THE SELFIE AS EXPRESSION OF CONTEMPORARY FASHION AND NARCISISM*

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Abstract: This paper aims to relate the selfie - self-portrait shared on social media - with contemporary fashion and narcissism. Therefore, we carried out a literature review that connects this type of image to the pillars of contemporary fashion (LIPOVETSKY, 1989) and narcissism described by Lasch (1983). The observation selfies posted identifies objective and subjective aspects that trigger or exacerbate narcissism: the need for public acclaim, celebrity illusion, constant fashion mention, new overvaluation, and desire to succeed as an end in itself, among others.

Keywords: Selfie. Narcisism. Contemporary fashion.

Introduction

The consumer society imposes on contemporary subjects the communication and creation of immediacy and ephemeral lifestyles, marked by the logic of individualism (MESQUITA, 2010, p.93) and the aesthetic value of everyday life.

In the postmodern context, communication exercises power of organization and social mediation, promoting symbolic exchanges and establishing values, among which we can mention freedom, happiness, individualism, pleasure, "self-preservation" and "psychic survival" – which incorporation, during the twentieth century, characterizes what Lasch (1983) called the culture of narcissism.

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In this culture, among other aspects, we identify the thin separation between public and private life, and the emptying of the meaning of success, where it appears as an end in itself, in which the appearance of victory is more important than the completion of the victorious made - contrary to occurred in the nineteenth century, when progress was related to the ideal of self-development, discipline and selflessness.

The emptied success is "personal and not transferable," depends on the public acclaim, desire for admiration and of personal attributes approval. Being increasingly linked to the appearance and vanity - and the overvaluation of the "I" - the narcissistic culture comes to be ratified not only by the media but by advertising and fashion, which usually reflects the socioeconomic, cultural and technology changes over the time, always permeated by subjectivity. To Mesquita (2010, p.15):

The modes of dress, to adorn, to interfere on the bodies, are elements that make up with the other vectors, which produce ways of being, ways of relationship to itself: subjectivities. Subjectivity varies its dominant models from the oscillation of the forces composing and recomposing its contours. The Fashion aestheticizes and presents many of these interconnected elements: moral, technology, art, religion, culture, science, economy, nature, etc.

The present moment fashion, conceptualized by Lipovetsky (1989) as consummate fashion, has as its pillars the ephemerality, aestheticism and individualism - intensely present flows in contemporary society.

The ephemerality is related to the acceleration of time, also perceived in the mediatic discourse of the internet, fashion and advertising. The aestheticism favors and amplifies the era of the image, while individualism is consistent with the emergence of individualizing technologies, among which we can list from the personal services to personal profiles in social media.

Given the visibility paradigm, events are legitimate after sharing/viewed through the media. And the subject, in turn, often end up entering the media discursive order, creating "personal myths" and giving to see from the media technologies.

Currently, social media mediate the creation of these myths, where there is not only the simulation of a character, but the edition of this, searching for acceptance and recognition. Understood as spaces for exchange of information, these media are also "local" of subjectivity, in which subjects reinvent themselves, showing up the way you want to be seen (SOBRINHO, 2014).
Also, are presented as means of personal exhibition/exaltation, in a kind of worship to the self-image which brings similar characteristics to the proposals by Lasch in his concept of contemporary narcissism, such as the desire for admiration and approval. One of the most representative examples of this reality corresponds to selfie (self-portrait), which has become a true phenomenon, both in the media and in everyday life.

Selfie, according to the electronic registration of the Oxford Dictionary (2013), is a photograph of a person taken by itself, usually with a smartphone or a webcam, and shared in any social media. The practice of self-portrait is not new, although there are painting and even in photography, these from the early twentieth century.

However, the word selfie would only have been used for the first time in an online australian forum in 2002. Eight years later, according to information released by the social media Instagram, it was the first use of a tag’ with the term. In the photograph, taken by an IPhone, writer Jennifer Lee displays his own face and, next to the picture, put the comment that "love your new sweater."

![Figure 1 – Writer Jennifer Lee in the first image with selfie tag. Source: http://www.techtudo.com.br](image)

It is, therefore, a "technological transformation of the self-portrait practiced by persons belonging to a visual culture and practicing a visual culture" (SAITO; SOUZA, 2014, p.12). It appears, too, that even in the old photos, there is another element to be considered, in addition to the own image display - fashion.

1 “Label” that refers to the relevant word; associated with the symbol # (pound or tic-tac-toe) from keyboards become the hashtags, which are widely used in social media.
Fashion appears in the photographs and provides visual information about the subjectivity of its protagonists, especially in the last example, in which the external writer's desire to show people their social network the garment associated with personal satisfaction, the well-being and even a love relationship with the object.

