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Special issue on Semiotics of Selfies

edited by
Gregory Paschalidis

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INTRODUCTION: THE SEMIOTICS OF SELFIES

Gregory Paschalidis

Since the beginning of the new millennium, the near universal spread of camera-loaded smartphones and web photo sharing has led to the profuse growth of all the historically familiar genres of vernacular photography, such as family snapshots and photos of friends, travel and vacation photos, landscape and photo-booth photos. The first institution to be challenged by the smartphone camera-wielding multitudes was journalism, where we've seen the massive invasion of amateur imagery into the prestigious terrain of 'breaking news' and documentary photography. The photojournalists' response was to castigate the amateurs' lack of the objectivity and ethical standards that give their profession its distinctive public value and significance. At least as much, if not more, controversy accompanied the astounding popularity of selfie-taking. If in the case of the omnipresent 'accidental photo-reporter' what was at stake was the moral status and legitimacy of photojournalism, in the case of the ubiquitous 'accidental self-portraitist' the stake was the moral status and legitimacy of the time-cherished institution of the self-portrait. With a pedigree that goes back to the cultural heroes of the Renaissance, the artist's self-portrait is a visual genre that, both in painting and photography, is revered as a signature artwork, crucial for the self-fashioning of the artist as well as for the art-historical significance of his work. The artworld's reaction is characteristically defensive. The exhibition *This is not a Selfie* at the San José Museum of Art (2017), comprising 80 photo self-portraits created by celebrated artists, aimed, according to the Museum's curator Rory Padeken, at highlighting the importance of distinguishing between selfies and 'the fine art genre of photographic self-portraiture' (Artdaily 2017). His statement condenses the artworld's resolve to deny any blurring of the borderlines between experts' and laymen's self-portraits. At the same time, the artworld has readily incorporated to the art-historical narrative various artists' engagement with the bland, unpretentious aesthetics of photo-booth portaiture – like Andy Warhol, Francis Bacon or Cindy Sherman – and, more recently, the selfies made by Ai Weiwei, the self-confessed 'best selfie artist' (Sooke 2017).

Condemned to the gratuitousness, overindulgence and profanity of the extra-aesthetic the self-portrayal of the anonymous mass of non-artists, made for the sake of intimate sociality rather than of posterity or artisanship, seems suspicious and scandalous, a symptom of some sinister socio-psychological pathology (e.g. narcissism, exhibitionism) or yet another instance of capitalist ideological manipulation. Vilification of new media technologies and practices is sadly more the rule than the exception in communications history. From the 'reading mania' in the 18th century to the current 'selfie epidemic', the path of modernity is strewn with outbreaks of media panic and the pathologization of media users, targeting especially women and youth (see e.g. Travers Scott 2018). Made a few years before the emergence of selfies, Jean-Pierre Jeunet's critically acclaimed romantic comedy film *Les fabuleux destin d' Amélie Poulain* (2001) proves unwittingly prophetic of the kind of pathologization that was in store for selfie-takers. Nino, a rather idiosyncratic young man, collects the discarded photo-portraits of strangers from photo-booths. Both he and Amélie, the romantically imaginative heroine, are mystified by the expressionless photo-portraits systematically left torn in different photo-booths by the same man. They believe that he is either a ghost or someone obsessed with the idea of death. The riddle of the 'mystery man' is solved when Amélie discovers that he is the photo-booth repairman whose discarded photo-portraits are simply part of his testing procedure. Nino's and Amélie's patent over-interpretation of an ordinary, everyday practice as a sign of metaphysical apparition or ontological angst offers a prescient parody of the socio-medical discourse on selfie-taking. To the relatively younger audience of Millennials, in addition, the film acted as a reminder of the fact that self-photography is not an innovation of the digital age but a long-standing familiar and widespread practice, associated with much earlier forms of photographic technology, such as the photo-booth or self-timer camera accessories. The international success of Jeunet's film may have contributed to the rekindling of interest in photo-booths, which in recent years have seen a nostalgic revival. More significantly, the emergence of digital self-portraiture has led to a sweeping new interest in the study of the self-portrait in both its artistic-professional and its vernacular forms.

