AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL, PERFORMATIVE AND CONVERSATIONAL

FUNCTIONS OF THE SELFIE

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ABSTRACT

Why do we make selfies? Although a recent trend fuelled by the fast development of mobile cameras technology, social media networks and wider spread of internet accessibility, this questions has already been asked in numerous academic disciplines - from simply mining and analysing statistical data such as number of selfies in a given geographical region (Selfiecity), to more abstract, psychoanalytical and philosophical analysis of the act of snapping one's own picture.

This work is an attempt to identify the main functions of the selfie from both personal and social perspectives by analysing the main reasons that prompt us to take our own photograph and share it on a social media channel. The main questions asked here are why are we obsessed with selfies and do they help us to define our identities, build our autobiographical selves; or the opposite - are selfies the competing, alienated image of ourselves, that expand the gap between our true selves and our ideal selves.

At a different level, selfies may be a symptom of the digital era and particularly, the mobile technology development. The information overload presses us to use more and more visual tools to communicate and the rise of the selfie may be an early sign of future times, when narrative will consist predominantly of images rather than spoken language. It is not difficult to imagine a universal visual narrative that overcomes the difficulties of the spoken language.

Last but not least, with the recent acceptance of several selfie-based project from some well respected and internationally known art galleries, we are interested to find out what is the art world response to the selfie as a form of an artistic self-representation and a performative tool. And in more personal perspective, do selfies enable all of us to become artists in a world where everyone can be an art critic.

To answer these questions, we looked at the work of Jacques Lacan and Damasio from psychoanalytical and neuroscience perspective; Erving Goffman from a performance perspective and dug into the projects of Richard Prince and Amalia Ulman to find out what these conversations are about.

FOREWORD

What is a selfie? Oxford Dictionary defines selfies as: '*A photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically one taken with a smartphone or webcam and shared via social media*[1].' Selfiecity goes a bit further in narrowing down the definition and their research is specifically on selfies taken by the user only, that does not include other people and includes the full face of the user - or what they call a 'single selfie'. On the other hand, Katz and Crocker (2015) consider a selfie any photograph taken by the person, that includes the full or a part of the same person. And as much as we agree with Mulderig (as quoted by Katz and Crocker) that the self extends beyond our physical bodies to, let us say, craft items that we make, family members that we are emotionally attached to, pets, homes, food, etc. for the purposes of this research we exclude all photographs that do not include the user's face in whole or part.

During writing this research, there was a debate whether the word '*dialogue*' or '*conversation*' should be used in relations to selfies. We insist that there is a difference between dialogue and conversation and we argue that the selfie is more a **conversational** than **dialogical** tool, simply because it is communicating to multiple recipients simultaneously and it is also mediated through a digital media channel[2].

It is clear that the selfie fulfils functions, of which the most obvious one is probably the function of conversation - we post our self-made photos on social media sites and engage in conversations about the way we look and feel at a particular moment of time. However, this most salient function of the selfie goes deeper than that - why do we need to engage in conversation, why do we need to engage others in our narrative?

One quick answer here may be that because of mobile cameras technology for a first time we get to be a part of the memory-building process - it is now possible not only to take the photo of what is happening in front of us, but to be in the photo, to be part of the memory. That was relatively difficult prior to the advanced development of mobile cameras technology - think of all

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[1] *https://en.oxforddictionaries.com Oxford University Press, 2017*

[2] *Susan Brennan makes a distinctive difference between the two terms in her paper 'Conversation and Dialogue'. She defines dialogue as a conversation between two individuals and conversation as a 'joint activity in which two or more participants use linguistic forms and non verbal signals to communicate interactively... Conversation may also be mediated such as when electronic technology is used for speech or text'. Brennan, S. 2010*

these holiday photos where one family member is always behind the camera or all the nights out when you did not have a camera due to its size! Mobile cameras technology made it possible to instantly record events as they happen; social media networks on the other hand took care of the effortless, free of charge, worldwide distribution of such content.

