



Putting Oneself Out There: The “Selfie” and the Alter-Rhythmic Transformations of Subjectivity

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I. What Is a Selfie?

Venice, Santa Lucia, Terminal Station. Crossing the train station concourse and entering the forecourt, a world opens up: the Canale, the vaporetti, the gondolas, churches and palazzi. So much uniqueness, so much culture, so many stories. If one wants to slip—on the way to the major sights—into the narrow alleys, it’s just a matter of turning left, then right, crossing the Ponte degli Scalzi, keeping the Burger King to your left, entering the Calle Lunga and turning left again a few meters later and following the trail toward Rialto. And finally, here, at the Ponte de la Bergama, tourist traffic halts because it’s selfie time. A smile for the world captured in my hands, in the background can finally be seen the “real” Venice as a bit of flair, the little channels (in Venice called “rio”), the small bridges, and the narrow route along the Fondamenta del Rio Marin. Everyone poses—mostly alone, but also with others for an “ussie.”

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Some show off their muscles, some their décolletage; some wear sunglasses, some not; some hold their dogs and pose with one arm extended to hold the camera and some—the experts—carry a selfie stick bought at the Ponte degli Scalzi. Picture taken, okay—what’s next?

It is no understatement to suggest that most of the 150,000 tourists strolling through “la Serenissima” on peak days could be plopped down right here, and after the selfie was taken, led right back to their trains, cars, buses, or cruise liners—the Venice selfie is taken and shared, the “little self” was here, *ergo sum*. And the magnificent world? It disappeared, it was reduced to scenery, and as such: it became replaceable. Canale Grande, Rialto, San Marco square—none of them matter. Had that not been the case, the Dutch “fakebooking” student Zilla van den Born wouldn’t have had such great success sending vacation selfies to her family, allegedly from Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand, when in reality they were taken and altered in her student flat. No need to have *been* to a place, only to have a photo of oneself there. And what argument could anyone muster against photographic proof, after all?

Pathological Narcissism?

Such critical impressions—which even one of this chapter’s authors experienced during a stay in the Laguna—have been part of the selfie discourse ever since the selfie was made mainstream by the release of the iPhone in January 2007. For many, photographing endlessly the ego is the perfect expression of a culture that is not only narcissistically formed but socially malformed: LOOK! AT! ME! I’m here, I’m there, I’m in the picture therefore I am. In scanning a space like a location scout, who has time to take in the space itself, to look at the people passing by? The critique has practically become a truism.

In order to attempt a diagnosis, an obvious question serves as a starting point: How does the selfie, this mobile self-portrait, relate to the long tradition of the artistic self-portraiture that has undergirded the Western cultures of individualism and individualization from the Renaissance to the present day? It’s true that, unlike the self-portrait, the selfie is not taken for private enjoyment, but for public display. It’s typically shared

via social media immediately after being taken. But how has this particular digital practice changed the status of the photographs? And from whose point of view, exactly, are they taken?

Tradition of the Self-Portrait?

The world recedes, the “little self” comes to the fore—but what exactly is expressed? Looking back at the art history for an answer, one finds (at least) two positions. A more affirmative reading stemming from the art critic Jerry Saltz aligns the selfie to the longer history of self-portraits represented, for example, by Parmigianino’s “Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror” (1523/24): “All the attributes of the selfie are here” in Parmigianino’s painting, writes Saltz: “[T]he subject’s face from a bizarre angle, the elongated arm, foreshortening, compositional distortion, the close-in intimacy” (Saltz 2014).

Saltz pays little attention to the mirror that, especially in early modern times, combined attributes of both truth and lie. Interpreting another famous self-portrait, Johannes Gump’s “Self-Portrait” (1646), the French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy points out the difference between two sorts of similarity: the mechanical-optical similarity of the mirror-image and the imaginary-reflexive similarity of the self-portrait (cf. Nancy 2015). On the left side of the painting Gump swaps what he sees (and is invisible for us) with the image in the mirror (that we can see). On the right side of the canvas he shows the face as a handmade mask looking at us. Gump’s preference between the two kinds of truth established by those two depictions is being clarified beyond any doubt by two allegorical figures: To the left he positions the cat as symbol of shrewd deceit, to the right we see the dog as symbol of blunt truth.