Being the first modern communication technology to be popularised, photography has, in fact, given rise to the first kind of vernacular media culture. The radical transformation that was unleashed by the mass marketization of the portable, user-friendly Kodak camera in the 1880s, is inscribed in the very definition of what 'popular photography' is really about. As pointed out by Robert Pols, 'when the 19th century is considered, it means "photography for the people"; in the 20th century, it increasingly comes to mean "photography by the people"' (Pols 2002: 20). In our digital times, vernacular media culture goes by the name 'user-generated culture' and encompasses a profuse variety of web-circulated amateur digital artifacts, amongst whom selfies are at once the most popular and the most controversial. The bulk of the selfie-ology produced so far, however, seems to forget the wealth of visual methodologies developed to comprehend the complexities of our modern imagescape and continues the

traditional practice of dealing with the extra-artistic in the summary terms of psychological or sociological reductions rather than as forms of signification imbricated in social discourse and communication.

Between the mid-1950s and the mid-1960s, the parallel endeavour of Roland Barthes and Umberto Eco to unravel the codes of mass-produced culture have effectively founded postwar semiotics as an analytical-critical project that, going against the grain of the then dominant paradigm of cultural criticism, addressed the wild, hitherto uncharted fields of popular culture rather than the noble, well-tended gardens of elite culture. This path-breaking moment subsequently faded, since, with few notable exceptions, the ensuing academic canonisation of semiotics prompted a preoccupation with either the cultural canon or the avant-garde. In this context, even the Formalists' adroit insights into folk culture were gentrified, relocated as they were onto the rarefied heights of auratic texts. In either case, semiotics has never adequately responded to the challenge of the other, equally reviled and neglected as a topic for serious consideration field of popularly produced culture, in other words, of vernacular media culture. As regards photography perhaps the last works of Barthes offer some fertile starting points.

Both *Camera Lucida*, published shortly before his untimely death, and the last seminar he had prepared for his lecture series at the Collège de France, dealing with Proust and photography (Barthes 2003), were about vernacular photography, and specifically, about amateur made pictures charged with highly intimate significance. In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes expresses his irritation with the sociological reduction of 'the worlds' countless photographs' to familialist ideology – as, most notably, Bourdieu (1966) had done. By defining the essence of photography 'separated from the "pathos" of which it consists', he remarks, none such approach discusses 'precisely the photographs which interest me, which give me pleasure or emotion', those photographs in which 'I see only the referent, the desired object, the beloved body' (Barthes 1981: 7, 21). Reversing the established hierarchy of values, but also opening up a perspective that can possibly deconstruct the art/vernacular photography opposition, he cites in parentheses his most iconoclastic thought:

(Usually the amateur is defined as an immature state of the artist: someone who cannot – or will not – achieve the mastery of a profession. But in the field of photographic practice, it is the amateur, on the contrary, who is the assumption of the professional: for it is he who stands closer to the noeme of Photography.) (Barthes 1981: 99)

Established artistic and professional photographic genres enjoy a discernible identity over time, since their respective institutional settings guarantee the adherence to certain rules and conventions, as well as an active dialogue with a discrete tradition of works and authors. Vernacular photographic genres, on the other hand, have a much more fluid generic identi-

ty based on tacit understandings and rules grounded in particular social contexts, uses and practices. Vernacular photography, Buse suggests, 'while it is sometimes described as a genre, it might be better understood as a social practice which partakes of many photographic modes' (Buse 2016: 146). In common, moreover, with the other vernacular media cultures that followed – like amateur filmmaking and radio – its emergence and subsequent growth was dependent upon the design and promotion of modern media as user-friendly technologies, accessible to the unskilled and the non-professional. Hence, 'it is highly dependent on and responsive to technological change, since so many (although not all) of its practitioners rely on equipment that requires little skill and the exact workings of which they do not understand' (ibid.). Consequently, the question of the selfies as a vernacular digital culture hinges both on the issue of the singularly affective dynamics of vernacular imagery, as indicated by Barthes, and on the issue of the singularity of the digital media themselves, their affordances as semiotic technologies shaping the contemporary imagescape, as explored by social semiotics (see e.g. Zappavigna 2016; Zhao and Zappavigna 2018a, 2018b).

