



THE CULT OF THE SELF

FORM: SPEECH/TALK

AUTHOR: CHRIS HEDGES

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When you spend your life as a celebrity, you have no idea who you are. And yet we measure our lives by these celebrities. We seek to be like them. We emulate their look and behavior. We escape the messiness of real life through the fantasy of their stardom. We too long to attract admiring audiences for our grand ongoing life movie. We try to see ourselves moving through our life as a camera would see us, mindful of how we hold ourselves, how we dress, what we say. We have learned ways of speaking and thinking that grossly disfigure the way we relate to the world and those around us.

The fantasy of celebrity culture is not designed simply to entertain. It is designed to drain us emotionally, confuse us about our identity, blame ourselves for our predicament, condition us to chase illusions of impossible fame and happiness, and keep us from fighting back.

There were 12 million cosmetic plastic surgery procedures performed last year in the US. They were performed because in America most human beings, rich and poor, famous and obscure, have been conditioned to view themselves as marketable commodities. They are objects. Like consumer products, they have no intrinsic value. They must look fabulous and live on fabulous sets. They must remain young. They must achieve notoriety and money or the illusion of it to be a success and it does not matter how they get there.

The cult of the self dominates our culture. This cult has within it the classic traits of psychopaths. Superficial charm, grandiosity and self-importance, a need for constant stimulation, a penchant for lying, deception, and manipulation, and incapacity for remorse or guilt. And this is also the ethic promoted by corporations. It is the ethic of unfettered capitalism. It is the misguided belief that personal style and personal advancement mistaken for individualism are the same as democratic equality. It is the celebration of image over substance. We have a right in the cult of the self to get whatever we desire.

But the tantalizing illusions offered by our consumer culture are vanishing as we head towards collapse. The ability of the corporate state to pacify the country by extending credit and providing cheap manufactured goods to the masses is gone. The jobs we are shedding are not coming back. The belief that democracy lies in the choice between competing brands and the freedom to accumulate vast sums of personal wealth at the expense of others has been exposed as a fraud.