Nancy subscribes to this allegorical representation because he perceives the mirror reflection (“le reflet”) as impregnated with narcissism. In the absence of the mirror-image, however, the portrait presents an opportunity to become similar to someone else. For Nancy, this production of a non-mirror-similarity is the *conditio sine qua non* to form a self that goes beyond mere re-presentation, deceit and narcissism in order to unveil something that is not known and not yet shown, a not-yet-visible part of the self.

From this perspective, selfies are wholly illusory masks of the ego, since the person is always present in the narcissistic mirror of the double camera that the iPhone 4 introduced in order to photograph in both directions, front and back. The person in the image may look at us, may show us her face, but we remain caught in the similarity between the specular reflection and the face as a mask: We cannot find a different, more genuine self.

This would also hold true for Jerry Saltz who—despite the parallel lines he drew—could not find classical self-portrait’s claims for eternity in the selfie. The traditional self-portrait lives by “the tension between an external interest in the extraordinary person (or at least imagined to be extraordinary) and her programmatic self-staging” as the art historians Ulrich Pfisterer and Valeska von Rosen point out (Pfisterer and von Rosen 2005: 23). The latter would qualify only for VIP selfies such as those in Kim Kardashian West’s notorious 2015 volume *Selfish* to stand in this tradition. For the normal smartphone user, the following rule applies: I am not special, therefore I must programmatically follow and copy extravagant self-stagings for reasons of the economy of attention.

Forgetting the “Weariness of the Self”?

If selfies, as mass phenomenon, do not represent a self in the sense of the “extraordinary person,” then what *do* they represent?

Shortly after gaining notoriety for the clip “Super Cool” (*Supergeil*) produced for the supermarket chain Edeka, the performance artist Friedrich Liechtenstein published a small book, “Selfie Man” (2014), which opens with a remarkable thesis: “Selfies are escapism as response to self-oblivion” (*Selfies sind Eskapismus als Antwort auf das Sichvergessen*). Liechtenstein’s *aperçu* calls forth the classic relation between self, authenticity and truth, yet he denies its relevance for the emerging selfie culture. For him the selfie does not enact any work on the self, it does not inform identity politics, but rather is a technique that does not deal with the self as a determined entity or essence—although the citation glosses over whether the forgetfulness is individual or collective. Is the “little self” an affirmative subversion of the claim to be someone, to be oneself, a self?

This fits perfectly into Alain Ehrenberg’s proposal of Western cultures as agglomerations of “wearied selves” (Ehrenberg 2010) who have exceeded all motivation and power to subject to the highly normative practice of constant self-modeling. Instead, according to Liechtenstein, they prefer to take tiny little pictures of their “little selves” as a form of self-management—yet these pictures do insist on being published, even in book form. Liechtenstein’s thesis, however escapist, confirms the urge to manage one’s own post-identity in highly performative ways.

One preliminary conclusion might be worded thus: The world has disappeared, the selfies as “little selves” are there, but as mirror reflections they do not (and cannot) show a self, because the self as a unique position has been replaced by “selfing” as an endless process and a media spectacle. But: For whom? From whom? And for what reason?

The Desire of Pictures

As already stated, the selfie is not taken for the purpose of analysis, but for the purpose of sharing. Looking at the selfie is not about content such as a six-pack or the boobs of a star like Kardashian West. What is shared in and with the selfie is the difference itself that becomes visible in the huge archive of self-similar selfies. For this reason, the British art historian Daniel Rubinstein, like many other theorists, emphasizes on the fact that it is difficult, if not impossible, to apply the established semiotic toolbox for its interpretation. The right question is not “What does the selfie show?” but “Where is it?” (Rubinstein 2015: 176). It’s only this second question that opens the horizon for understanding selfie culture as a virtual field of self-similarities that constantly both mutate and replicate the original image.