The special issue on the 'Semiotics of Selfies' starts out with Paulius Jevsejevas' exploration of animal selfies as a distinctive part of the selfie phenomenon characterized by a particular enunciative practice featuring the semiotic construction of the animal face. Employing Eric Landowski's semiotics of interactions, Jevsejevas demonstrates the significance of animal selfies for the anthrozoological problematics, as a site for comprehending the contemporary redefinition of human-animal interactions and of humanity itself.

In the following article, Massimo Leone develops a strategy of denaturalizing the all too familiar selfies by employing Umberto Eco's hermeneutic trichotomy, i.e. the distinction between *intentio auctoris*, *intentio lectoris* and *intentio operis*. Proceeding to chart the different analytical and interpretive tasks and challenges involved in each of these levels of meaning, Leone rounds off his comprehensive account by focusing on the selfies' vital connection with the temporal ideology of the present, of an always renewed 'here and now', unmoored from history and memory.

In the next contribution, Sebastián Moreno focuses on the practice of selfie-taking as a complex negotiation between the offline/perceived self and the online/expressed self. Combining the insights of Jean-Marie Floch and those of social constructivism Moreno proposes a processual model of selfie-taking whose analytical force serves to reveal the thickly coded and essentially contractual character of the selfie as a realistic 'show of the self'.

Finally, Benson Rajan investigates the process through which fitness influencers in social media produce and perform their 'fit' visuals, and its relationship with anorexia nervosa and other eating disorders. Combining in-depth interviews with Indian female fitness influencers and a semiotic reading of the gestural aspects of their selfies, Rajan highlights the discursive formations, rules and limits that define the technocultural circuit of kinesthetic sociability connecting the production and reception of fitness selfies.

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Their Faces. Building the Semiotic Case of Animal Selfies

Paulius Jevsejevas

In this paper, I attempt to provide a tentative semiotic description of animal selfies. I treat animal selfies as part of the broader selfie phenomenon and interpret them with regard to some general considerations of how selfies might be seen as texts of a particular enunciative practice that is intertwined with social media. I argue that selfies are related to the mirror and depend on constructing the face-object; that they are a way of sharing enunciative positions; that they can be conceptualized as personal deixes that intimate the person sharing her experiences. All of these features feed into the peculiar morphologic invention of the animal face in animal selfies, which I take as a reference point for a description of a larger variety of animal selfies. Through the animal face, animals take part in the enunciative practice of selfies and in the interfacial sphere of sharing personal experiences. To put animal face selfies in a broader context of animal selfies, I make use of the sociosemiotic framework of modes of meaning and interaction developed by Eric Landowski. I take animal face selfies to be representative of one mode, Manipulation, and then discuss animal selfies as dependent upon other modes, Programming, Adjustment and Accident.

Keywords selfies, animal selfies, human, animal, modes of meaning

Animal selfies as a subject of semiotic inquiry

In 2013, 'selfie' was named Oxford Dictionaries Word of the Year. The definition provided by Oxford Dictionaries is as follows: *A photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically one taken with a smartphone or webcam and shared via social media.* (Oxford Dictionaries 2019). This formula is a definition of the selfie as a technological practice of image production and exchange: it describes the kind of image produced, the typical procedure, the devices used and the social and media environment wherein the images are offered to spectators for inter-

pretation. It is useful for the purposes of a semiotic analysis of selfie images because it recognizes that the use of smartphones and social media is inherent to the selfie phenomenon. The potential implications of these conditions have already been highlighted. According to Alise Tifentale and Lev Manovich, ‘the implications of particular technologies [...] are exactly what makes the selfie substantially different from its earlier precursors’ (Tifentale, Manovich 2015: 8). I will take heed of this when attempting a semiotic description of selfies. I will describe selfies as a semiotic phenomenon with an emphasis on the coexistence of different levels that constitute their meaning (I see the interrelation of these levels as part of the substantial difference stressed by Tifentale and Manovich). As indicated by the title of this paper, I will consider such selfies in which animals or some sort of animality is depicted, calling all of their variants animal selfies.

