

Know then thyself

Internet finds its limit in self-actualization



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I've been told that it's possible to find whatever it is you're looking for on the Internet these days. News, products, jobs, love – the Internet has it all.

After an exhaustive search for self, however, I found the information superhighway to be sorely lacking.

This isn't an earth-shattering revelation for many users, but for millions of online automatons the world over, it's sacrilege.

These lost souls compulsively don electronic obscurity and take refuge in

chat rooms and newsgroups, searching for something that has eluded their corporeal lives: a sense of self.

Anybody with access to a computer has the power to wander the endless planes of cyberspace either without a face or with an assumed identity. The Internet offers everyone an alluring escape from responsibility for words and deeds.

It would be easy to simply write off Internet junkies as misanthropic "Dungeons & Dragons" aficionados who work the night shift at Gas 'N' Shop and live in their parents' basements at the age of 35.

Instead consider how you use the Internet.

Have you ever entered your name into a search engine? Have you ever taken an online personality or IQ test? Have you ever spent time in a chat room? Have you ever flamed someone or had cyber-sex?

People often confuse the interaction of the Internet with genuine participation, but the inherent anonymity of the medium undermines any claims of communion.

Indeed, like its technological predecessor, television, the Internet can never truly be a medium of reflection, personal or otherwise.

Several philosophers, including Marshall McLuhan and Neil Postman, have referred to radio and television as media that avert reflection, and their theories apply just as well to the Internet.

For example, in his book "Amusing Ourselves to Death," Postman discusses the oft-used phrase "Now ... this" in newscasts. He notes that regardless of the import of the preceding segment, this phrase effectively realigns our attention for the purposes of the newscast.

"There is no murder so brutal, no earthquake so devastating, no political blunder so costly ... that it cannot be erased from our minds by a newscaster saying, 'Now ... this.'"

The same can be said for following a highlighted link or banner advertisement by means of a simple mouse click.

The Internet is a medium that is being presented to a mass audience –

mass media in its most pervasive manifestation. Because it is being presented en masse, it cannot pause – as a reader can pause for reflection on a passage in a book or a viewer can stop to reflect on a painting in a museum – for the individual.

Indeed, the Internet has never been terribly concerned with individuality but with collectivity. It is the realization of McLuhan's global village: humanity drawn together by the power of God into one collective consciousness.

Judge the necessity of religiosity to this definition as you will, but there is little question that collective consciousness is the logical potential of the Internet.

While the Internet would seem to be drawing humanity closer together, however, it is simultaneously compromising personal understanding for an arguably dubious greater good.

My intent here is not to portray the Internet as a malevolent technology or even as a necessary evil.

Who can condemn the sort of free expression that has thrived as a

byproduct of this medium? Even online anonymity would seem to serve a purpose, providing the sort of out-of-body experience that may be just what the psychiatrist ordered for egocentric modern neuroses.

If this seething mass of electrons and binary code eventually translates into a deeper understanding of the human condition, then it will have served a benevolent purpose.

However, if people continue to define the medium as a means to personal actualization, as would seem to be the trend, the ideal potential of the Internet will become a self-perpetuating waste of time.

There seems to be a growing apprehension with regard to the Internet in the belief that the development of such a pervasive information medium demands that the individual know more proportionately.

It would seem wiser instead to follow the advice of Alexander Pope:

"Know then thyself, presume not God to scan; The proper study of mankind is man."

The third eye

Weekend of discord and tarot cards open new dimension of reality



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It was Saturday afternoon that I was finally inducted into the High Order of the Illuminati, the title bestowed upon me as Grand Conspirator.

I can hear you laughing already, but the eye in the pyramid has taken over my life, ever since the Goddess found me and bred me into the realm of Discord.

Somewhere behind Time, there is a shadow turning over Tarot cards. First – The Magician, my signifier – New beginnings, confidence as action overtakes thought, the concept of ideas flowing from some external source.

Look, just roll with the punches and flow with it, okay? It's better if you don't resist.

