

# ***Selfer*, Personality in a Virtual Paradigm. An Ethnomethodological Study on the Subject of the Selfie**

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## **Abstract**

In view of the emerging behaviors facilitated by digital innovations, this article proposes an insight of the development of identity in the virtual paradigm. The task is to inscribe the *selfie* phenomenon in an exploratory manner within a pertinent theoretical framework that allows apprehending its aspects in terms of value and relationships. Using a qualitative ethnomethodology (Semantic Analysis Based on Images), it's sought to locate certain narrative of the body in a context of interdisciplinary exchange in relation to a hypothetical category; namely the *Selfer*. Compiled sources derived from psychoanalysis, psychology, sociology, cybernetics etc. offer to inscribe these new phenomena into theories of mediation and the Subject. The ethnomethodology employed here considers selfie-narrative as a deployment of the body image. The interest lies in understanding motivations and consequences as individuals and societies through discursive consciousness. A group of three components were derived from the collected data: *Self*, *The Ideal Virtual Collective Self (IVCS)* and the *Symptom*. The results are presented as a narrative analysis of the participants' discourse. This study considers selfies as trans-aesthetic objects with notable elicitation of self-impressions, based on a critical analysis of the participants' testimonies. The findings of this study are relevant in a social context in terms of exploring the effect of selfies on mental health, psycho-dynamics and semiology.

## **Introduction**

The wide dissemination of personal mobile devices has brought about the widespread phenomena of taking *selfies*. Selfie is defined as a "photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically with a webcam or a smartphone". A person that takes selfies with the purpose of making them public, or a *Selfer*, is constructing a positive continuous self-presentation to a wider audience allocated in a digital ecosystem. As it can be easily inferred, this is not without consequences in the subjectivity of the individuals. Attending critically to the symbolic meanings evolved, makes it necessary to abound with the *trans-formations* of our media and the aspects of desire.

Social science research is yet incapable to catch up with the pace of development within social media, as far as communication and identity issues are concerned (Warfield, 2015). Profiling, imaging and social network interaction are new topics in cybernetics, defined by Kolmogorov (1958, p. 149) as the "science concerned with the study of systems of any nature which are capable of receiving, storing and processing

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information so as to use it for control". However, they have been widely studied in non-virtual grounds, that is to say society or interpersonal *real* dynamics within traditional psychology. The first advance of the new *technoself* studies, TSS, was coined in 2013 by Luppicini. In view of this context, studies on *selfies* appear to be beneficial for the purpose of understanding profiling, imaging and interaction in social networks.

As it has been pointed out by McLuhan (1995, p. 23) in his famous axiom "The Medium is the message"; it is thus important to examine the subjectified technological extension that allows selfies to exist. Information locally transmitted from technological platforms such as mobile devices have been considered in different addresses as "instantaneous, representative, appealing, egocentric, normative, hysteric, dysmorphic, sociopathic, hedonistic, artsy, intimate and conspicuous". Personal data in this aspect can be seen as a bundle of self-referred on-line content, or later named *egoteca*, into which *selfies* recollections find place. Hence the above mentioned adjectives elicited by this format are referential to well defined registers and operations studied by psychoanalysis, that is to say: it responds to the devaluating-idealizing logic of narcissism imaginary.

The *Selfer* directs a narrative to an *Other* which is consolidated by means of images while also refers to a fantasized identity. Bearing that in mind, one ought to question the emotional and perceptual responses that *Selfers* evoke in their *real* audience in order to evaluate the symbolic status of the exchange. The cultural flow of trans-aesthetic products which central value is established through a visual appeal, such as selfies, through social networks, creates an implicit intersubjectivity established by users. Therefore; the code that circumscribes the relationship of *Selfers* and audience implies a specific iconicity, or even language, as shown by selfies. Are we expecting to see, as other studies have shown, a relation with the aggression inherited to secondary narcissism as J. Lacan portrays, where imitation, admiration, identification, provocation, competition and consumption or closeness<sup>2</sup> assumes the form of the operation?

The *Subject* presented by Lacan received a great amount of influence from the modern intellectual and political panorama of his time (namely; the world wars, the artistic vanguards and structuralism). Similarly, the phenomenology of the *Selfer* may prove useful in comprehending contemporary subjectivities. This article will thus aim to contribute with an analytical framework to apprehend the actuality of body schemes in relationship with personality and the way they are represented in digital profiles through selfies. If the Lacanian psychoanalytical topology has managed to demonstrate something, it is that the imaginary and symbolic registers anchoring within the real register of the body leads to precise consequences within our fundamental conceptions of the unconscious, repetition, transference and drive.