The corpus of selfies presented and described in this article is limited by a dominant morphological feature – I will only be considering selfies with visible heads, be they animal or human. This means that leg selfies, hand selfies, abs selfies, butt selfies, eye selfies, beard selfies, armpit selfies or genital selfies will not be considered. Admittedly, this is a significant limitation. But it springs from my initial focus on what I shall call the ‘animal face’ – a particular meaning effect by which animals acquire faces and which makes the selfie genre interesting in terms of contemporary conceptions of animals and animality.¹ Through this effect, animals are acknowledged as quasi-human subjects, on a par with their human partners. Hence, my limited choice of head and face selfies is conditioned by the problematic of the animal face as a reference point for analysis.

As I have mentioned above, I will consider animal selfies to be all types of selfies where animals or anything related to animality is present in a figuratively recognizable guise. These shall include selfies physically taken by animals themselves (Figure 1, Figure 20); fictional selfies supposedly taken by animals (Figure 2, Figure 16); selfies taken by humans with in the background (Figure 15, Figure 17); selfies taken by humans with animals nearby (Figures 6, 7, 9, 12, 13, 14); selfies taken by humans for animals and their social profiles, seeking the impression of animal user autonomy (Figure 4, Figure 10, Figure 11), Figure 8, Figure 9, Figure 10, Figure 11, Figure 12,); selfies taken by humans wearing animal masks (Figure 3, Figure 18, Figure 19); selfies taken by humans using augmented reality software apps (Figures 21, Figure 22, Figure 23).

It is only by treating selfies as texts and enunciative practices that I am able to include many of these types. If I stuck to a definition strictly confined to a technological practice, then even David Slater’s famous macaque selfie (Figure 1) should be disregarded since it was not the animal itself who put the selfie on the internet, and even the actual use of photographic technology by the animal could be questioned on cognitive grounds (is the animal taking a photo of itself or is it just grabbing some thing it finds interesting?). Similarly, fictional animal selfies (Figure 2) could be disregarded for simply not being real, animal mask selfies (Figure 3) for not being animal enough etc. This is a position someone might possibly take and defend.

However, in the terms espoused here: 1) all of the aforementioned examples are selfies and they circulate as such; 2) all of these selfies or, indeed, animal selfies, provide some view of animals or animality and thus might be considered a site for a human understanding of animals, even though some of them might prove more significant than others.



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3

As for 1), all of these are selfies, because in terms of meaning images are constituted on different levels. Maria Giulia Dondero distinguishes four such levels: the text (morphology), the genre (enunciative praxis / perceptive and semantic memory), the situation (enunciation and perception as acts) and status (stabilized usage and interpretation) (Basso Fossali, Dondero 2015: 68). All of the levels coexist and do not predetermine one another unilaterally, it is their interrelation that matters. For example, the fact that an animal took a selfie because it was induced or imagined to do so by a human who then shared the selfie does not cancel out the selfie-specific textual arrangement of the image or its status recognition on the internet.

Thus, even if we know that the koala in Figure 2 did not take the selfie nor share it and even though we have encountered the image in the context of advertising rather than a peer-to-peer social interaction, the textual morphology (we clearly see a representation of an act of taking a selfie) and perceptive and semantic memory (the use of a camera together with a mirror, the relatively narrow field of view suggestive of a phone camera, the banality and intimacy of the circumstances) are enough for us to recognize the image as a selfie taken by an animal (albeit a fictional one). It is also used sarcastically as a 'terrible animal picture' in order to remind the spectator of the higher-quality images made by professional nature photographers, which for the purposes of this paper counts as an element of the way the animal takes part in the selfie.

The same goes for Figure 1 where a real animal did take a photo of itself but probably

didn't know or care it was doing just that and never intended to share it. There is an act of enunciation wherein the animal has approached the camera and pushed the button: we can see the hand of the macaque stretching out behind the frame, explicitly demonstrating the spatial and temporal limitations of a self-photograph made with a handheld device. There is also a particular tilt of the head that suggests, by ways of genre-memory, a certain propensity to immediately address, to be seen and reacted to by whomever the photo is sent to.