This relationship is a characteristic of the consumer society, where fashion is a symbolic component through which identities and subjectivities are assumed, in a redefinition of object process.

Furthermore, according to Lipovetsky (1989, p.39):

> The fashion was not only a stage of assessment of the others performance; triggered at the same time, an investment of itself, an aesthetic self-observation without precedent. Fashion has connection with the pleasure of seeing, but also the pleasure of being seen, to display to the gaze of the other. If fashion, of course, does not create high below narcissism, reproduces it notably, makes it a constructive and permanent structure of worldly, encouraging them to engage more of its representation-presentation.

When it comes to social media, empirical observations denote that selfies can be considered instruments of contemporary narcissism ratification and, in this context, the fashion objects/products offer to the narcissistic several possibilities for editing and presentation of the image itself.

You can say that the selfie relates to the characteristics of contemporary fashion, and the narcissism expressed today. These and other relationships are meant to be studied, in summary, in this paper.

**Selfie, fashion and contemporary narcissism**

According to what was mentioned above, the practice of selfie as we know it today began to take space from publications in social media, occurred in a postmodern context marked by *cyber culture*, defined by Levy (1999, p.17) as "a set of techniques (material and intellectual), practices, attitudes, modes of thought and values that develop along with the growth of *cyberspace*.

The media technologies have enabled a large number of people projecting their images - both in *cyberspace* and in the communication between two or more mobile devices - the way to
look them more convenient. Often are created (and published by advertising) new devices and applications that enable the rapid exchange of visual information.

The presence of mobile devices and media in everyday life reached large proportions; the time and the language of the Internet began to dictate behavior, to create multiple identities and subjectivities, and to make the subjects present is the way in which they want to be seen by others.

In this sense is made unreasonable to assume that many aspects of cyber culture became fashion, starting from the concept of fashion as a social structure based on the present. This structure, however, "recycles" elements of the past, not limited only to the clothes, but with a logic that attached objects and varied territories, coinciding with the development of the consumer society and mass communication.

Examples of self-portraits from the past listed in the introduction demonstrate how old formulas can be reinterpreted by the fashion of each historical period. The fashion today, in their total social fact condition, "covers all aspects of society - economic, social, cultural - and all individuals, independently of race, belief, social class, gender, age" (PEREIRA, 2004, p. 63). Thus also relates to the media in the production of images, dissemination of ideas and stimulating consumption.

The pillars of contemporary fashion permeate the universe of social media for the simple fact that they are the very characteristics that time we live in, and also encourage the act of consuming images, ideas and products. In that universe everything is "new", ephemeral and subject to replacement; images and aesthetic ideals unattainable by most users are persecuted; and individualism is worshiped as a true lifestyle.

Online social networks represent the relationships between people in contemporary society, and, according to Bauman (2001) these relationships are made and kept alive by two different activities: connect and disconnect. However, "sharing is a cornerstone of contemporary visual culture" (SAITO; SOUZA, 2014, p.12), in which there is the instantaneous spread of multiple images, which are incorporated into everyday life and become part of it.

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As described Debord (2011), we stage our own show, our social relations are mediated by the images that we visualize/share, and today they are among the selfies. It would be fair to say, therefore, that the experience of the world would be experienced through countless interactions carried out and, in this case, the photographs published is a way of understanding reality. And best: would share these experiences with the greatest possible number of people present in our network “friends.”

However, do a self-portrait and offer it to an undetermined number of people subverts not only the aesthetics involved in the issue, but the very experience of photography. First because we lose control over our own picture and that portrait, multiplied in computers, tablets and mobile phones, is now no longer ours, opening the possibility for manipulation and various uses by those who have access to it.

Second, because, in line with the thinking of Baudrillard (2011), the transformation of the communication in show has made us unable to experience real experiences, because everything is previously lived virtually. And we can no longer imagine how much virtuality exists in our representations of the world.

Admittedly, the selfie really brings the aforementioned sharing idea. However, this share is intended to cause the other a sense of membership. Therefore begins to disappear the communication element of interaction with each other, it is necessary only to say something already suspected about yourself. In the language of social media to “like” what is being disclosed.

Although shared with other users of online networks, selfie has this power to turn the subject into object, "erasing" the context and the figure of the other, positively valued to "authorize" what is being shown in a given image. The contradiction lies in the fact that the presence of the other in the communication process reduces the legitimacy that can give posted messages, nearly a “happiness authorization” exposed on the screen and/or display.

