sup>, I will also add that by participating in fandom, fans allow the 'idol' to be one by constructing a narrative around him/her character as seen from a third person perspective. Thus, since a third - person perspective can never match exactly with a first - person one (unless it is a third - person omniscient narrator, but that only happens in fiction), the 'idol' created by the fans will always be a new, partly fictional, character which, while retaining the *sameness* of the icon (image), will be formed by a constellation of different impulses and references, each of them unique because coming from each fan's personal experience.

John Schumacher suggests that *radical identification with enshrined cultural heroes can even beget illusions of immortality through association*<sup>32</sup>.

The desire to be immortalized is the apex of a longing that is ever 'adolescent' because it is permanently frustrated and *unconsummated, inconsumable*.<sup>33</sup>

The passionate seriousness which always characterizes fandom is precisely what makes it exist. It is what matters. And, similarly to a children's game, the more absurd it is, the more serious it needs to be. In fandom, there is no space for agnosticism. You either believe in it, or you don't.

<sup>31</sup> Lewis, L.E. (1992) *Adoring Audience*, London: Routledge, p. 156

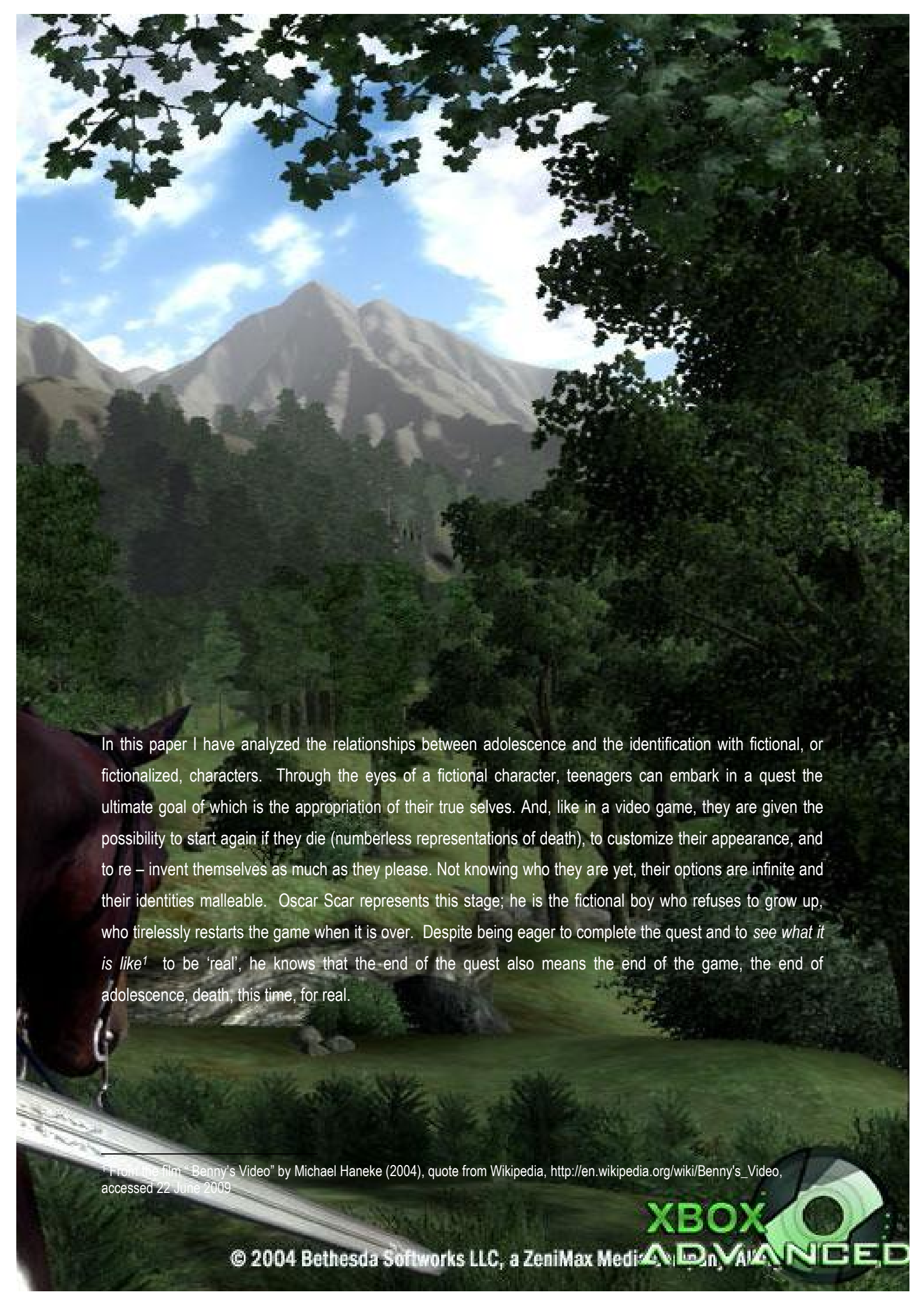
<sup>32</sup> Schumacher, J. I Obsess Therefore I am, from *The Listener Archive: Feature*, July 12-18 2003 Vol 189 No 3296

<sup>33</sup> Vermorel, F., J. (1985) *Starlust: Secret Life of Fans*, Comet Book



5.