Putting aside the question whether selfies can be analyzed semiotically or not, Rubinstein’s plea for a perspective beyond clear subject-object-relation is valid; at least more valid than fears of selfie-induced cultural decline. In this sense, selfies seem to exemplify the approach of W.J.T. Mitchell, who claimed that we should stop trying to interpret images and start asking: “What do pictures want?” No longer should we attempt, according to Mitchell, to make sense of the interpreter’s deepest

wishes so as to understand the pictures' content or message. In order to investigate the relation to the picture beyond clear roles and patterns, Mitchell tries to make them less transparent and comprehensible, and insists that we ought to withdraw from the temptation to conceptualize them as a transparent medium that makes something visible (Mitchell 2008: 69). Methodologically, he sets up two basic premises: first, that pictures enjoy a special status as animated beings, quasi-actors and pseudo-persons; second, that any interpretation of pictures views them as "subalterns" carrying the stigma of difference and ambiguity in serving both as mediators and as scapegoats in the field of human visibility (Mitchell 2008: 66).

Framing selfies in this non-transparent way Mitchell has proposed, beyond the search for a fixed self, we can begin to see selfies as subaltern and as contrasted to a self that—seen this way—becomes only allegedly fixed. This impulse also underlies Liechtenstein's "Selfie Man," which proposes a radically subjective immersion in the world of the selfie, thus leaving behind imperatives of coherent and authentic self-modeling in order to embrace contingency that—paradoxically enough—can provide for a new feeling of safety. Ultimately, he reminds us, there certainly are billions of other users who are both unique and distinct in doing this same thing.

"I" Is the Others

From this perspective, selfies are viewed and liked not by friends in the common and old-fashioned sense of the word (friends at home, in school, at work etc.), but by friends in the sense of other social-media users: It is one of the consequences of globalism, writes culture critic Nadja Geer (2016: 133), that the world around us (*Mitwelt*) demands attention, rather than the individual human beings around us (*Mitmensch*). On social-media platforms, responsabilization (the responsibility for one's personal appearance on social media) meets interconnected machines, networks, and platforms. The result are visual codes that might have had an emancipative, Do-It-Yourself premise, but due to the general connectivity of the internet have always been "positioned in digital media

cultures and, via economies of networking (clicks, likes, tags and comments) linked to cultural techniques of naming, collecting, sorting and counting” (Reichert 2015: 89). Being so embedded in public forums creates a normative form of transparency: The most-liked selfies—the prominent, “exceptional” people—are taken as normative standards and drive “normal” users to contort themselves just to project themselves into these famous pictures. Social pressures to conform, which had formerly been a local phenomenon that went hand in hand with retreat rooms and sites of escape, have now become ubiquitous.

II. The Selfie, Selfing, and Subjectivation

To sum up our phenomenology and theoretical framing of the selfie, we could settle on four central features of our discussion: The selfie is *oblivious*, as Liechtenstein discussed; it’s *shared*, per Rubinstein; it’s *serial*, as Mitchell explained, and above all it’s *determined by others*. These four features correlate with salient points of contemporary theories of subjectivity and can serve to inscribe the selfie, as cultural practice, into current modes that regard the subject as a product of the Social. In this part we will slightly change the order in which we presented the aforementioned elements and begin by presenting aspects of Nancy’s “communication” (*shared*), Butler’s “iterability” (*serial*), Gambetti’s “void” (*oblivious*) and (post-)Marxist alienation (*determined by others*). Fundamentally, we are working from the assumption that we are entitled to understand “selfing”—*this repetitive taking and archiving of selfies in order to be shared*—as a process of subjectification, that is, as a way of determining an individual and his or her psyche vis-à-vis social instances, norms, and behavioral patterns. At the same time, there needs to be differentiation between general types and processes of such determination and the concrete production of a certain singularized self. In order to do that we operate according to Bührmann and Schneider’s semantical distinction between (general) “subjectivation” and (concrete) “subjectification” (Bührmann and Schneider 2008: 100, Foucault 1978). The main question is: Does the self that takes selfies of itself insert, attach, or suppress itself vis-à-vis a certain way of production by (re-)producing itself through

the active proliferation of pictures of itself that it actuates? Our aim in this discussion is to prepare the ground for our thesis of the selfie's blank space as a new form of *alter-rhythmic* transparency that we will lay down here and conclude at the third part of the paper.