Another possible answer is - we like to see ourselves. Before the mirrors, there were pools of water in which we could enjoy our reflections; technological development provided us with cameras and the more advanced they became, the easier it was for the photographer to also be a participant in the moment recording.

The arts have always been engaged with the identity of the artists - self-portraiture is not a recent thing (neither is a painting of one's dinner or bowl of fruits). However, this activity was a privilege for the selected few who had the skills and the access to education. Selfies are accessible to anyone with a mobile device camera. For 2017 the forecasted figure is 4.77 billion mobile phones worldwide, of which 2.32 billion are smart phones[3]. According to a 2016 economic survey in 2015 a median of 37% (up from 21% in 2013) of the population in emerging and developing countries reported owning a smart phone and using the internet occasionally, while a median of 68% own a mobile phone and use the internet in advanced economies[4]. 76% of internet users worldwide use social networking sites, and the most avid ones are found in regions with lower internet rates[5].

There are no specialist skills needed to make and distribute a selfie - all one needs is a smart phone, long enough arm and an internet connection. The cost? - virtually none.
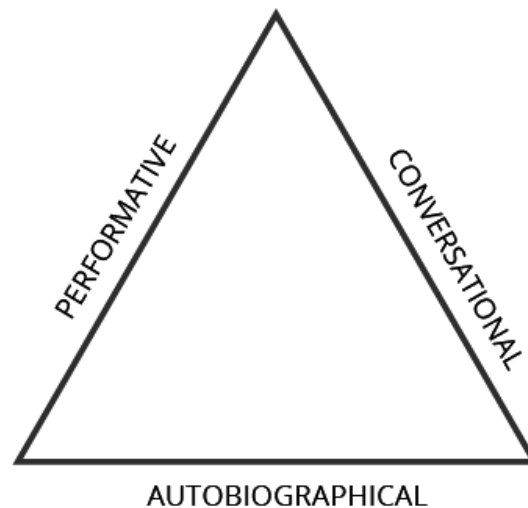
FUNCTIONS OF THE SELFIE

With this information in mind and within this line of thought, we identified three main functions of the selfie, which we called **autobiographical**, **performative** and **conversational**. The first one allows us to create and store memories and thus build our identity, or what Damasio (1999) refers to as the autobiographical self. The second function is performative and through this

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[3] *Source: https://www.statista.com/statistics/274774/forecast-of-mobile-phone-users-worldwide/*

[4] *Source: http://www.pewglobal.org/2016/02/22/smartphone-ownership-and-internet-usage-continues-to-climb-in-emerging-economies/*

[5] *Source: http://www.pewglobal.org/2016/02/22/smartphone-ownership-and-internet-usage-continues-to-climb-in-emerging-economies/*

function we create, build and express ourselves creatively. The third function is conversational - we believe that selfies have become a new universal visual narrative. We also believe that theses three functions are closely interlaced and that they are in a ever-repeating, cyclical alliance - one, where each applies forces but neither can prevail.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL FUNCTIONS OF THE SELFIE

Personal identity is the concept that we develop about our selves in the course of our lives, which may include facts about us (e.g. place of birth, skin colour, gender) and choices the we make (e.g. education). In other words, personal identity is a combination of traits over which we might or we might not have control. Damasio (1999) defines the autobiographical self as the organised record of lived past and anticipated future, heavily dependent on past memories and projections for the future (Damasio, 1999)

Damasio argues that "*we are only fully conscious when the self comes to mind*". The conscious mind is a flow of mental images (including visual, auditory, tactile, etc.) and a sense of self - i.e. where and who we are in relations to others. According to him, we regain our conscious minds every morning when we wake up and a conscious mind is a mind in which the self is present. The self on the other hand, introduces a subjective perspective in the mind - we generate brain maps of the body interior (a constant) and we use them as a reference point of the self. Why the body

interior? Because it keeps us healthy and therefore is relatively constant - i.e. it does not deviate much on a day-to-day basis.