In December 1968, the Apollo Space Mission transmitted an image of the Earth on TV back from the moon. As McLuhan (1995, p. 21) remarked on this beautiful historical event: "We *outured* and *innered* at the same time, we were on earth and the

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<sup>2</sup> This notion appeared in clarity for the first time in *Family Complexes in the Formation of the Individual* (1938).

moon simultaneously. And it was our individual recognition of that event that gave it meaning". This statement is compelling in the sense that the image can be seen as a universal selfie where everyone becomes the *Selfer* and the audience simultaneously. Furthermore, it also indicates the forthcoming of an epistemic revolution since people became irrevocably connected in the *global village*, as McLuhan famously coined the term. This development gave birth to the *mediation theory* which also provides the theoretical foundation of the qualitative technique used in this paper.

## **Objective**

By using different interdisciplinary backgrounds and empirical observation, the aim will be to elucidate the latent discourse concerning photographic instantaneous and public self-portraits; or *selfies*. The main objective is to achieve an assemblage of informed and heterogenous opinions on selfies. Further, the intention of this study is to avoid performing any value judgement, because to label selfies simply as 'postmodern narcissism' would be to apprehend a narrow vision of a cultural symptom (Senft & Baym, 2015). Therefore, part of the objective is to explore whether selfies signify wider implications of possible perspectives concerning human welfare.

## **Methodology**

### **Study Design**

This study used qualitative, non-experimental transversal design. The insights of the participants from the collected samples were gathered in accordance with ethnomethodological approaches and grounded theory. The *Image Based Semantic Analysis* technique developed by Reginald Clifford (Galindo, 1998) was used in this study.

### **Participants**

An intentional non-probabilistic sample of seven subjects (four women and three men) from *Universidad Anáhuac* in Mexico City was used. Inclusion criteria were the enrollment in the private institution above mentioned and to respond to all the topics in a comprehensive manner. The participants were primarily scholars, therapists and students from humanities and social studies. This study subserved the qualitative characteristics of the population and their specialized discourses that favored the process of in-depth interviews and the textual testimony in the narratives presented as the results, hence the small number of participants.

### **Sites**

A classroom in *Universidad Anáhuac* was employed for the core of the study, where the participants were shown *selfies* via projector. Later, a focus group discussion and individual interviews were conducted in various settings, all of which were enclosed comfortable environments in order to optimize participant disclosure.

### **Measures**

Observation and discussion of a collection of 2,789 *selfies* from randomly selected users under the hashtag *#Selfie* on *Instagram*. The study was conducted on the 8th of August 2017 and lasted seven hours in total. The participants were briefed that the

study was carried by a bachelor degree student. Two initial participants (other than the seven listed above) withdrew from the study due to timing difficulties.

## **Procedure**

Initially the pictures were shown to the sample. In this stage the analytical categories began to be displayed and expanded. The main aspects of the images reflected where selected to constitute the core of the analysis, these consisted primarily of the visual aspects in terms of elements in the compositions, emotional aura permeating the image and social and cultural contextualization in terms of preferences, affiliations and relations between preexisting literature to understand the iconic aspects of *Self*.

Further, individual interviews lasting approximately one hour were conducted with each of the seven participants, where raw data were gathered using audio recordings and notes. The data were processed into the form of interview charts, category charts and analytic charts in accordance with the adopted methodology (Clifford, 1998). The processed data in the form of charts were then analyzed and divided into five sub-categories. These sub-categories were refined and constructed into three specific metaphoric components. Lastly, the narrative of the components was adjusted into the format of a case study of the metaphoric Subject-of-the-Selfie, the *Selfer*.

This technique systematically analyzes the probes of the cultural material, social discourse, and expands on the narratives of the symbolic capital of each individual testimony. The participants were purposely selected in hopes that their testimonies might indicate the opinions from their fields, namely the humanities, psychoanalysis and social studies.