Shared: Com-munication

In "Being Singular Plural" (1996), Jean-Luc Nancy lays down a concept of communication according to which communication neither connects, nor conveys meaning, but on the contrary—through *sharing*—a being, a subject, is induced that realizes itself as being from the very beginning in in-common, because it has been brought forth through this common sharing (Nancy 1996: 94). By revisiting, in this conceptual framework, the Aristotelian notion of "pollachôs legomenon," Nancy asserts that "Being is said in many ways," that "the singularity of Being is its plural," that "[t]he multiplicity of the said (that is, of the sayings) belongs to Being as its constitution" (Nancy 1996: 38). Mediation, that is, how the plurality and the singularity are related one to the other, remains constitutive for subjectivation also in this post-Hegelian context, but it is neither something external that gets embodied, nor a historical-philosophical necessary step towards the subject's fulfilled manifestation. Mediation is the point of departure of every attempt to grasp the being in its common/plural character and as such an intermediary point of departure through which every understanding of the subject in its plurality has to go through. The latter makes it possible for Nancy to extract the notion of mediation in the form of a "mediation without an instrument," since this mediation is causally necessary in order to grasp the subject in its plurality, but not necessarily existent in an individual form.

From this perspective, selfie's selfing would coincide with a sharing, with a com-munication, and could indeed be the result of a dialogue with the community of all the separately collected pictures. Moreover, regarding every picture as a "mediation without an instrument" illustrates the necessity that the mediation can neither be exhausted in one sole picture/medium, nor that this picture/medium is a finite one. Furthermore, the pictures taken are not to be counted additively so as to

be thought of as being accumulated in order to let a sedimentary multiple picture arise. The pictures taken one after the other do not add to the subject in order to be summed up as the subject, but constitute the Being as a holistic being-in-common where all the pictures co-exist parallel to one another.

Yet something feels awkward when retrospectively looking at the pictures accumulated throughout the selfie’s selfing: Though the subject is depicted in all of them and all of them could be regarded as partial expressions of this subject-in-common that is common to all of them, there seems to be no consciousness of the subject selfing itself. The pictures do reveal a process, they do reveal a common process, and they even do reveal the subject as a common process. At the same time though, the subject encapsulated in those pictures *is* no longer, but it has found its way out, it became a fugitive in those pictures and the subject judging the subject in the picture is no longer the subject captured in those pictures.

The subject is constituted by all the pictures taken, but it is also impossible for it to identify with them because they illustrate a subject in the past: The subject is all of them together, but it has no consciousness of itself as discernible entity, no matter how meticulously transparent it has shaped itself. Framing the selfie’s selfing with Nancy thus provides for a preliminary aspect of what might be called the selfie’s blank space, that is, a subjectivation process without concrete subjectification.

Serial: Iterability

The same argument can be found when taking Judith Butler’s “iterability” into account, understood as *modus operandi* of subjectivation processes. Butler does not understand iterability solely as “the operation [...] by which the subject who ‘cites’ the performative is temporarily produced as the belated and fictive origin of the performative itself” (Butler 1997: 49), but also as a “logic” “that governs the possibility of social transformation” (ibid.: 147).

Could we read selfie’s selfing as such an iterative process? The self’s pictures are taken incessantly, successively, and they keep reiterating rather than just repeating themselves since the subject keeps effacing

through/on them contingently differently every time. The problem is that through those reiterations not the structures among which the subject will emerge are being perturbed and subverted. Rather, this process brings about the different potentialities as which the subject might prospectively arise. Repetition is the appearance of something new in the orthodox Derridean sense, but those repetitions do not allow for the subject to come to terms with its being different from its outside, as Butler indicates. Nor can these reiterations abort power structures before congealing as subject.

Seen this way, it is rather the collective, the amalgam, of all its yet opaque potentialities that selfing renders transparently possible and visible. The selfie's selfing reiterates not what the subject really and unalterably is, but rather the virtual and actual prospect of its becoming a subject and of the different manifestations the subject can take on. As such, selfing renders present and visible the logic of subjectivation processes, not the concrete subjectified substantialization of a certain subject. The latter is taken further in Zeynep Gambetti's theory of the void.

Oblivious: The Void

Taking Hannah Arendt's conceptualization of the subject as a starting point, Gambetti claims that the "self is an entity that is always more than the sum of its social identities. Social identities operate through an articulating principle whose locus is the self, but the self is always something in excess of identity, in excess of language and therefore of conceptualization or symbolization" (Gambetti 2005: 431). According to her, the benefit of Arendt's understanding of singularity as "ontological human condition" (ibid.) lies in the fact that "no identity can be so fixed that an actor's actions will be fully explained through general discursive causalities" (ibid.) since these processes generate a certain force of negativity that ultimately allows for the subject to overcome its complete determination. This negativity is what Gambetti frames as the "void": "Arendt's notion of plurality is her version of the negativity—the void—that enables the queering of social determinations" (ibid.). Combining the void with another Arendtian notion, that of natality, Gambetti will go a step

forward and assert that the subject as worldly existence is an insertion of “something new into the world” (Gambetti 2005: 432) that needs to be observed and classified or categorized as such by the others.