Let's hypothetically apply Damasio's theory in reverse: what if that subjective perspective of the self has evolutionary grown (or evolutionary destabilised) and now seeks a physical confirmation and less subjective assurance of existence? Our bodies exteriors, although growing and developing, do so slowly and at a continuous rate. If we regain our consciousness every morning when the self comes to mind, then maybe ascertaining our physical existence on a daily basis is not such a crazy idea. So in this way, selfies may be regarded as a tool for a continuous confirmation of our physical existence, using as a reference point our physical body exteriors; a kind of imagery maps of our exterior, which in its turn is an extension of the self.

On the other hand, the autobiographical self is '*the organised record of lived past and anticipated future*' (Damasio, 1999). Damasio posits that the autobiographical self prompts the extended memory, reasoning, imagination, creativity and language, which on their turn create the instruments of culture - religion, justice, trade, the arts, science and technology. Could we then think of a selfie as an extended byproduct of our imagination and creativity, simply a physical tool, which makes use of the instruments of culture?

As we already discussed, mobile camera technology made it possible for anyone taking photos to be an active participant in the memory creation. The person taking the photograph is no longer an abstract concept, a faceless name, someone whose presence is merely made real by the presence of the photograph itself. Thanks to mobile phone cameras, we now can provide a real evidence of the existence of the photograph creator and he (the creator) has an equal share in the memory creating process along with everyone else within the photograph. Moreover, we do not need other people to share memories with. Even if we go through an experience alone, there will be no more photos of deserted landscapes or historical buildings with strangers - we are now able to create memories in which we are the creator AND the active participant. Social media on the other hand, provides the platform for sharing.

In this way, mobile phone cameras enabled us to participate on a more equal footing in the memory creation, but they also provided an opportunity for alienation. Sharing, instead of a first hand experience, is now mediated by social media sites. And although we share instantly with

more people than before, this sharing is now selective and planned. We now have full control over the memories we create, who we share them with and which memories we share.

Does this process change us?

Jacques Lacan provides an interesting framework to answer this question. The Mirror Stage theory (1949) argues that from the moment we are conscious about our existence, by being able to recognise ourselves in the mirror, we create an alienated and competing personality, which is in endless dissonance with our real self. If the mirror experience (prior to the invention of mobile technology) was a relatively personal activity - one will look at the mirror in the privacy of the home - technology made it possible to have a tool for the creation of mirror images constantly at our disposal. And even more - social networks provided a platform for the distribution and multiplication of this competing personality.

But why do we share? If the alienated self is in dissonance with the real self, if this is a competing, hostile self that we don't like, why do we go public with it?

The long answer: we want to converse, because we need to confirm, conform, adjust and mould this alienated hostile self into something acceptable to both us and everyone else. We need the attention, the confirmation and the approval of others; we need to hear it that this self is good enough, or we need to shout it that we don't care what everyone thinks - two different ways to get the same result: to identify who we actually are. We need to see ourselves, to prove our existence, to state that we are here now, thus manifesting our identity and by looking at our own (hostile) reflection, striving to achieve the ideal self that we aspire to become.

PERFORMATIVE FUNCTIONS OF THE SELFIE

Comprehensive research into selfies done by Katz and Crocker in 2015 shows that although selfies are meant to appear momentary and spontaneous, 45% of all respondents[6] agreed that "*It is important to make sure I look good in my selfies*", and 17% strongly agreed with this statement.

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[6] *Katz and Crocker study encompasses multiple date collection in US, UK and China. In the US sample, two thirds of all respondents were female (n=117); UK sample was evenly divided between make and female (n=74) and the sample form China was a total of 23 responders (n=23) of which three quarters were female. In their research findings, Katz and Crocker do not specify if 45% and 17% are the overall all countries response; however, further in their findings they mention that the number of responses agreeing with the statement in UK is "nearly half"; no statistics shown separately for US (Boston University).*

This supports the argument that although selfies are a snapshot of the momentary state of the self, they also reflect and are an extension of our image - the way we want to be seen by others. In other words, majority of social media distributed images are prepared deliberately and with thought and consideration of the way we present our selves to peers.

