

## The Sentient Mask

The modern man faces the problem of constantly redefining and inventing himself in trying to make sense out of life in the new urban spaces and within the consumer culture. An easy way out is to construct one's identity by copying the suggested mass mediated identities in that one purchases the products that were employed in the creation of such images. We are continuously moving within images, brand names, and advertisements. Today, identities are more or less hybrid consumer identities and the consumer can be described as one who creatively uses the resources of the consumer culture to construct his or her identity. It is a commoditization of happiness, culture, and leisure, identification through consumption. Identity is now realized at the marketplace.

The face is one's physical identity. It most distinguishes one from another. The face directly expresses a person's experience, education, depth, and style as well as psychological and material conditions. We remember and recognize a person primarily because of the impression made by his or her individual look. As cities dramatically grow and transform, human faces take on a wider range and play even greater social roles. Consumers most readily accept a face of a beautiful woman or handsome man. The face itself takes on a commercial character. When the facial character in the biological sense weakens, the mask, in the sociological sense becomes more complex. As a result, the face of a person becomes increasingly obscure, ultimately becoming only a symbol of personal identity. As we objectify our body, it becomes a vehicle or prop for an identity which we see as separate. Dress is integral in socialization for roles in that individuals utilize dress in enactment of roles. Thus clothing could be seen to act as a substitute for a body which is no longer there, plugging the gap left by the objectified body. Fashion would then seem to constantly redefine consumer identity and meaning and thus the question of clothing as a mask emerges.

The mask has five layers which correspond to the five senses of the face. Each layer covers one of the five senses: one for the eyes, the ears, the mouth, the nose, and the face itself. When the layers are removed, the senses and true identity are exposed. When one feels that they have liberated an individual sense from the consumer images, they will remove that layer of the mask, until all layers are removed and the person is freed from the consumer identity that enveloped them. It is a procedure which acts as a cleansing process. The goal is to realize our true identities, not the consumer ones. Everyone wears a metaphorical mask now, you just can't see it. My mask is the physical manifestation of the metaphorical one.

The mask, in design, has been constructed out of a digital fabric. This digital fabric would allow for images to be downloaded onto it, much like that of a computer screen. It would allow the individual to put any images of their choosing on their mask, representing their consumer identity. The fabric is tight against the skin to accent the facial structure, while at the same time hiding the senses. This digital fabric, however, is not yet available. The Palo Alto Research Company, a subsidiary of Xerox, is currently working on the production of this fabric. It's an extension of their digital paper technology which is due to be released next year. The fabric will probably not be accessible for a couple of years. To produce the mask without the use of digital fabric, a regular lightweight fabric can be used. The images can be printed onto the fabric at the time of purchase. The buyer can choose their own images and have them printed onto the fabric in the store. The drawback to this is that unlike the digital fabric, the images can't be changed as consumer images change. But the cleansing process can still occur and the mask still serves its designed function. Buyers will purchase the entire mask with a small carrying case, like that of eyeglasses, to store the layers when not being worn. The masks will be sold in sizes: small, medium, and large. The fabric is elastic allowing for the three sizes to fit everybody comfortably. It will be marketed towards young adults. They appear to be most susceptible to developing consumer identities, and would benefit most by the mask. They are constantly trying to fit in with their peers, constantly trying to find themselves. However, anybody wishing to reveal their true identity will benefit from using the mask.

Ascertaining who we are is the starting point of all things in our life. The self you paint in your mind is a self which has been painted, not the self which paints. We are sentient beings; we form our identities through perception, perception of others and their perception of us. By perceiving the world through the five senses, the conscious mind grasps only the mask or outward appearance and truth is thus obscured. Whatever mask we assume in this world of everyday life, the real self or identity maintains its distinction, albeit a hidden one. Our senses have become masked by the images of our consumer culture. Clouded by layers of consumer attachments, our identities become hidden. If we remove these layers, we will reveal our real self, our true identity.