This also applies to Figure 4, where a real animal was photographed and the photo captioned and shared by people who own and take care of the animal. First, the centrality and forward protrusion of the body and especially the head, as well as the lack of a portrait-like stability of the background and composition, successfully imitate the 'casual feel' of the selfie. Second, the photo has been captioned and made part of an Instagram feed of a personal profile of Esther the Wonder Pig. In the caption, there is talk of early mornings which makes the photo an instance of everyday media accounting (see p. 7). Through the perceptive dominance of the snout, ears and eyes – and a projection of a face – this photo appears as an effusion of the most intimate personal presence in the general everyday flow of photographs in a profile. As I shall try to show later, such effusion of personal presence is one possible description of the selfie in general. A selfie purist might say that all of the above are attempts to imitate real human-made selfies, but even so, they are successful attempts, and as such they are animal selfies. They need to be explained as a particular way to make sense of animals with obvious animal participation.

Then again, there are limits to this interplay of different levels on which the meaning of images is constituted. Another photo of Esther the Wonder Pig (see Figure 5), should not be considered a selfie, as it reveals too much of the body and the background, does not bring us very close to the position of enunciation, has an angle that suggests the cognitive activity of an autonomous observer etc. It is a portrait snapshot that acquires intensely personal undertones because of its caption and its being part of the feed of a particular personal Instagram profile, but this does not make it a selfie.



Figure 4



Figure 5

As for 2), selfies are one of the numerous sites where a human understanding of animals or animality is instituted, developed and maintained. As such, they pose the general

problems of representation, agency, power relations, objectivation, personhood etc. In this article, I shall describe animal selfies using a Greimasian sociosemiotic framework of modes of meaning and interaction, developed by Eric Landowski (Landowski 2005). This framework has the advantage of allowing for an analytic and non-ontologizing description of social and existential meaning implications of texts, without adopting some predefined standard of their limits of interpretation. The framework also facilitates working with a corpus of multiple texts, since the semiotic concept of interaction is not an explanation of textual coherence or interpretability, but a field of general systematic distinctions between different ways in which actantial relations are established. Landowski distinguishes four modes. These different ways of establishing actantial relations function as general models for the meaning of our being in the world. Whenever a (anthropologic) subject encounters someone or something in the world, this very encounter depends on one or another actantial form, an 'existential style' or a mode of interaction, which allows for the production of meaning. Texts and uses of texts also establish actantial relations and thus reveal how worldly encounters are understood by those producing and using the texts. In this particular case, the sociosemiotic framework will allow for a description of animal selfies without losing sight of their immersion in social media and the semiotic underpinnings of their medium and practice of production. It will allow me to see such differences between animal selfies as based on different conceptions of how humans encounter animals or animality as someone or something that needs to be interacted with through some kind of actantial relations.

The animal face in selfies: animals as enunciators

On the grounds of this very general conception of animal selfies as a site for the human understanding of animals and animality, I would like to single out a certain form of animal selfies as a focus and a point of reference for further analysis. I consider this form to be more significant than others both because some of its practitioners have reached a rather high level of execution and because it uses the genre to transform our visual access to understanding animals. I have already mentioned that these are animal selfies in which an *animal face* is instituted – as in the following figures:

By 'animal face' I mean the effect of meaning when we recognize a real or realistically rendered animal head making facial gestures analogous to human facial gestures. Sometimes this is supported by the animal making similar bodily gestures. Both elements, the head and the face, are equally important here. For even though the animals are recognized as making facial gestures the way humans do, these are not human facial gestures – they are made by real or realistically rendered animals and thus depend on the physiognomy and the plasticity of particular animal heads and acquire undeniable non-human characteristics. And yet, despite



Figure 6



Figure 7

the fact that they are not human, the gestures are facial – they successfully constitute faces that are normally the privilege of human beings. These animal faces are equivalent to human faces in their meaning-making potential as exploited by the selfie genre.