According to Katz and Crocker's (2015) research, only 29% of the respondents agreed that selfies should reflect the "true" self (7% strongly agreed and 22% agreed)., while 44% were neutral and nearly 30% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Katz and Crocker came to the conclusion that, based on their findings and the clearly varied opinions of the respondents, there is no compelling evidence that people believe that selfies represent the 'true' self.

Interestingly, the respondents in this study were alert that they have no control over the consumption of their selfies and this is where the consideration and thoughtfulness when taking (and we might say carefully composing) a selfies comes into play. These findings refute Harper's (2003) statement about spontaneity in visual conversation, where he argues that "*they do these things [exchanging messages and selfies] mainly without thinking. It comes naturally, or more accurately, it comes from the heart*" (Harper, 2003, p.215 as quoted by Katz and Crocker, 2015). They also support the hypothesis that selfies are a branding tool with which we build a public image of our selves[7], a publicly accessible and visible variation of our autobiographical self.

So, every time we take a selfie, we perform in front of the camera: we set the stage, choose the role and play a short performance. When discussing performance, let us consider this: performances are an act of representing a reality from the perspective of an actor, which may differ from the reality of the observer. Goffman (1959) refers to three main points of reference of each performance: this of the **performer** (self), the **observer** (audience) and the **outsider** (neither performer, nor observer). In order for the **performer** to be successful, he has to be 'truly taken in by his own act' (Goffman, 1959). Goffman's idea of a *personal front* and the way the **performer** uses stimuli to make the performance more believable fits fully with the way selfies are staged. *Personal front* uses vehicles to convey signs and clues of our performance which could be relatively fixed - e.g. gender, age, racial characteristics; or relatively transitory - e.g. clothing, posture, setting, facial expression. Goffman distinguishes two main types of stimuli, which the

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[7] *We should note here, that Katz and Crocker's data is statistically insignificant and entirely based on university students; therefore the research has a strong bias towards people who, by their actions, can be identified as fully aware and understanding of the potential negative impact on their future career towards which they are already working and studying.*

performer needs to control in order to control the credibility of the **observer** (and potentially the **outsider**):

> **Appearance** - these are stimuli which reveal the social statuses of the performer - whether the performer is engaging in work, play, socialising, etc.
>
> and
>
> **Manner** - these stimuli convey information about the interaction role of the performer, which they are expected to play in the oncoming situation.

If the **performer** is not sincerely convinced in his own staged interpretation of reality, the **observer** may not believe the performance and even less so the **outsider**, who is not the intended audience and therefore may not be privy to the narrative. Consistency and coherence between **appearance** and **manner** is required for a sincere act, one that will be believed by both observers and outsiders.

Application of Goffman's theory once again refutes Harpers' idea of spontaneity and further supports Katz and Crocker's findings that selfies are intentionally and deliberately staged to represent a reality that the performer wishes to convey and subsequently employs variety of visual stimuli to make the performance (and hence, the reality) believable[8].

AMALIA ULMAN - "EXCELLENCES & PERFECTIONS"

Amalia Ulman is probably the person that demonstrates this newly gained and facilitated by mobile cameras technology and social media ability to perform and represent ourselves again and again. In her project "Excellences & Perfections" she takes a multitude of imaginary identities. In her own words, the project "[*it] was more than a satire*". Ulman picked on the image / self-branding side of the problem and mocked a generation that in the words of Simon Sinek for

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[8] *In a completely different line of thought, we can go further in applying Goffman's model to explain the increase in educational institutions presence on Facebook and the resulting withdrawal of younger people from Facebook - the performance that the educational institutions are putting together is simply not sincere enough to engage the observers (young people) in this narrative.*

Inside Quest, is '*low on self-esteem*' and because of that, addicted to social media '*instant gratification*' (Sinek, 2016).

Ulman's (in her words) planned and scripted narrative is turned into an exaggerated performance through series of selfies. Posing in variety of settings which follow an already established pattern of a "successful" selfie, Ulman accompanies each image with short narrative, also following the unwritten rules and the tone of voice of the selfie conversation - grammar and spelling are bad, punctuation is incomplete or missing, excessive use of bad abbreviations (or phone keyboard abbreviations); incomplete sentences, etc. For example: "*Ok ok last 1 promise! This place was so cool tho ~~!!!*" accompanies a selfie in the reflection of a mirror in a hotel bedroom, where the bedroom is also visible.