## **Analysis**

The narratives thus presented constitute an amplification of the discourse signifiers expressed by the participant testimonies and their correlations with the grounded concepts of the methodology. The author of this methodology (Clifford, 1998) is associated with the mediation theory, basic concepts such as 'discursive consciousness' and 'indexicality', while also recognizing the founder of ethnomethodology Harold Garfinkel. The final analysis is consistent with this style of narrative construction; adhering the textual phrasing used in depth interviews, where, at the same time, indexing the statements to their authors. The Lacanian psychoanalysis with its approach on linguistics as well as theory of informatics was utilized throughout the discursive interpretation, considering that the core of this analysis is the dialectic of the self-image.

## **Ethical Considerations**

The heuristic value of this method comes from creating an allegiance with a subject-object of study, hence expressing a mediated *doxa*. The study is built inside a paradigm in which daily-life language creates and describes actions within the social ground, and these verbalizations are sought to be taken into consideration and indexed for further elaboration in research. The nature of the statements and the phenomena they refer take place in a specific time, place and actors, hence its limitation: the findings are non-generalizable. The anonymity of the participants was granted by the methodology. The participants provided ethical consent and were aware of their

ethical rights to withdraw from the study. The study was subjected to an ethical approval by the institution before it was carried out.

## Results

Meta-categories were developed as a result of the most common topics in the participant discourse. Firstly, the statements were distributed into five sub-categories: a) values and properties, b) functions, actions and consequences, c) signs or appearance, d) cultural meaning and e) affects. Each significant word, concept or signifier were taken into account for each and every one of them. These meta-categories were further developed into a trinomial group of components, namely the *Self*, *The Ideal Virtual Collective Self (IVCS)* and the *Symptom*. These three components reflect a progressive extension of the consequences and values of selfies; from a constitutive stage to a social and clinical elaboration.

The trinomial group component was selected due to the extension of the arguments built upon three main concerns: a) the constitutive aspects of identity as the incorporation of the psychosocial spheres from the outside world into the interiorized figures of self-representation. b) the normative aspects of the subjective identification and the contemporary embodiment of the image and c) the possible discomforts related to the dynamics of the publicity of the self-profiles in digital media. The final material constitutes the processed analysis of the three components presented in the structure of narrative constructs that include some participants' quotes.

### **The Self**

“There is no better way to account for selfies than through the idea of coagulation of the Ideal-self image that Lacan theorizes in the mirror stage” (Participant #3).

Our species is not organically self-sufficient from the early stages such as other mammals; instead, *Homo sapiens* relies in the cares of the mother until very advanced age (Corte, 2015). This ontogenetic evidence is contingent to the materialistic explanation of the Lacanian subject as presented in the canonic article *The Mirror Stage* (1937), where Lacan described the antagonism of the environment for the fragmented and uncoordinated new subject-to-be. In this adversity, the child fixates his desires of completeness in the image reflected in the mirror, which contrasts with the primitive feelings of fragmentation and constitutes the matrix of reality perception<sup>3</sup>.

As the development goes further, the personality begins to consolidate. The further inscription to an established language will define all the extension of *Self*. This definition includes, the gratifying or dissatisfying relationships, the interiorized figures that are identified with oneself and the way to solve problems. The nature of

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<sup>3</sup> The development of the imaginary register, which occupied the majority of Lacan's early work, found its culminating point in the mirror stage. However, it is of the utmost importance to follow through the transformations of this notion throughout his elaborations. For instance, in the 1964 seminar *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* Lacan articulates these findings with the function of the gaze in relation with the cause of desire, making use of the optical scheme to account for the symbolic intertwining of the self-image.

the inscription to the social reality sets the beginnings of the unconscious dialectics and eventual identification in relation with the *Other*. One participant accounted for the shift of paradigm in relation to identity in the virtual representability with the following statement: “adaptation in digital ecosystems is a new modality of identification” (Participant #3 in accordance with Zepeda and Herrera, 1995). However, with Lacan, self-consolidation involves the intertwining of the human registers, namely the real, the imaginary and the symbolic, within the identification to a signifying chain.