Of course, this invention of realistic animal faciality is a human endeavour. The important point here is not some metamorphosis of the animal head in and by itself but the human willingness and ability to transfer to animals this ‘materialised retention’, this ‘prolongation of the self’ which is the face according to Marion Zilio (2018). By creating the conditions for this transfer, the selfie genre provides for a peculiar kind of encounter between humans and animals. As much as the selfie is a semiotic practice of the face, of communicating faces in different circumstances in order to foster different kinds of interpersonal interactions and ventures, when an animal is made part of this practice by acquiring a face, it follows that the animal also becomes an active participant of the aforementioned communication, the obvious physiological, cognitive and behavioural limitations of any such animal participation notwithstanding. In terms of textual meaning, it is impossible or rather irrelevant to consider selfies with faces of real or realistic animals as simple projections of human discursive categories unto animals. The difference that matters is not the one between humans and animals, but the one between animals without faces or with make-believe faces and animals with realistic faces taking part in communicative practices based on facial projections of the self. In other words, even if animal selfies are, in principle, a human endeavour, the introduction of animal faces intimates a new kind of partner for selfie driven interactions – an animal partner. In order to better understand what this development might entail, a brief consideration of selfies as a text-driven interaction is in order.

First of all, it is interesting to note a certain metaphorical quality of the novel experience of visual media as offered by the principal selfie gadgets thus far, webcams and especially smartphones. Because of the front-facing camera, the screen of these gadgets has become



Figure 8



Figure 9

an instance of the portable mirror: the process of video capture and streaming is so rapid that it feels like an instant reflection. But this is something else than a simple repetition of the traditional mirror experience, since the smartphone is also a networked device, allowing us to instantly share the aforementioned feeling of instant reflection – as if others could stand in our shoes. In selfies, others can share our feeling of having seen ourselves.

This makes the networked image-producing digital mirror quite different from the traditional mirror which, according to Lewis Mumford, for the first time provided an image of the self that ‘corresponded accurately to what others saw’ and revealed ‘the self *in abstracto*’ (Mumford 1955: 129), as an epistemic object of introspective knowledge. Because the smartphone produces visual texts, in it, we do not simply see ourselves just like others would; instead, in selfies we see ourselves the way we look in terms of an enunciative practice that we take part in and at the time of our taking part in this practice. In selfies, we do not share a simple well-defined image of ourselves. We share the way we are able to make ourselves seen under the confines of our circumstances as we live them. We share an enunciative practice – a whole practice and not just singular results, since selfies are indefinitely serialized – of showing ourselves from the perspective of our situation in the duration of our lives. Thus, the selfie is not a stable and objective surface from which we could abstract our inner self via introspection, or someone else’s inner self via inspection. Instead of a common empirical facticity, we instantly share a process of self-imagining. From its very conception, a selfie is a way we enunciate our own situation in the world as it might be seen by someone – whoever is in the position of the enunciator – who wants to see it as his or her own, as we just have. The selfie is an emphatic practice, which arguably is no less binding than an epistemic object of knowledge. And since we carry our smartphones around everywhere we go, it is a practice of sharing experience, because it is always under some circumstances of our lives as experienced by us that we have seen ourselves and shared the way we have seen ourselves.

In media semiotic terms, networking and instantly sharing how we have seen ourselves

amounts to reducing the experiential distinction between the positions of the producer of the image and the spectator: networking and instant sharing establishes an equivalence between production and interpretation, allowing the spectator to identify with the enunciator's bodily, spatial and temporal circumstances. It is an extreme form of connectedness, making everyone's enunciative position potentially available for our taking in an instant, and our own position available for the taking by others. As Anne Beyaert-Geslin has put it, in contrast to autoportraits, selfies 'deny any memorial or historical function'; they 'shorten the temporal sequence as much as possible, [they] offer themselves to superficial attention and even deny any sort of pretension to posterity'; they 'insist on the present' and are even 'protentive' as they require a continuation and a response (Beyaert-Geslin 2017: 173, 174) This functionalizes the selfie mirror-image and makes it available for exchange: my face is there to offer a position I have taken; its particular qualities are not there for themselves and contemplation, but rather to suggest an immediate outlook on that position. Thus faces require to be 'read' and appropriated instantly.