In order to keep the **appearance** and **manner** consistent and credible, she even makes the occasional selfie "mistake" - taking a video instead of photo. The narrative to this reads: "*Haha so dumb didn kno i was recordin*". Along with this, she also publishes a photo of a perfectly arranged flower petals, coffee cup and scissors. The use of contrasting elements, like the scissors in the morning coffee set up serve as little clues to awaken us to the harsh truth - the petals had to be cut in order to appear in the narrative. The inference here is that nothing is spared in the representation of the perfect life.

At the beginning the narrative presents an enviable life style bordering perfection, which later develops symptoms of low self-esteem and by the end - an enlightening.

Is Amalia Ulman mocking and copying? Has she created an imaginary persona? A closer look into her Instagram page prior and post the "*Excellences & Perfections*" may suggest that the project was rather an extension of Ulman's regular Instagram activities. It seems like the project emerged as yet another opportunity to self-brand and promote - something that many contemporary 'artists'

know only too well how to do. One thing is for sure - she, just like any other person, was performing.

There are already a number of studies worldwide that provide insightful data that we get 'high' on social media - our brains release dopamine (the reward molecule) and oxytocin (the love hormone), two powerful hormones that are highly addictive. According to an Australian study, social media makes us feel a sense of belonging, makes us create expectations, we feel a rush of happiness and '*we advance our concept of self through sharing*' (Soat, 2015)

Rettberg (2014) states that although blogging and selfies are not exclusive to women[9], the accusation of being narcissistic and exhibitionistic is more common when women engage in these practices.

This cultivation of image poses two main questions: are we using selfies as a tool to brand our identities and create a public image, an ideal 'self' that we can successfully 'sell'? And if so - who is the intended audience for this product? Katz and Crocker's research also shows that the respondents are well aware of the popular and somewhat established opinions linking selfies with narcissism. They were also conscious of the possible harm of randomly sharing selfies on social media platforms. But this act of self-representation is found to be somewhat liberating - for a first time we have been provided with a platform that allows us to speak freely to a large number of people.
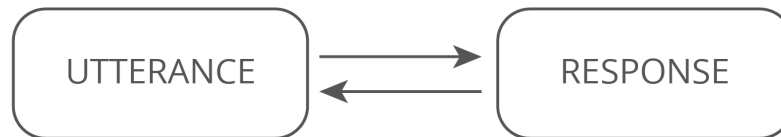
CONVERSATIONAL FUNCTIONS OF THE SELFIE

> *"You see a girl that you like, so you take a selfie, put it on Instagram and if she 'likes' it - then it's a game"* (Luke, 21, Cambridge)

Conversation is a joint activity in which two or more participants use linguistic forms and nonverbal signals to communicate interactively. They are structured into adjacent pairs: first and second parts produced by different participants. The first part is utterance, which prompts the second part: response. Both utterances and responses are contingent upon one another and

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[9] *According to <u>selfiecity.net</u> and their data analysis on selfies from 5 major cities 64.72% of all selfies are made and posted on social media by women. This percentage varies considerably: women selfies are 1.3 times as many as men in Bangkok to 4.6 times in Moscow.*

interpretation is incremental and dependent on the context. A simple diagram of a face-to-face dialogue between two participants may be represented like that:

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┌──────────────┐              ┌──────────────┐
│              │  ─────────▶  │              │
│  UTTERANCE   │              │   RESPONSE   │
│              │  ◀─────────  │              │
└──────────────┘              └──────────────┘
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The utterance and response exchange is repeated multiple times. In a more complex face-to-face exchange with multiple participants the utterance and response pattern varies depending on the number of participants and accepted structure of 'taking turns' - in other words, an informal conversation between friends will be structured differently than a business meeting. However, in either case all the participants will follow the established 'accepted' pattern for taking turns within the constraints of place and time, as in a face-to-face conversation all participants will be at the same place and exchange will occur at the same time frame. In addition, face-to-face communications are supported by nonverbal signals as nods, mood, intonation, etc.

