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Antisocial?

I am *not* alone. No matter how friendless, lonely, or abandoned I may feel; I have never been, nor ever can be truly alone. Nor do I want to be. The fundamental base from which my identity is constructed is a combination of both social and individual components. This combination of internal and external stimuli, of individual and communal identity is essential to defining what it means to be human. Without a valid point of reference to reflect upon, individual identity is meaningless.

Rene Crevel's pseudo-biographical character in *My Body and I* and Daniel Clowes' character Andy in *Eightball #23* fixate upon this sense of individual identity in destructive ways. Both characters express what they believe to be the human desire for solitude and separation from society. However, this "human desire" for solitude and separation exists only as an illusion. This longing for detachment is a denial of the true human desire for community and companionship. By examining the choices, messages and actions of both Andy and Crevel, who both so desperately want to distance themselves from others, their motivations can be revealed. Through their own renunciation of their need for love and friendship, the truest aspect of human nature is made clear. Love is as necessary a component for human survival as eating, breathing, drinking and sleeping.

Take, for example, the story of a man who embarks on a spiritual pilgrimage to the desert to get away, be alone, and gain insight and perspective on himself and the world around him. He desires to understand the world from which he came and expects that the detachment from outside influence will render him a revelation on the nature of his world. The man returns home

no wiser than before and with no better understanding of his place in society, because his experience was limited to his own thoughts and not through experience. A second man, having the same hunger for knowledge, lives his entire life in the thick of community. He experiences life directly from the inside rather than observing from beyond. Which man is wiser, and which man has a better understanding of his world?

Crevel, in *My Body and I*, follows the path of the first man. *My Body and I* takes place in a hotel room in the mountains where Crevel has left to be alone to understand his existence. Crevel appears to be running from something. He asks if "only solitude can wash me?" (Crevel 27). At this point he thinks he desires solitude as a means of healing his wounded soul. He seeks an escape from the companionship which he believes has no effect on him. He claims that he doesn't find pleasure in anything, and that leisure activities are only a mask for his sorrow. At the same time though, while he thinks he wants to be truly alone, he claims that "no bridge connects me to the others" (Crevel 1). However, he brings with him a flower and a photograph which remind him of the ones he loved best. However, this fact betrays him. It is his fierce denial of the impact of his friendships that he had that causes him to believe he wants to be alone. Crevel claims that ^{he} is guilty of "false revelations" (Crevel 46). At the narrative's conclusion, Crevel emphatically states, "I am alone" (Crevel 145). Despite his claims, Crevel is not, never has been, and could never find solitude. By definition, human existence is necessarily composed of both social and individual components. If Crevel were truly alone, then he would be without the social component of his being. Crevel would not be human.

What then, might be the closest thing to being human without being human but a *superhuman*? Daniel Clowes uses the character Andy in *Eightball 423* to turn the conventions of the super-hero in the traditional comic book on their heads. Andy does not by any means fit the

stereotypical role. His super strength is acquired through smoking cigarettes, he has a bitter disposition towards the world, and most importantly he has the ability to erase people. We are first exposed to Andy in a scene where he picks a fight with a man for littering in the street. Andy asks the man "How the hell does one man stand a chance against four billion assholes?" (Clowes 1, 12). This question represents Andy's stance where he pits himself against all of humanity. At the end of the book, Andy uses his power to erase the littering man from existence. During the story Andy erases every character that has any strong connection to him (his grandfather and his best friend Louie) that do not reject him (the Nanny and Dusty). Clowes uses this action to express Andy's "desire" for separation from others in a destructive manner. Andy's disposition is best seen in ending choice A. While Clowes provides three separate endings for *Eighlball #23*, this ending best fits Andy's destructive behavior that progresses throughout the book. In ending choice A, "Andy zaps everyone in the world until he's the only one left" (Clowes 41, 12). Though Andy's waking persona acts out his wishes in destruction, his secret desire for companionship is revealed through his dreams. This secret takes the form of his sexual fantasies with his nanny and his dream where he is suffocated in a room full of clouds. By trying to escape his past transgressions he is haunted by them as they become clouds in his dream. Both the nanny and the clouds represent elements of his desire for friendship and love which he tries to escape from, but is ultimately consumed. In ending A. Andy, like Crevel, follows the path of the first man.

But what of the second man's story? Rene Crevel's surrealist contemporary, photographer Man Ray, embodies the ideals of community and companionship, and travels along a path similar to that of the second man. In his article *The Age of Light*, Man Ray writes, "It seems irrelevant and wasteful still to create works whose only inspirations are individual human

emotion and desire ... what can be more binding amongst beings than the discovery of a common desire?" (Ray i). The idea of sharing a work of art is a prime example of humanity's desire for community and companionship. Man Ray embraces this concept, while Crevel and Andy's secret wishes betray their hidden agreement. There is a common desire to *have* a common desire. Only by accepting rather than denying this human need for connection, we can find happiness. I am *not* alone. I take comfort in that fact when all else fails me.

Works Cited

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Crevel, Rene. My Body and I. Brooklyn: Archipelago Books, 2005.

Ray, Man. Photographs by Man Ray: 105 Works, 1920-1934. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1979.