EVERQUEST



In this paper I have analyzed the relationships between adolescence and the identification with fictional, or fictionalized, characters. Through the eyes of a fictional character, teenagers can embark in a quest the ultimate goal of which is the appropriation of their true selves. And, like in a video game, they are given the possibility to start again if they die (numberless representations of death), to customize their appearance, and to re – invent themselves as much as they please. Not knowing who they are yet, their options are infinite and their identities malleable. Oscar Scar represents this stage; he is the fictional boy who refuses to grow up, who tirelessly restarts the game when it is over. Despite being eager to complete the quest and to see *what it is like*<sup>1</sup> to be 'real', he knows that the end of the quest also means the end of the game, the end of adolescence, death, this time, for real.

<sup>1</sup> From the film "Benny's Video" by Michael Haneke (2004), quote from Wikipedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benny's\\_Video](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benny's_Video), accessed 22 June 2009

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## **Online Resources**

[www.oscarscar.blogspot.com](http://www.oscarscar.blogspot.com)

[www.kierankingdom.blogspot.com](http://www.kierankingdom.blogspot.com)

[www.andrewconfessionsofabrokenheart.blogspot.com](http://www.andrewconfessionsofabrokenheart.blogspot.com)

[www.vampirefreaks.com](http://www.vampirefreaks.com) – accessed 5 June 2009

[www.thewerthereffect.blogspot.com](http://www.thewerthereffect.blogspot.com)

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[www.denniscooper-theweaklings.blogspot.com](http://www.denniscooper-theweaklings.blogspot.com)

[http://www.listener.co.nz/issue/3296/features/310/i\\_obsess\\_therefore\\_i\\_am.html](http://www.listener.co.nz/issue/3296/features/310/i_obsess_therefore_i_am.html) - accessed 1 August 2009

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## Images

p. 2 - 3 *Full – time daydreamer*, 2009

p. 4 *Becoming Oscar Scar*, chapter 1, 2009

p. 5 *Becoming Oscar Scar*, chapter 1, 2009

p. 6 *Oscar Scar's diary*, 2008 – 2009

p. 7 Amajoh, Marc, 2009 [www.kierankingdom.blogspot.com](http://www.kierankingdom.blogspot.com) , accessed 2 August 2009

p. 8 Steve Runciman' s blog [www.alwaysfindme.blogspot.com](http://www.alwaysfindme.blogspot.com) , accessed 1 August 2009

p. 9 Confessions of a Broken Heart blog, [www.andrewconfessionsofabrokenheart.blogspot.com](http://www.andrewconfessionsofabrokenheart.blogspot.com)

p. 10 *Becoming Oscar Scar*, chapter 4, 2009

p. 11 *Paranoid Park ( at the skate park)*, 2009 – Tazio in *Death in Venice* by Luchino Visconti ( 1970)

p. 12 Friedrich, *The Wanderer Above The Mist*, 1718 [www.artsz.org](http://www.artsz.org), accessed 2 August 2009

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p. 16 David Wojnarowicz, *Rimbaud in New York: 1978 – 1979* – [www.tate.org.uk](http://www.tate.org.uk) – accessed 19 June 2009;  
[www.thomasmoronic.blogspot.com](http://www.thomasmoronic.blogspot.com) – accessed 19 June 2009

p. 17 *Becoming Oscar Scar*, chapter 4, 2009

p. 21 Carjät, *Arthur Rimbaud*, 1871

p. 22 - 23 Pierre Huyghe, *Two minutes out of time*, 2000 – [www.stretcher.org](http://www.stretcher.org) – accessed 4 June 2009

p. 24 *Wanderer above the clouds*, performance on IMVU online chat, 2009

p. 25 Adrian Piper, *Mythic Being: it doesn't matter who you are if what you want to do to me is what I want you to do for me*, 1975 – [www.artnet.com](http://www.artnet.com) – accessed 10 June 2009

p. 26 *Becoming Oscar Scar*, chapter 2, 2009

p. 27 *Becoming Oscar Scar*, chapter 2, 2009 - *Dead* , <http://katatonia.musica.mustdie.ru/Dead3.jpg>, accessed 30 July 2009

p. 28 - 29 [www.myspace.com/doctor\\_moonwalker](http://www.myspace.com/doctor_moonwalker), accessed 31 July 2009

p. 30 [www.myspace.com/ricomjmusic](http://www.myspace.com/ricomjmusic) - [www.jasonjackosn.com.au](http://www.jasonjackosn.com.au) , accessed 31 July 2009

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The first part of the paper discusses the importance of the research and the objectives of the study. It then presents a literature review of the existing research on the topic. The second part of the paper describes the methodology used in the study, including the data collection and analysis techniques. The third part of the paper presents the results of the study, and the fourth part discusses the conclusions and implications of the findings.

The study was conducted using a quantitative research design. Data was collected from a sample of 100 participants, and the results were analyzed using statistical software. The findings of the study indicate that there is a significant relationship between the variables being studied.

The results of the study suggest that the research has important implications for the field. Further research is needed to explore the relationship between the variables in more detail.

In conclusion, the study has provided valuable insights into the topic and has contributed to the existing body of knowledge. The findings have important implications for the field and suggest that further research is needed.