It’s not necessary to go far to identify this reality. Just observe the selfies published in social media we have access. Many of the pictures are taken in front of mirrors, “as a reflection of yourself that, in turn, is reflected in photography” produced\(^3\).

Other photos doesn’t have a scene or background, just the face of the person shooting takes all visible space with a unique and exclusive protagonist: a figure that shows and, of course, sought the ideal angle for viewing and "tanned" the largest number of followers. Many of these parties come to the laschian narcissist that seeks successful appearance dissociated of experience and work as if there were no results whatever it took be a process. The selfie receiving “tanned” and positive comments meets the desire of narcissistic admiration, which prefers to be envied to be respected (Lasch, 1983).

Data that can prove this phenomenon come from a survey conducted in 2012 by Humboldt University of Berlin, who pointed Instagram as the media that caused more depression. According to the survey, suffering arises in comparisons between profiles, affecting the self-esteem of users. In the so-called “spiral effect”: the envy picture of someone, the user tries to take a picture in which seems happier. Another statistic says that people spend a lot of time riding a beautiful image and choosing the best filter and do not realize the time invested in the network.4

The ideal image is a much explored nuance in selfie phenomenon. With the popularity of Instagram, "ordinary" people began to follow the daily life and the lifestyle of famous national and international, having the possibility to appear "closer" of his idols, even sending messages to them.

Similarly, celebrities seek to use the media to gain popularity and get closer to fans. This approach can lead to envy mentioned in that study, but also increases self-esteem of the narcissist, which binds to admired people, whose acceptance aims and whose image you want to emulate.

In the image of the Brazilian actress Isis Valverde in social media Instagram (Fig. 2), comments revolve around statements about her physical form, with prominence the girl says “I want to be like that,” and have “the belly”. To Nascimento:

Signs of beauty and youth make the narcissism a social phenomenon, and generating a new form of individual who, nevertheless can be inserted in the “normal”, so, in the medium and common psychological type of our society suffers from typical anxieties of pathological narcissism. […] The investment of the contemporary “narcissistic” turns to an image made from external references determined by the cultural and spectacle industry and (2011, p.100).

The celebrity industry, linked to the market mass media interest, joins the other cultural industries and products on which it depends (CAMPBELL; TWENGE, 2009): fashion, cosmetics and any products/procedures to assist the search for the perfect body. Within the embodied culture, the body is mediatized and subjected to compulsory visibility⁵. Advertising discourses of individuals lifting become subjects in media and consumer goods.

In Figure 3, the actress Bruna Marquezine shares, in Instagram, one selfie done in front of the mirror in which she was staying in the city of Belém-PA, with the following caption: "Primed!!! And with beautiful enamel of my collection #EsmaltesBrunaMarquezine #Ludurana # Belém", making the dissemination of products that just launched in partnership with a nail polish brand.

Meanwhile, in the comments, a follower wants to know where is the dress worn by actress. This is an example of how the shared self-portrait on the Internet may have affinity with the fashion industry, and how to cause the general public to identify with the mediatic subjects.

For Lasch, the media intensifies the narcissistic dreams of fame and glory, encourages the common man to identify with the stars and to hate the ‘flock’, and makes it increasingly difficult for him to accept the banality of everyday existence "(p .43). In addition, shareholder relations are one of the peculiarities of contemporary narcissist. Because of their difficulty of maintaining real relationships, rather forge links with whom radiates celebrity.

Extremely individualistic, contemporary narcissist practices the "ethic of self-preservation" and "psychic survival," concepts also mentioned by Lasch. Thus, they have a relationship with the time that is now the most important moment. Disappear the questions for the deeds of the past and plans for the future, leaving only the need for acceptance by the other, but without it becoming an important role in the life of narcissist.
Involvement with others is, above all, a threat to a "makeup" world view and superficiality of relationships. The other, indispensable for the exercise of communication and subjectivity, appears empty. Until the selfies made in group, the idea seems to be to demonstrate belonging to a restricted brotherhood, where all share the same forged joy, the same lifestyle and the same subjectivity, as if they were one face in a selfie taken forward the mirror.

This overvaluation of "I", the profusion of images of consumer culture, fashion is even more ephemeral, offering products that fit that either have or present as pictorial characters (MELLO, 2014), which can easily appear in numerous selfies also making up a form of narcissism expression.

**Final considerations**

During this study, we sought to analyze, from a brief literature review, the proposition that the share of self-portraits known as selfies through social media can be seen as a form of expression of fashion and contemporary narcissism.