This allows for extended animal participation via the animal face. As selfies are not concerned with introspective knowledge, we do not need to presuppose introspection in animal partners in order to acknowledge their capacity to take part in this practice. If taking a selfie is equivalent to having seen oneself in one or another way in the act of enunciation under some lifelike circumstances and having others see this sight as analogous to their own self-image, we are able to ascribe all of this to an animal as long as there is a gaze that we can interpret as a presence in front of the camera, a facial configuration and posture that we can interpret as an outlook on the way one has seen oneself with regard to the camera, a body that we can interpret as implicated in the act of enunciation and a set of circumstances that we can exchange for our own through the recognition of experience. On the basis of these elements, we are able to grant animals selfie agency and empathize with them. It is a peculiar case of empathy because in this case empathizing means sharing an enunciative position, a way of seeing and imaging oneself, which means that, to a certain extent, animals are acknowledged as enunciators who take part in generating meanings of texts and interactions driven by these texts.

Behind the face, a person

In order to better understand this kind of empathy, it is worth noting that in spite of all the instantaneity of producing and sharing selfies, we never see each other directly; there is no possibility to look our interlocutor in the eye. The most straightforward example of this must be the real-time experience of a video call. In a video call conversation, we can only look our interlocutor in the eye by looking into the camera eye. Which means that while the interlocutor is confronted by our gaze, we are looking nowhere, into a certain void required

by the technological setup itself. The same thing applies to selfies. This indicates a process of becoming-image that affects our persons both in real-time streaming and in instant sharing of still images: it is only as images that we encounter each other directly; any kind of personal involvement is oblique, indirect.

A Skype call screen is very explicit about this encounter in images. The screen comprises two boxes for streaming video: one shows us the interlocutor, and the other shows us ourselves, the way we are being shown to the interlocutor. We need to see both the interlocutor and ourselves in order to construct a conversation, which we do by staging our bodies in certain ways – looking straight, sitting still, controlling posture etc. We stage our bodies as images on the screen in order to arrive at a shared enunciation, an effect of co-presence. In the terms used by Zilio (2018), we could say that the staging of our bodies with regard to what we see as images is a process of constructing our ‘face-object’, and, together, the interfacial space for a direct encounter. Once again, the face is instantly shared and not intended for contemplation or posterity. In this sense, the face-object is not finished, it is a dynamics of becoming-image that retains a connection with our our bodily situation.

This dynamics is expanded further by the sharing of selfies. Sharing selfies is not limited by a necessity to stay in front of the camera. Indeed, an encounter by selfie does not have a limited duration: after you post your selfie on social media, it can be discovered there for an indefinite time to come. This makes selfies somewhat similar to deictic pronouns in writing. They are relatively independent of the embodied situation of enunciation in comparison to a video call, just like pronouns in writing are relatively independent in comparison with pronouns in spoken conversation which point to a particular speaker. But there is also an important difference, since linguistic pronouns in themselves are abstract (the meaning of ‘I’ in itself is tautological at best – ‘I’ is the one writing), while selfies are the epitome of particularity: they are the image of an actual someone, a person in the flesh, and thus always have a unique inherent semantic value – at least insofar as they include faces. In terms of meaning, the linguistic ‘I’ is empty and filled in by choice, while selfies are not. Selfies with faces are inherently meaningful deixes that depend on an indirect recognition of somebody able to project a facial presence from a multiplicity of experiences but never exhausted by this projection – of somebody who is a person.²

Once again this is important if we acknowledge the invention of the animal face in animal selfies. If there is an animal face, then there is a direct encounter with a dynamics of becoming-image pertaining to an animal. Accordingly, it presupposes a possibility of an indirect personal involvement, a recognition of an animal person projecting the facial presence in the image. This way, the animal face enables animal visual personal deixes with an inherent personal semantics. This entails a meaning effect of sharing experiences as well as enunciative positions. Of course, this is an effect of meaning that is accessible to humans rather than animals themselves. But the way we understand animals must play some part in what they are, at least for us humans. In this sense, animal selfies might be considered as a minor site of a shift wherein real

and realistic animals are attributed a subjectivity and a personhood: first, they are conceived as actants-subjects capable of sharing their enunciative position; second, they are attributed an indirectly accessible being, a personality with a horizon of experiences.

