

TEMPLATE

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Karolin Meunier

A MASK
A STENCIL
A MODEL

A TEMPLATE CAN BE AN OBJECT, A FUNCTION AND A TOOL. IT SHIFTS FROM THE ANALOGUE TO THE DIGITAL, FROM ORIGINAL TO COPY AND BACK AGAIN. A TEMPLATE IS MAINLY USABLE. IT'S A STRUCTURE AND A SIMPLIFICATION. IT IS MADE FOR REPETITION, IT CALLS ON US TO APPLY IT. IT PROVIDES A FRAME AND PROMISES CONVERTIBILITY. IT IS READY TO BE USED BY EVERYONE ACCORDING TO THEIR PURPOSES. SHAPED BY RESPONDING TO CERTAIN NEEDS, IT GENERALISES AND ANTICIPATES THEM, TRANSFORMING THEM INTO A STANDARD.

A REQUIREMENT
A TASK

CAN YOU SEE THE PATTERN?
(INVISIBLE)

CHOOSE ONE
USE IT
TO REPLICATE

REPLICATE
PICK A PATTERN

IT'S EASY
USE IT

NOT BEING IN USE,
THE TEMPLATE IS A DIAGRAM

A COLD POTENTIAL
A SAD VOID

The word template, originally describing a shaped piece of metal, wood, or other material used as a pattern for processes such as painting, cutting out, or shaping, has recently gained a certain popularity, and certainly gotten another twist in the context of software applications and social media interfaces. It can be understood as a frame, a graphical mask, or a matrix, to be filled with content and information, but also as something that serves as a model for others to apply. When I now blend this term with the concept of persona, what springs to mind is their congruence in one particular aspect. In ancient theatre persona is the name for typified masks used by actors. The term does not only describe the distinction between a person and a character or their more or less predetermined social role. Following the translation of the Latin *personare*, "to sound through", the mask in the widest sense of being a second face — or skin — is also a tool to act with or speak through. It is made in order to be repeatedly used and be recognised, no matter how complex its features are supposed to be or whether it would be activated by one particular person or by an infinite number of users. It is made to establish a figure, a type, which can be identified as holding a particular position in a larger structure, a story. One could say it's a form of abstraction for the sake of reproduction.

In contrast to the idea of the originality of each person's performance, the character as template emphasises a technical understanding of acting and the use of a persona on stage: the training, the labour of learning a pattern until it turns into a habit, the actual effort as much as the boredom to repeat the tricks and techniques for slipping into a role for an audience at a specific time and place. And yet, it is exactly this moment of constructedness that allows us to acknowledge the asymmetry of person and persona, of a mask and a body, of a technique and its actual effect. When a movement pattern is choreographed for triggering a certain emotion, the audience may realise the stereotyped quality of such movement or the artificiality of a character as such, and it would affect them nevertheless.

What's interesting here is not to measure the extent to which a character is set. It is rather a matter of observing and recognising the different stages of preformation one encounters and traverses. I can think of the template—or the persona performed through the template—as a concrete, yet codified object, put into action for (and being in flux between) performer and spectator. It can be mixed up, reformatted, decomposed, it can be applied anonymously, it can grow into the skin. I can gradually or partially replace myself, rearrange the image of another self, and rely on the template as an agent to display whatever asymmetrical subjectivity it performs.

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