Personality does perform as a “non-biologic membrane” (Participant #5) that mediates between the interior and exterior world, the Self and the *Other*. At this point a distinction is made to contrast the Latin signifier ‘*persona, personae: mask*’ from which the word has found etymology. This contrast is made upon the fact that a mask is unidirectional whereas a membrane “permeates and exchanges information to balance the environment” (Participant #3), since there are antagonist forces going in and out the interior world. To thrive is to be adapted, to be able to love and work; reaching the minimum friction or opposition with the *Other*: in that way “standardization is observed” (Participant #1). This inscription corresponds with the eccentric place related by Lacan (Lacan, & Fink, 2006, p. 6) in the opening paragraph of this famous seminar on the *Purloined Letter*:

My research has led me to the realization that repetition automatism (*Wiederholungszwang*) has its basis in what I have called the insistence of the signifying chain. I have isolated this notion as a correlate of the ex-sistence (that is, of the eccentric place) in which we must necessarily locate the subject of the unconscious, if we are to take Freud’s discovery seriously. As we know, it is in the experience inaugurated by psychoanalysis that we can grasp by what oblique imaginary means the symbolic takes hold in even the deepest recesses of the human organism.

One reason why it can be inferred that selfies constitute a subjective narrative of identity is due to their power as signifiers. “A selfie gallery represents the subject to another selfie gallery” (Participant #2, paraphrasing the famous Lacanian definition of Subject: a signifier that represents for other signifiers). Contemporary perception is importantly constituted by the predicate of the *Other*, which is represented by the dynamics in social networks.

“As I see that other, the specular image, i(a), I see me” (Participant #7)<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> This contribution allows us to trace back the function of the gaze as a mediated relation with the object of castration. This dimension is carefully elucidated in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* alongside with the poems of

Insecurity originates from the primordial fear of death; what follows are the chains of necessities, demands and ultimately symbolic desires. From within the imaginary register we discover our desire to become an immortal omnipresence satisfied with selfies. Nevertheless: “is such imaginary fulfillment real or even healthy?” (Participant #2). We are led to deduce that what sustains this desire to be omnipresent comes from the reaches of mass media, which was later called micro-celebrity from within attention economy, as studied by Marwick (2015).

Ultimately, standardization as a consequence of society, contributes to a desire to be a “desirable, beautiful and intelligent merchandise” (Participant #1). That in turn is translated into repetition and imitation which are the basic processes of self-consolidation as seen in selfies. Through repetition a disguised continuum is established in which the whole Subject is implied (Nasio, 2013). “Selfies are facilitated by phone cameras whose technique is based on the function of repetition” (Participant #6). Repetition is thus reinforced via selfies where the imaginary content of the selfie-signifiers can be reproduced to gain symbolic sense; a public explanatory narrative of self.

Some participants took notice in the contemporary phenomena that the aesthetization of the media has brought about by the exercise of appeal in the interiorized logics of merchandise. “Selfies are a non-paid part of work produced by *prosumers*” (Participant #1) since they feedback to the commercial panoptic about ‘trendy lifestyles’. Technologies of the self, as coined by Foucault, far from only producing efficient consumers has proved to be a most valuable source of the immaterial profitable *qualia*.

### **The Symptom**

It can be said that from this origin the ego retains the ambiguous structure of the spectacle clearly seen in the situations of despotism, seduction and parade described above and gives their form to the sado-masochistic and scopophilic drives (desire to see and to be seen), which are essentially destructive of the other.

Lacan in *The Family* (2002, p. 3)

As mentioned, Lacan in *The Mirror Stage* (2006) describes identification of the Subject with the specular image and therefore the importance of the body’s *Gestalt*. According to this reading, the register of that imago conforms the matrix of idealization-based introjections that constitute the Self ideal. But as it is shown in the dialectic opposition of the imaginary, this scheme can give birth to its complete opposite: the source of shame and guilt. It’s upon this imaginary ground in which the aesthetic narrative of the selfie, as a “*doppelganger*” (Participant #1), will be built upon: to obliterate the dimension of the lack, to obdurate castration and with that, desire. According to some of the participants, the process of reiteratively accumulating selfies in public profiles could create a deployment of identity, an object scission that results in a polarization of cathexia in which the material body is diminished through castration fear or complex.

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Aragon and Valery and the theories of Aristotle, Sartre and, most importantly: Merleau-Ponty.

Put in topological consideration; something in the real fails to be aligned with the symbolic, as a consequence of imaginary turbulence concerning one's own public image. The imaginary register *reels*; it drifts along with the speculative feedback that the digital profiles receive from the super-public. Far from the *point de capiton* and from the father metaphor the subject cannot be taken as such by himself in a continuum. Hence we could have the result of self-objectification, allocating indefinitely the object *a* in the ever-perfecting egoteca.