The latter seems to adjoin what we deemed from the very beginning as important in order to decipher selfing as subjectivation process. In order for the subject to acquire visibility and—well noted, visibility is not a quality inherent to the subject, but it has to be asserted as possessed or obtained by the context in which the subject acts—it needs to emerge. This genesis of the subject through the selfies it produces is nonetheless at the same time a structuration process, because as long as the subject emerges it gets conformed to the structure it effaces. Every picture accumulated is a new structure that necessitates the subject to conform itself with by remaining loyal to the picture taken. The self emerges in this framework at the intersection of all its selfies. Nevertheless, as soon as those picture-structures and the subject at their intersection emerge, a set of negational relationships arise between those structures. If every picture is a different structure, then the subject has to conform itself to every one of them. From this, different processes of structuration and confirmation unravel out of those pictures that result in an overdeterminating struggle over the subject.

In this sense, the subject is ultimately a thick, opaque network of negativity pictures/structures that proliferate through the subject’s structuration as plain void. Again, what we see is how selfing resolves in a subjectivation process out of which a subject emerges that this time is an indeterminable negational relation. Neither void nor content, but the impossibility—caused by the opacity of the pictures collected—of attaching itself to a certain picture-structure is the subject that selfing enables.

Determined (by Others): Alienation

This kind of negational relation argued for with Gambetti can be completed by our fourth aspect, the almost classical negation of the subject in processes of self-alienation or self-reification—broadly, its determination by others. In their long paths as notions enabling a radical critique of social structuration, “alienation” and “reification” inevitably have to start

from a pivotal point: That there is a subject at hand either as point of departure (alienation) or as point of arrival (reification). By both alienation and reification, the subject functions as the necessary focal point in order to determine the beginning of its estrangement (alienation) or the state of affairs from which its disentanglement will commence (reification).

The necessity of a subject possessing a minimal core of subjectivity is indicative of the subject as the ultimate horizon framing classic or Western-Marxist subjectivation discourses. The political normativity of the subject's emancipation underlying the post-Marxist discourse is also not redeemed of any residues of subjectivity. The grounding line of the subject's production alongside biopolitical frameworks—immanent as these frameworks may traverse—is to foreclose this very subject's emancipation as a real possibility. By forestalling it they reinstitute—this time in form of an external normative promise—the subject as a prospectively necessarily emancipated one, resettling it thus once more as the necessary pivotal point of their analytics. For this reason, even more elaborate concepts such as those of communicative capitalism (brought forth by Jodie Dean 2005), or neo-liberal flexibility (as laid down by a series of theorists like Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello 1999 or Alain Ehrenberg 1998) can be asserted as inadequate in order to address selfing as a certain process of capitalist self-alienating socialization.

Selfing, as seen in the three previous theories, neither precludes or presupposes, nor envisages a sovereign, integral, and qualitative subject. It does not connect the subject-to-be to a community of subjects while proclaiming the latter as the promised land of fulfilled politicization that has reached its outer goal. Nor does selfing convey a hierarchical norm that the subject embodies. From this perspective, selfing does not stand for a “relation of relationlessness,” as Rahel Jaeggi's recent, most advanced, reinterpretation of alienation would demand (Jaeggi 2014). The subject itself has to keep sustaining its sets of pictures with new data, because, should this relation come to a standstill, that would also mean the death of the subject. By generating incessant pictures of itself, the self-selfing-itself eludes its self-alienating concretization by rendering any self-determination process impossible. Through the proliferation of the pictures that the subject collects of itself, it creates an opaque net of

appearances that undermines its own fixation. With no kernel of subjectivity laying at hand, the concepts of self-alienation or reification are rendered obsolete. The subject becomes one without being subjectified, since no concrete content arises at the end.