The structure of the selfie exchange over social media network is not much different than that of a face-to-face conversation. A comparison reveals that:

A. The interaction is mediated by the social media platform and therefore the responses use the tools provided by this media platform - i.e. LIKE, comment, heart, symbol, etc.

B. There is presence of nonverbal clues provided but the social media platform and the selfie itself: he setting in which the selfie is made, the face expression recorded in the selfie, the type of response (LIKE is different than LOVE and different than linguistic comment). As face-to-face conversation gives signals about our preferred role of relationship (specialist, friend, parent, etc.), visual conversations are also dynamically enacted with nonverbal signals.

C. There is no set time frame within which all exchanges will take place - e.g. comments or LIKES may be delayed with weeks or more

D.   The turn-sequence is chaotic due to the lack of constraints of place and time

E.   Single turn-sequences may develop - e.g. a separate conversation / dialogue develops under one comment only

And as in face-to-face conversation , the visual communication exchange, although it may appear egotistical and self-centred, has its own purpose: to "ping" a response, which may be positive (approval), negative or neutral (refusal to engage in conversation)

Just as a face-to-face communication can be taken out of context when the place/time, so could be a photo when viewed in a different than intended media channel or time. Walter Benjamin wrote in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* that '*painting is in no position to present an object for simultaneous collective experience*' and he compares this experience with the experience of the moving image where individual reactions are more or less influenced by the collective reactions of the public present in the movie theatre. Social media (and internet in general) has not only provided a platform for simultaneous collective experience - it has also added additional extra dimensions. Benjamin's two context-defining constants of space and time are turned into the two greatest context variables in a virtual environment: consider viewing a selfie out of the intended "place" and after the intended "time".

When though of as a potent conversational tool lacking linguistics barriers, Fields and Carter (2015) discuss the potential power of the selfie to inspire '*social activism and critical consciousness*'. Fields and Carter are not the first ones to explore a more practical use of the selfie conversation. Their experiment shows that, although visual, a communication such as a selfie, still varies in interpretations across cultures.

RICHARD PRINCE - AN ATTEMPT TO CONVERSE

As we established, a conversation is not simply a series of random message exchanged by participants. In order for conversation to exist, these messages follow a structure and a logic and are made in adjacency pairs (Sarah Brennan, 2010) - i.e. a question starts existing only after an adequate response is given. This poses a problem when analysing Richard Prince process of appropriation of images from Instagram. At first it seems that, prior to appropriation, he engages in conversation with the original creator of the image; a closer look reveals that in most cases his