One participant articulated the *phantom* of selfies as such: "I want (symbolic) to be-in-you (imaginary) but not with you because I am limited (real)" (Participant #3). Society in this track would lack empathy, complementarity of affection replaced by a competition paradigm. The empire of the ideal-Self in detriment of the self-Ideal; the speculative imaginary enhanced whereas the Self-with-the-body "weakened of perceived value" (Participant #4). "We are being constantly reinforced into the fantasy that we are in someone's thoughts" (Participant #4), which is the imaginary satisfaction of a common drive, that ought to be transcended to gain a non-regressive personality structure. Taken 'into scene' this phantom arises and functions in social dynamics.

Roland Barthes (1989) lists certain qualities: trickery, pose, objects, photogeny, aestheticism and syntax as elements of image coding. These qualities are exemplified in selfies as the management of the self-image in contemporary media. They are directly related to the semantics and iconicity of selfies that define the strength of the imaginary bindings being forged. From this standpoint, the notion of *jouissance* as the cyclic failed re-signification of trauma begins to be necessary. "There is a certain *jouissance* I've seen in some cases of addiction when people upload media content" (Participant #3). In words of Lacan (2002, p. 26) (regarding the scopophilic drive): "This interest confuses within itself identification and love, and though it only appears in a veiled form in the thinking of adults it confers an incorrigible quality on the passion it sustains, which makes it akin to an obsession".

Coquettish, callous, manipulative, self-absorbed, non-empathetic behaviors at the service of the ideal-Self are likely to be found, since, without the analogical observation of real face-to-face encounters, deviations of partial drives of infantile sexuality are provided with a scenario. "Power strategies" (Participant #7) could be reinforced since they have served the Self previously to adequate within society and the digital feedbacks allow to settle an adapting "code of response, comments, likes, etc." (Participant #3) often leading to agonist or symmetric-competitive ways of communication (Watzlawick, Beavin & Jackson, 1981). These models of communication were also studied by Lacan (2002) in the chapter *Jealousy; Archetype of all Social Sentiments* in the early text *The Family*. He analyzed the reactions, namely parade, seduction and despotism, in the process of what he called 'mental identification' when two toddlers are left alone.

"Although repetition is made due to the parameters of adaptation, that does not necessarily imply that the content of the repetition is non-pathological, it deals with reiteration of a certain trait" (Participant #6). Some of the participants of the study believed that the over-exposition of a managed impression of self could reinforce exhibitionistic, voyeuristic or even dimorphic internal representations of *Self*. "What happens in the screens is now the Real, virtuality has always been constitutive of our

culture but never as it is today” (Participant #1). The dispositions of interpersonal surveillance, and the manner in which the distinct plugins and feedbacks are interpreted and interiorized (often in an obsessional or delusional scale) has brought about today’s *nomos*.

“The self is unstable and unfinished; the market speculation taken into personality”.  
(Participant #2).

### ***The Ideal Virtual Collective Self (IVCS)***

Generally speaking, the relation between the gaze and what one wishes to see involves a lure. The subject is presented as other than he is, and what one shows him is not what he wishes to see. It is in this way that the eye may function as objet a, that is to say, at the level of the lack ( $-\phi$ ).

Lacan in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*  
(4 March 1964)

Since we are opening the present and last category, it seems especially important to consider the term ‘virtual’ from its Latin etymology *vir*, *virtus*; reference to a certain kind of potential. This potential could be referred, as the evolution of the word suggest, to the virtue that in antiquity accompanied virility. The meeting point of virility and virtuality is something that psychoanalysts cannot elude; the symbolic legislation which is, arguably, never fully accomplished. This legislation is installed by language from the beginning of every human life which creates a breach between essence and the inscription to the symbolic. It is with such inscription that we acquire a desire for differentiation as well as independence. This in turn reminds us of the implied oedipal triangulation which, if accomplished, would result in an interjection of the father and the admission of his prohibitions; the assumption of castration. What this order provides is, in the words of Olguín (2008, p. 5) “an unpayable debt and indelible blame”. Olguín (2008, p. 6) further argues, in regard to postmodernity and its subjectivity: “The unprecedented failure of the ideals of modernity implies provisionally, and without a positive prognosis of restitution, the fall of the self-Ideals that counterbalance the return of the ideal-Self”. The first aspect that Olguín makes clear is the decline of the meta-narratives that pretended to apprehend *essence* from within the symbolic, and that, as a common denominator, bequeathed an even deeper malaise on which postmodernity and its *ethos* was founded. The debt and guilt deepened and the media aligned with the voracity to alleviate the lack of being. This refers us to a second aspect; without spiritual expectations to be deposited in the social construction or in the innate betterment of the self-Ideals (sublimation), the contemporary subject turns his imaginary impetuosity into the construction of the prosthetic ideal-Self (idealization).