Transfer: Relation as Form

Summarizing this second chapter we can conclude that—from the background of poststructuralist theories of subjectivity—framing “selfing” as the cultivation of a visual ego provides us with insights according to which we could understand selfing as a vector of subject’s production, yet—as shown—selfing at the same time possesses a force and carries many diverse elements that resist clear classification. As observed in the four theories cited above, the selfie’s selfing (a) is communicated in Nancy’s sense, but remains opaque since it cannot rewind its component parts from the past. It cannot be understood as (b) an iteration leading to a concrete subjectification, but only as a process that manifests the making of a subject, since its reiterative processes do not exert a change upon their context. It can be seen as organized (c) around Gambetti’s void of negative relations to other selfies, but this also does not allow for a positive or affirmative understanding of the self, but only for a negativist understanding of it. Finally, the selfies are not (d) an expression of digital alienation (understood, very basically, as the mismatch between external picture and internal image of the self), since during or through the selfing no substantial self is to be found or produced in order for it to be alienated.

Through the cartography we offered, a paradox has become clear, namely that none of the subjectivation processes accounted for managed to engender or subordinate selfing completely under their own accounts of subjectification. In each and every one of them selfing seemed only upon a first glance to qualify as application and exemplification of the subjectification processes that the consulted theories promulgate, but at the very same time selfing proved itself to be a process that subverts, drives *ad absurdum*, renders impossible and undermines each and every one of those subjectification processes. In this regard, selfing seems to

question the necessary presumption that subjectification follows upon subjectivation. This paradoxical constellation breaks with every theory of subjectivity that we have discussed in our paper and ultimately, according to the thin assumption, it problematizes processes of subjectivation, or else, according to the thick assumption, it questions the possibility of any theory of subjectivation as such. Our hunch is that selfies, as a phenomenon of opaque visibility, position selfing in the age of algorithms not as a process of substantializing a subject that was created in relation to its outside, but as a process of *substantializing (this) relation as form* (on this topic, see also Thomas Berns' analyses of the algorithmic management of relations included in this volume).

There is no political space that the selfie impedes, and no structure that the selfie subverts. There is also no dialogue that takes place through the selfie, and no surplus that is created. No place of negotiation is brought forth through this process as there are no concrete entities struggling for political participation or visibility that the selfie makes visible. There are no contents conveyed, nor any aspirations forged. The subjectivation does not lead to concrete positions of desires, wills, or interests, but keeps the subjects in their non-existence. If essentialist notions of subjectivity presupposed agency and therefore emancipation and should the constructivist notions of subjectivity have enriched our understanding of the powers-to-be at work, the selfies leave the subject naked in its form and dependent on being shared. This subject position can be that of a *tabula rasa*, a "blank slate", or a "blank space", as we would like to call it, that holds the potential to display a hundred potential stories despite never becoming the history of the concrete self as it is always determined by the form of relations to abstract numerical others in vast quantities.

To capture this important aspect which makes the phenomenon so new in the history of subjectivity, we might talk of *alter-rhythmic* subjectivity, from Latin "alter" for "the other/s" (Metelmann 2017). Determined by algorithms, having to be shared on sharing platforms and in need of *quantified others* instead of "qualitative" others characterized by co-presence, inter-subjectivity and dialogue, being oneself boils down to being a content-free, relational form. It is, as already mentioned, not something, but anything; it is the constellation of a purely formal relation.

Both elements for themselves are strictly speaking not new: We’ve learned from the works of Friedrich Kittler (1992, 1999) about the media *a priori* of any kind of subjectivity and we all live from birth onward under the pressure to adapt to social environments (family, friends, groups, colleagues etc.). The only new component is these two forces’ technical connection through social-media platforms, enabling them to conquer the “return channel” as the Internet activist Jaron Lanier put it: The new power of platforms is to determine the way people see and feel themselves, a technology of power that was unknown till today (Lanier 2015). The individual is thereby configured as a big-data effect and appears as a “mass original” (Metelmann 2016) both highly individualized and totally collectivized.

III. Conclusions: Towards the End of the Modern Dream of Transparency

In conclusion, we might ask: What do these observations mean for the transparency discourse? What’s the story behind the reconfiguration of subjectivity as alter-rhythmic in form of the selfie? And how does selfing precipitate or decelerate the emergence of a transparent self?