part of the conversation bares hardly any relevance to the image posted and, in some cases, it is simply a string of emoticons.
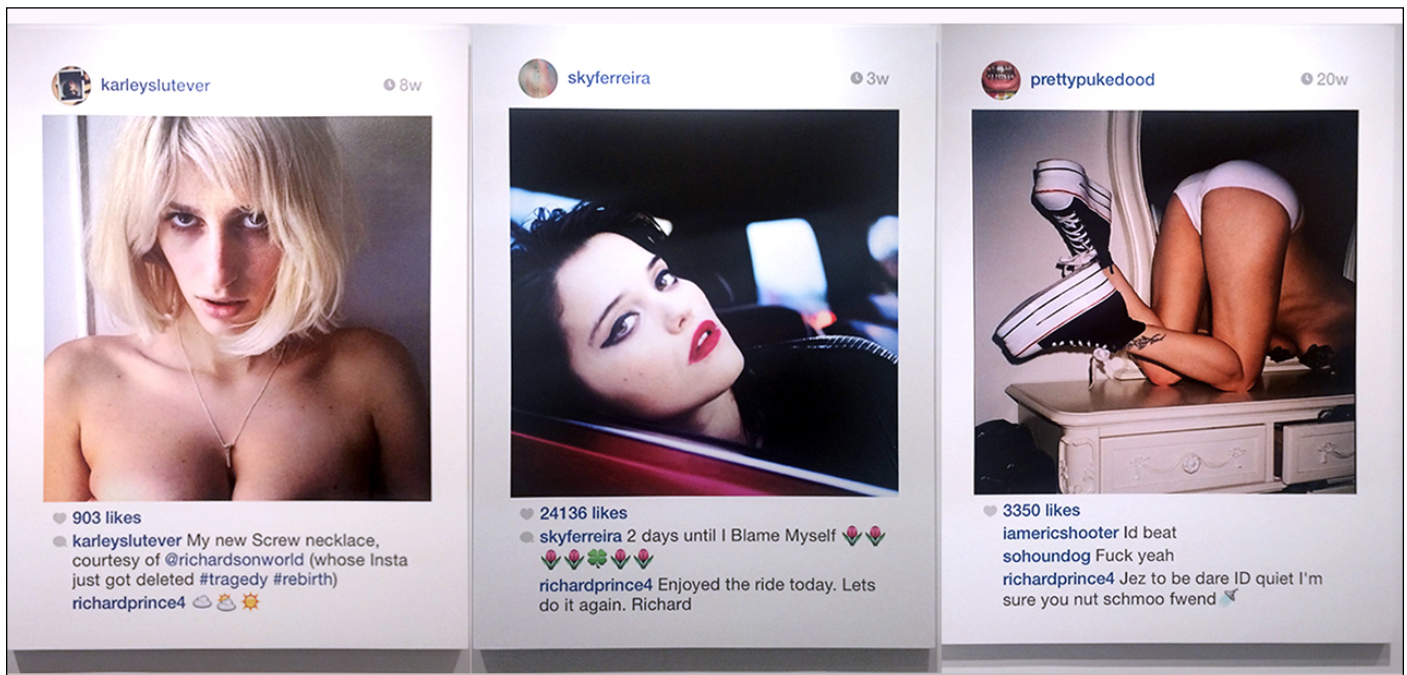
Three possible reasons pop into mind:

1. He understands that although publicly posted, these images are intended for the user's immediate circle, which (as Katz and Crocker research suggest) uses its own language, based on common experiences, jokes, etc. Therefore as an outsider, Prince cannot possibly understand and contribute to the conversation; yet, he makes a valid effort to 'belong' to this circle of people.

2. Another reason might be that Prince is simply mocking the futility of the whole process - the public exchange of images, the ultimate call for response they represent and the artificiality of the commenting process10. Prince's comment in this case is simply farcical due diligence, saying: I commented, although inadequately, but the whole thing does not make any sense anyway; however, having commented, I now belong to this little circle and therefore I can appropriate, because you made me consume your work.

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10 *Let's not forget that any user is in control of their feed and any negative comments may be removed and blocked, which essentially prevents by default and most certainly discourages any remotely negative criticism; if any such criticism exists, it is more likely that it is shared privately via messages between people that mutually trust and know each other.*

3. The act of appropriation is not responding to an utterance (posting of the image); the
    appropriation itself is in fact an utterance to start a conversation.

Benjamin's idea of detachment from space and time is what makes Prince's appropriations so shocking (but arguable less than his working ethics - from an ethics point of view, there will always be the question has he got the right to do that) - deconstructing the original work and taking it out of its natural habitat; removing the time element and 'mechanically reproducing' them in a way that size actually matters.

As Douglas Coupland simply puts it, "*Selfies are mirror we can freeze... They allow us to see how others look at themselves in a mirror making their modelling face when nobody is looking... except these days everybody is around everywhere all the time*". We are in general agreement with Coupland; however we think that what is feared the most from most people is the refusal of other to engage in conversation about ourselves. Or as Keith Lowell Jensen said: '*Our biggest fear is that no one is watching*'.

Prince is simply watching. And we generally don't mind the attention and the presence of yet another **outsider** to our narrative. What outrages most people is not the act of watching, it is his ability to capitalise on his outsider position and turn our effort, our creativity, our deliberate staging of the public self into a monetary gain - one, that we do not participate in.