“The virtual *Selfer* can be understood as an ‘anesthetic-aesthetic’ construction that responds to the normative aspects of contemporary means of production” (Participant #1).

The views on the Lacanian ideals of self contrasts with Freud’s Super-ego, as Braunstein states in Olguín (2008, p. 7): “The imperative is not to obey, but to enjoy (*jouissance*), precisely the thing that the Freudian Super-ego prohibits”. The context on which both notions were described are self-explanatory; Freud analyzed a

Victorian super-ego whereas Jacques Lacan lived the sexual revolution of the sixties, among other vast social and political transitions in which he actively engaged. “It would appear that the limits of society are progressively permissive” (Participant #4). In *Totem and Taboo* Freud (1950) hypothesizes how the primitive guilt or taboo would have destructive coercion that would even be able to self-destroy the individual, kill him in a matter of days out of a *sacred* coercion. “Within the elements of millennial Super-ego, assimilations or identifications are objectivized and seldom depicted in Selfies” (Participant #7). What we see nowadays is the exacerbation of sensuality, an aspiration for glamour, glory, fame, and above all attractiveness and personal success (Marwick, 2015). “The values introverted in selfies could be economic, moral, and emotional” (Participant #5). Maier (in Olgúin, 2008, p. 8) says on this account: “Pleasure has become mandatory: exigencies of seduction, euphoria, dynamism; the body is exalted but, under a layer of permissiveness, it sits submitted”. “Authenticity is pursued in a manner of approval of self, since the display of the intimate raises the illusion of affective identification with the fetishized image” (Participant #5).

We emphasize the reflection on the vassalage of the body in reference to the selfie from the point of view of Maier (in Olgúin, 2008) while we consider the importance of the development that concerns the problem of authenticity. A paradox arises at the moment in which the supposed authenticity comes from a mandate that emerges from the *Other* in an imperative way. This environment can produce a fetishized social habit, denying castration by enhancing the mediums of self-management by means of seduction, euphoria or implanted statements. Testimonies recollected by Warfield (2015) conveyed they “sought an image that they felt was ‘authentic’, ‘real’, “‘not fake’ and ‘not forced’”.

One can deduce that this is the response that the *Selfer* compulsory wants to address to the *Other*, responding to its desire, after the famous Lacanian *Che vuoi?* (What is it that you want from me? We ask the *Other*). It concerns the register of extimacy. The concept of extimacy, as studied by Byung C. H. (2017) after Lacan, denotes the progressive loss of freedom thus installing normativity. Byung (2017) explains this process in a fable; *The Mole and the Snake*, in contrast to the disciplinary and seclusion society studied by Foucault, the mechanism of coercion today is the snake moving in the extension of mediated intersubjectivity. It is about the neoliberal control that institutes a rivalry and a debt through the tyranny of the ‘like’. The snake “wants to dominate trying to please and generating dependencies” (Byung, 2017, p. 34), while reading and fostering the expression of intimacy.

The immediacy between ‘time/public’ reach and ‘space/private’ image could be seen as an ontological invasion, with pathological consequences, since human faculties and nature are an abyss apart from a smartphone screen and internet superpublic. Immediacy as a value is evident even from the names of the mayor selfie display apps like *Snapchat*, *Instagram*, *Flickr*, and *Tumblr* which connotes just this, speed and urgency. One can mark the resemblance of the operations harnessed by colonization;

colonized by another time register and a new *real* based on interconnectivity without even noticing and accepting technology as *master*<sup>5</sup>.

The ritualistic features related to the user experience inhabits the disembodied *Selfer*, forming a collective diaspora exiled from the ancestral Real and ingathered in the Noeme. “This selfie mythology is from now on a common denominator, the non-delayed fulfillment of imaginary drives and the certainty that everything is on-line” (Participant #5). “Interconnection gives the illusion of facing a deity” (Participant #1), a unifying self-explaining power, that Kyriazis (2015, p. 22) has called Noeme:

...the Noeme is structurally coupled with its medium. As a self-organizing system, it adjusts to external influences and reinvents itself in order to adapt to its environment i.e. it reproduces (self-replicates) horizontally if successful, will lead to others copying it i.e. it is the total sum of all individual cognitive efforts and active information-sharing accomplishments of a person, the intellectual standing of a person within the Global brain.