Our claim would be that our observations hint at a paradigm shift that makes the traditional inside-outside distinction, as the basis of the modern transparency discourse, obsolete (cf. Chul-Han 2015). As shown, the selfie as subjectivation process without subjectification does not produce contextualized, socially embedded, individually meaningful selves: We neither have a subject that delegates its own production to technology (subjectivation) nor does technology fully subjectify (subjectification). As a result, we cannot speak of an “outsourcing” of the self to media and machines, because this would assume either an already constituted self (which is not the case) or a successful creation (which is not the case either). As such, there is no point in differentiating between interiority and exteriority or privileging the one over the other. From this perspective, the specific form of subjectivity that the selfie demonstrates leads us to something beyond the classic transparency discourse. This discourse,

like Wittgenstein's famous ladder, is something you have to use and climb in order to see that there is no subject at the bottom of it, that is, after the selfing process: Its semantics simply do not apply to this anymore.

According to Manfred Schneider's seminal study on the "dream of transparency," the semantics of this dream consists of an undistorted access to the truth, moving from the observing outside to a meaningful inside. And this dream is, as Schneider frames it, "the impossible" (2013: 302). Going through the history of this dream, Schneider sees a movement away from its life in "books, heads, utopia, plans, pictures, programs" (Schneider 2013: 22) to more concrete social players. Formerly prominent in and owned by literature, film and the arts, this movement has now been taken over by the "machinery" of politics, science and technology (ibid.). In considering the selfie, we might specify his thesis by marking the distinction between on the one hand a "quantified self" (Lupton 2016, cf. also Bernard 2017) that could be seen as a striking example of this expropriation and on the other hand the selfie as a still more "qualified" phenomenon of subjectivity that seems to stand in the long tradition of modern subjectivity but already moves beyond its frontiers.

This tradition, starting with Descartes' "cogito," became culturally relevant as soon as Jean-Jacques Rousseau urged himself to "say all" about himself. As we have interpreted it throughout this paper, this "tout dire" should not be understood in terms of extensive enunciations, that is, as expression of a concealed inner self awaiting to be expressed, but rather in terms of a visualization of the interior, as a real possibility of a perspectivization that has to come from the outside (cf. Brooks 1995: 16). Since this "incipit" (ibid.), the modern subject had to become fully transparent, authentic, and responsible for the unique kernel it carries. Tragically enough, this "tout dire" coincided with the opaqueness of societal communication, namely with the fact that there is no direct access from the outside to the inside (Starobinski 1988). Nevertheless, this claim provided for a very strong narrative in the culture of the Western self: It sufficed in providing the idea that becoming oneself has to go through the full expression and visualization of the singularity, depth, and truth of the proper self. The fact that there is no direct access from the outside to the inside not only did not dull the claim's intensity, but actually aggravated

it. Becoming transparent by expressing oneself and exteriorizing one's innermost world became henceforth a normative ideal, the impossible dream of self-realization, self-understanding and self-determination. It became the presupposition of every communication and the condition of political participation. Which better vector in order for this norm to be realized than the selfie that supposedly hides nothing, that allegedly is executed by the subject itself and that purportedly results in the (self-) revelation of the subject as it really is?

As we've argued, the selfie can be positioned in this genealogy of the modern self, but the very premises of the game have been altered as the basic distinction between exteriority and interiority no longer make sense. It might still be applied to forms of *quantified selves* in a stricter sense, but the selfie remains erratic in its processuality as a substantialized form, referring back to traditions (of the self-portrait) and genealogies (of the modern subject) without being subsumable to them. In our reading, the selfie indicates, pushes forward, and conditions not transparency, but the end of transparency as a dream. It thus opens up the path for new paradoxical forms of becoming: The new dream is to be fully visible, but not recognizable—transparent, yet opaque (Saltz 2013). In this way, selfing renders the subject visible, and makes it transparent. At the same time though, selfing undermines the subject's transparency, by making it opaque, annihilating thusly any chances for transparency the subject might have ever possessed. At the end, it seems as if not only theory still has to learn a lot about the new fabric of the social imaginary. It also seems that artists such as the ever-controversial Kanye West might be able to inspire these debates, and this premise might not be so far-fetched as we might have originally thought, as he has declared, commenting on his controversial video “Bound 2,” that he wants to be “clearing a path for people to dream properly.”

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