But this only makes us think of the branding qualities of the selfie. If the selfie is purposefully cultivated and made for a specific audience and public use, what are we promoting and who are we selling it to? In business, branding is the process involving the creation and establishment of a unique name and image for a product[11] in the consumers' mind. Branding deals with both physical and non-physical characteristics of the product and aims to create a differentiated presence and position in the consumer mindset, highly distinguishable of competitive products. The basic idea behind branding is to create a set of memorable attributes which emphasise salient and unique characteristics in order to establish mental shortcuts - the stronger the links, the more likely is the recall and therefore the likelihood to purchase increases proportionately.

Are we not both the creator and the product every time we post a selfie online? The authorship is obvious and easily explainable - we hold the handset, we critically assess and correct our

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[11] *And services*

appearance in front of the mirror, we strike a pose and we press the shutter, then we crop, filter and edit. But this is where the interesting part starts - from then on we start acting like an agent: we choose the media channel, we control the audience, we can even choose the time of the performance. And even more interesting thing happens after that - once it is published, our photo, our face on it, turns into a product - a representational product of **our self**, targeted **by us** for the **consumption** of our preselected audience. Yet another three-way relationship between us and our self-representation, which we can simply classify in stages as: INVOLVED - DETACHED - PERFORMATIVE; or roles: ARTIST - AGENT - PRODUCT.

EVERYONE IS AN ARTIST

In his paper 'The Artist and the Self' (2000), Bruno pays great attention to the imagination as a drive for creation (as opposed to an initial, more epistemological function) and its central role in art creation as an immediate source of truth. Bruno's paper is largely based on the works of Richard Kearney and Charles Taylor; the last one in 1991 calls the artistic an "*agent of original self-definition*" and further states that the imagination and artistic creation become the mode of self-realisation (Taylor, 1991). In this light, a selfie is a conductor of creative and imaginative process, made possible to take shape and form because of the technological development level we have reached. As in support (and as in an extended version) of Benjamin's "*The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*", empowered by mobile technology, for a first time we have the opportunity to instantly define ourselves by creating and using our imagination and this act of self-realisation is cyclical and constantly redefines us again and again. We are the artist, the agent, and the first consumer of our artwork in a word, where anyone can be an art critic. And if we learn to perfectly synchronise our **appearance** and **manner** (Goffman, 1959), we are then more likely to not only successfully convince the regular **observers**, but also to convince the casual **outsider** that this is us, this is our identity, this is who we believe we are, even if it is only in a short period of time. As Shakespeare said it: '*All the world's a stage, And all the men and women merely players*[12]'

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[12] *Shakespeare, W. "*As You Like It*", Act II Scene VII*

CONCLUSION

Selfies can be viewed as a tool to constantly adjust our subjective ideas of the self through role play, performance, memories creation, encounters with our competing selves and conversation. They are a dynamic construct that self-regulates and self-adjusts triangulated by:

- surveillance on oneself
- response of others
- our competing self

By creating memories we confirm our existence and enrich our experience and the ripple effect of the memories creation is adding to our '*lived past*' and shaping our '*anticipated future[13]*'. The self that we see on a daily basis is persistently reminding us that we can be better versions of ourselves and we slide into a never-ending contest, where we become our primary competitor. We perform in order to find the ideal versions of ourselves and we engage other people in this search of perfection through self-representation. This conversation sets the cornerstones of the imposed norms; so we are constantly bouncing off what we feel we are, what we think we want to be and what how others see us.

If Blackburn is right in saying that '*what we call the self may be not a wonderful inner thing that is ours alone and the framer of our destiny, but just the sum of our experiences*' (as quoted by Acocella, 2014), then the mobile camera technology development has enabled us to add many new dimensions to the self by providing a new experience-making tool.

Diane Arbus said that "*A photograph is a secret about a secret. The more it tells you, the less you know*". And it may just be that the core motivation for selfie-making is just to add to the secret by revealing; to whisper tat there is more to us than the obvious; that we are multifaceted, ever-changing individuals, shaped by our experiences and our perceptions of the world around us.

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[13] *Damasio, 1999*

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