## Discussion

In Lacanian theory most of the aspects referred to the selfie correspond to the study of the imaginary register that occupied the early stages of his theoretical production. As Jiménez (2009) indicates, he was engaged in locating a subject that differed from the one studied from the standpoint of psychology and psychiatry. This subject then corresponded to a system regulated by the drives and the metabolism of *imagos*. It was influenced to a great extent by Alexander Kojève, Roger Caillois (1986), Georges Bataille and Salvador Dalí, since the I (*moi*) functioned as a platform of meaning, therefore imaginary, that glides on illusion, deception, imposture, vertigo, boldness and antagonism. Mimesis and paranoia occupied a central place in his dissertations. It seems to us that due to this sum of factors the study of subjectivity as a postmodern Selfer could not be more *ad hoc* to such a perspective since it was founded in a historical context that has much in common with ours. The image today regains its status of primacy and the truth falters in a weakening of the symbolic register.

In correspondence with a dialogue facilitated by the present journal, some details proved to be necessary to put in question, especially some concerning the applied methodology. It was previously stated that our approach aimed to contribute to a type of study that privileges empirical data while also harnessing a diversity on critical apparatus. This article sought to work through the findings within the analytic discourse (as accounted in *L'envers de la psychanalyse*), with the selfie in the position of the agent: as object a, cause of desire. In this regard we sustained our decision to

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<sup>5</sup> Viewed as in the four discourses accounted in *L'envers de la psychanalyse*. “The master, S1, is the agent who puts the slave, S2, to work: the result is a surplus, object a, that the master struggles to appropriate”.

incorporate different voices and addresses to this peculiar discursive agent. This procedure was sought to prevent the inclusion of one exclusive critical apparatus to translate the possible meanings. The Lacanian psychoanalytical approach was primordial; since it was firstly appointed by the participants own reading, specially referred to the *mirror stage* and its conceptual surroundings in the early works of Lacan. It was therefore our responsibility to ‘dialectize’ the dimension depicted in that particular writing with the elements that later on articulated with the object a, thus with the integrity of the topology. We say responsibility, since remaining in the logic of the specular image would create exactly the effect it aims to prevent, namely: a static fixation on a schematic lure. Hence our overview on the developments of virtuality in social bonds as accounted in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (Lacan, 1964). Furthermore hereby we wish to suggest the reader to further review the status of the alienation through the image in correspondence with the signifier, primarily developed by Lacan (2006) in *The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious, or Reason Since Freud*. This text would be a turning point to assimilate the sign as an anchor in the inter-subjective field. In this line, Rabaté (2007) argues that in the seminar of *The Symptom* there is a rethinking of the identification via a fourth consistency: the observation elicited by one participant (“a selfie gallery represents the subject for another selfie gallery”), might be propping towards this instance. However, due to the complexity of the problematic, the relation between this antecedent and the final consequences of it within a Lacanian chronological overview shall correspond to further research.

Selfies have been analyzed from different perspectives, some results indicated that selfies involved elements of self-objectification, demonstrating how people develop an objectified appearance consciousness, including appearance, surveillance and appearance dissatisfaction (Lyu, 2016). It has been stated that in Self objectification people tend to continually monitor their own bodies and subsequently have negative feelings of their appearance. As a result, women show their physical assets as more attractive to enhance and maintain their self-esteem, while men are willing to inflate their generosity and resources. Consistent with these findings, other results also demonstrated that young women try to find a balance between an image that presents them as a conventionally beautiful model, while also being an image that others would want to see, an image that somehow represents a felt connection to the body and ones’ authentic sense of self (Warfield, 2015). Her phenomenological studies have shown how imaginary audiences can be either persecutory or gratifying in a superlative way. The finding that people do not want to be seen when they are taking a selfie [Warfield (2015) uses the words *policed, chastised, ashamed, silly, vulnerable, exposed, and embarrassed*], advocate that the real of the body is constricted and subject to the primary feelings of fragmentation and incoordination of the body, previous to the final joy when they are able to “coagulate” the idealized specular image, in this, the findings are entirely compatible with the *mirror stage* in Lacan. With this testimony she made evident the game of “lost and found” that precedes the symbolic register. Even when people deny staging, in that study they stated that it is a very precise process. In consequence, it would appear that the value judgment of *narcissism* or *artificial* is a collective projection of the qualities we attribute to ourselves in this kind of acts. However, we must advert this phrase used by Warfield (2015, p. 6) for future studies: “It is important to mention that this research is not suggesting that the body holds the true/a more true/ or transcendental subjectivity than the other subjectivities mentioned in this paper”. If the Lacanian