Based on the paradigm of visibility, it was found that communication currently occupies a distinct space, organizing social relations. The society organized on the basis of symbolic exchanges raised the everyday life to show level, in which the boundaries between public and private are increasingly confused.

It also occurred over the years, a change in the sense of time, making thoughts, work habits, and the definition of success. These changes resulted, among other implications, the exaggerated individualism, the cult of appearances and extremely concerned about the lived moment. Led also to the rise of values among which stand out freedom, pleasure, the "good mood" youth, "peace of mind" - all pointing to what Lasch call "ethics of self-preservation and psychic survival "(1983).

With the consolidation of cyber culture, part of the consumer culture, the Internet has become a breeding field and subjectivities of expression. More recently, social media have become the stage for the "spectacle" of everyday life, in a profusion of images shared instantly via computers and mobile devices. Contemporary visibility thus becomes legitimate facts and events through publication/display these.
This process that changes day to day in a show affects a large number of people and, in a way, "presses" individuals to have online social networks. Do not have a profile on the Internet, do not share your intimacy on the network can even limit the importance of the person or other social spaces make it seem outdated, "frozen in time".

In these profiles, you can not only publish ideas, common interests with the network, but "edit" the image itself, making detailed autobiographical selection, choose the best photo, show only convenient to be shown, in short, it is about a true exercise of individualism, in which images of himself - expecting "tanned" and positive comments - occupy a privileged space.

In 2010, the first picture with the selfie tag is posted on social media Instagram. This photo, shared by writer Jennifer Lee, brought a legend that made mention of "love" that this user had for a new piece of clothing. Since then the selfies, mostly made through webcam and smartphones, have multiplied, appearing in various situations and published faster and faster.

The ephemerality is part of the characteristics of the consumer society, which is maintained by dissatisfaction and the redefinition of the objects. So it did not take long for the selfie acquired a fashion character, since this is not just limited to clothing, but the whole social context that attaches various territories, where the mass media and technologies.

It was felt, therefore, that the pillars of contemporary fashion cited by Gilles Lipovetsky in his consummate fashion concept, namely: the ephemerality, individualism and aestheticism (1989), are related to the very nature of the act of producing and sharing selfies. In addition, every time they arise innovations that can increase this act, as bats called monopods, triggered via Bluetooth technology, and used to capture a wider angle of view, and more people can appear under the selfie.

The fashion industry, aesthetics, tourism, among others, are also profiting from the self-portraits, especially when these are made by celebrities who use social media as self-promotional advertising space and dissemination of products that "sign".

Accordingly, using the ideas Christopher Lasch (1983), it was found that the selfie phenomenon is one form of expression of contemporary narcissism. From the literature review and observation of photos shared on social media, were identified peculiarities that lead to the following considerations mentioned.
The contemporary narcissist aims to overcome your insecurities with the vision of the self reflected in other people's attention. Such attention is measured from the positive comments and the amount of people who "likes" images, so, that "validate" the exposed happiness on the photo. However, as the body discourse this work, the other is an erased in the selfie context.

With the transformation of the subject in object, depends from the other figure only for validating own self-esteem. Empty up, so the communication process and the performance of subjectivities. Sharing is one of selfie bases, but the obsession with oneself denotes the fragility of the "I" and makes room for that narcissism is installed (NEPHEW, 2014), making the individual dependent on others' approval only up to a point - since the presence of the other psychic can interfere with the survival of narcissist.

Public acclaim need and approval of personal attributes, desire for admiration, celebrity illusion, overvaluation of new and youth, and the will to get success as an end in itself are narcissistic characteristics that can be identified in selfies. The pursuit of an ideal of the perfect body - or considered perfect by current standards - and the cult of appearances also part of this list.

It appears again when the "latest fashion", that needs to be portrayed by the narcissist and brings us to the memory of the first selfie shared on Instagram, a reference to the "love" that media user felt for his new sweater. Or to celebrity profiles, filled with selfies in the mirror showing the "Look of the Day", that their own fashion conventionally already change the name to "outfit of the day" or, in the language of hashtags, #ootd.

In view of the observations, it appears that social media is the ideal setting for the creation of personal myths and amplification of narcissistic personalities. In postmodern culture, marked by consumption and exacerbated individualism, are identified market aspects in their own relationships between people, transforming the subjects in media.

It is possible to say, therefore, that the shared self-portraits contribute to the proliferation of narcissistic culture, and keep close relationships with other aspects of contemporary society, such as fashion and advertising, for example. Thus, the contemporary narcissism now has subjective and objective conditions that trigger or exacerbate, which include their own social media, the selfie and fashion.
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