The stories of my interactions with Malaclypse the Elder (and Malaclypse the Younger) will remain unspoken and savored for another day when these events will make sense, because they'll be in the past, not in the future, as they are now.

Most people would have overlooked the signal, that faint yet intuit message that was left for me in the grocery store: the golden apple.

Next, the Two of Pentacles – change and alterations, as the ups itself on one end and does a headstand.

Had I a less careful eye, one that gleaned information in a less successful manner, then I might have skimmed past that shimmer of gold within the bundle of red.

Yet I did not.

I sneaked over to the mountain of formerly forbidden fruit and plucked the golden apple from the stack. The surface was not metallic to the touch, as I had feared, but soft and waxy.

Was this the fruit of knowledge, the apple of divinity that had been concealed from me for so very long? Or was it, in fact, just merely an apple that was so far before green that it had merely shaded into the realms of yellow, and if so, why could I see my own reflection in it?

What looked of gold, felt of fruit.

The cashier didn't treat the apple any differently, nor was she disturbed by the fact that I was buying merely one apple, nor the fact that I did not want to let it leave my hand (even though it had never really touched my hand at all.)

The Two of Swords, yet ill-dignified, inverted if you will – Falsehood and deception, the need to take care in a decision.

When I stepped outside, the world was not as it once had been. I was steeped in an urban jungle, one that was on the surface similar to the world I knew, but I could see things like I'd never seen them before.

The buildings inhaled and exhaled, the streets groaned and warped beneath the cars, the vulture flew down from the light post and landed on my car, staring at me.

A gorgeous redhead walked towards me, carrying her quantum physics book, and I could hear U2 blaring through her headphones. She gave me one of those smiles that could have flattened me through the pavement.

Then she walked right past me. It couldn't have been that far from the real world, I decided.

And then, the Ace of Sword – a power for good or evil, something great or vile, yet all depending on who wields it.

An elderly man in a billowing brown robe walked up to me, and he had stars for eyes. "Are you readying for Descension?" he asked me.

"What is above is below?" I responded.

"There is no reality, only illusions. When you realize that the curtains of life can be torn down, you will be ready to leave."

With those very words, I took my fingers and pierced through the azure tarp of sky and tore myself an exit, that I walked on through.

On the other side of the sky, I touched tomorrow. It was, to my glee, the first time that I ever disproved the existence of a coherent space-time continuum. I was a bit giddy at the discovery.

Here, on the Twelfth Astral Plane, my third eye opened and the secrets of the universe, ones that society as a whole had conspired to conceal from me, were revealed with the casualness of opening a book.

And so the cards finish with perhaps the most appropriate one, The Fool – the adventure of several lifetimes, the necessity of a leap of faith, a jump headlong into an abyss that may or may not be waiting.

No matter what people defined as their common law reality, there wasn't anything they could ground it in that was relevant to anyone else.

We are our own reality.

The light slowly begins to fade from my eyes, while the answers fleet from my brain, my fingers failing to cling on to what the tendrils of my mind cannot.

It all fades and flounders, and yet, I remember the important thing, that one fine detail which lets everything else be rediscovered at a later date.

The only reality is the one we make for ourselves.

A pause, then one more card, merely to fill out the thought, The Devil – the ties that bind and the grounding of idealism in realism.

There are electric guitars gently flanging in the distance, a warm reverb flowing against my skull like a river of tears and light, an embryonic throbbing bass line like a heartbeat.

Colors overwhelm me and supersede my conscious, there's a rush of moving towards the edge of understanding, then that adren-

aline surge as I touch the starlight, then am snapped back like a rubber band that's been stretched too far, from eternity to now, and all of it is gone.

The man in robes, the breathing buildings and groaning trees – everything but the golden apple.

As soon as I tasted gold and felt it slide down my insides like the Seed of Infinite Knowledge, it all made sense. How'd your weekend go?

Belgium.



MATT HANEY/DN