framework is used to future studies focusing on the disembodied ontologies, one should take caution in neglecting a topological consideration, and in this manner the role of the *real* register to sustain coherency with the symbolic and the imaginary.

Other researchers have analyzed the texts accompanying posts on *Instagram* to develop an understanding of the types of narratives that *Selfers* use to communicate. They identified seven primary genres of selfie meta-narratives: autobiography, parody, propaganda, romance, self-help, travel diary and the coffee-table book (Eagar & Dann, 2016). This is relevant considering the functions of selfies and the nature of the sub-texts they wish to convey accompanied by the self-portrait. These statements have the potential to constitute a manifest inscription in the symbolic order and circumscribe the imaginary, which at the same time, from the name of the categories, reveal a *zeitgeist* reflecting today's state of globalized signifiers.

Very interesting contrasts emerge in respect to the nature of the interviewees since two selfie studies were conducted at the same university. We compiled, under different methodologies, the opinion on selfies by people from the field of humanities and psychoanalysis (the present) and marketing students (Barajas et al., 2017). The contrast demonstrates a very different approach between the two publics. "The most relevant findings were that the marketing students felt enthusiastic, free, comfortable, satisfied and relaxed when sharing emotions and feelings such as friendship, joy, happiness and love, among others" (Barajas et al., 2017, p. 8). This points out a peculiar breach apparently inherited to the two critical apparatus and/or subjective constitutions of both populations.

As far as the economical implications concern, it has also been proven that throughout anthropomorphism and familiarity, a *brand personality* can relate easily through affectivity with target consumers through specific kinds of brands (Barajas et al., 2017). The visual content, in this perspective, is added with fetishistic features that make the selfie a speculative merchandise. According to the definition of *branding* by Reynolds and Gutman (1984), it could be understood as a process that generates the image of a brand taking into account the synthesis of attributes of the product, the consequences in consumers and the personal values. As Murolo (2015) observes, painters such as Rembrandt, Kahlo and Van Gogh generated a brand identity around their self-portraits that endures, propagates and mythifies. This visibly correlates with the contemporary public character of the *influencer*. This was relevant to our analysis since 'the fetish' was analyzed in its rapport with castration and the erection of a public profile. A hashtag trend, a publicity campaign, contests and collectively organized dynamics and even art exhibitions concerning selfies could represent an important economical event (Canga, 2015).

Byung C. H. (2015) in *The Aroma of Time* Exhorts to retake the *vita contemplativa* in postmodernity since the cult of the *now* creates an *atomization* of life's temporality. These phenomena would carry a progressive loss of the narrative tension (vital to existence) between past and future and the reliance of a prosthetic digital memory in an *egoteca* as a denial of personal significant memory. This point was relevant to our analysis in regard of the ontological ground that inhabits the subject in digital media. It deals with aspects of 'belonging': what belongs to the superpublic, to memory, to privacy, to our social bonds or to self-identity.

To further explore the present topic, we propose the question: How can we conduct with accuracy the analysis of the relationships of cultural emblems and media aesthetic with the subjectivity of the individual?

## Conclusion

Even though selfies carry the desire to reach the other as a *love demand*, it also carries the risk of being left trapped in the dream of the *Other* or being symbolically disembodied. The duck-face vestige of an unconscious kiss will remain whether to reach the other or our ideal of *Self*. But where does the analogical life reside in postmodernity, in the escape from memory or the fear of forgetting who we “are”?

It is here indeed that something else forces us to question ourselves about the fact that the punctuation in which this presence to the world manifests itself is not simply imaginary, namely that already it is not at all to the other that we refer ourselves here, but to this most intimate part of ourselves which we try to make the anchoring point, the root, the foundation of what we are as subjects.

*The Identification* (Lacan, 1961, p. 29)

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