As inherently meaningful deixes, selfies constitute a digital landscape of persons who find themselves in different circumstances. The circumstances range from the enunciating body in front of the camera to the place or the time of taking a selfie, to the body, time and space as represented and constructed (and perhaps enhanced) in the selfie. The human body and posture may be pretty, or attractive, or strong, or explicitly real, or funny, or just ordinary etc. With the animal face, the animal body also becomes a particular personal circumstance: the small body of Lionel the Hedgehog is able to sit in the palm of a human hand and feels incredibly light and merry (Figure 10); the body of a farm pig is huge and feels heavy; dog postures and expressions are very different from cat or rabbit postures and expressions.

For example, Esther the Pig (Figure 4) has rather small eyes and a relatively large head, which, together with an upwardly curved 'smiling' lip line, makes her look like she is squinting in a kind-hearted manner; on the other hand, Doug the Pug (Figure 11) has rather large round eyes and a relatively small head with a downwardly curved lip line and thus looks somewhat melancholic or maybe sarcastic. It is also a smallish animal in a large human world... Along with faces, the species-specific features of animal faces like the size of the eyes, ears, noses or snouts, the thickness, evenness and the tactile quality of the skin or the shape of the head play a role in constituting their personalities. The same principle of differences applies to spatial and temporal circumstances. Just like humans take selfies everywhere from their private bathrooms to exotic beaches, from their working hours to Christmas eves, so do animals appear anywhere, from zoos or human homes to farms or places of natural habitat, anytime from Christmas time to ordinary days.



Figure 10



Figure 11

These are cases of synchronic comparison. In a diachronic sense, selfies may be considered an element of a novel form of biographicity made possible by social media. In online personal profiles, intense processes of accounting everyday lives take place. Lee Humphreys has defined media accounting as 'the process of reckoning or providing evidence for and explanation of our presence, existence, and action through media' (Humphreys 2018). Series of photographs and text messages originating in ever changing circumstances spread out in a chronological order, connected by a more or less vague adherence to a 'profile' which makes all of them expressions of a moral entity. In personal profiles, because of its deictic nature, a selfie is perhaps the most poignant visual expression of the person as she is by and in herself. Selfies puncture the flow of images as the moments when one is most truly oneself, not hiding behind anyone else's gaze or the standards of professional portraiture (which does not mean there are no standards for making selfies). Selfies reveal and acknowledge the personal involvement behind a particular social media practice.

The diachronic dimension of social media is also another means to constitute and support the animal face. In animal social media profiles, even if more often than not they post regular portraits rather than selfies, repeated exposure to frontal photographs of the animal's posture and its head, together with captions commenting on the moment's mood or the thought of the day etc, habituate the spectator to recognizing different 'expressions' of the animal. Through these expressions, a face-object is constituted, as an imaged presence of the animal as enunciator. Accordingly, this presence indirectly intimates the animal's personal being behind the multiplicity of experiences. Thus, animal profiles are potentially no less biographic than human ones, and in this sense the animal face on social media is potentially a practice in animal biographicity, occasionally punctured by selfies as the most intense personal moments of animal lives.

Animal selfies and the modes of meaning and interaction. Manipulation: the animal partner

The animal face in selfies establishes animals as subjects engaged in networked practices of photographic enunciation and as instances of the cultural maintenance of personhood. It also implies a potential for animal biographicity and intimates a potential animal authenticity behind the image. Returning now to Landowski's modes of meaning and interaction espoused above, I will suggest that the animal face implies human-animal interaction in the mode of Manipulation. Having described some implications of interpreting human-animal interaction in this mode, I will further discuss how animal selfies might be interpreted in other modes, namely Programming, Adjustment, and Accident.

Manipulation is a mode that has its origins in the Greimasian canonical narrative schema,

where the actant-subject of the quest comes into actual being and is oriented towards and object of value by establishing a contractual relation with an actant-sender of some sort, who generally stands for a social or metaphysical order of some kind. Hence, the mode is characterized by mutual subjectivity of the partners of interaction: manipulation is only possible if the partners recognize each other as subjects possessing narrative, cognitive, pragmatic, passional and any other possible competences. Also, the partner must be recognized as someone capable of choosing and thus possessing a motivation and never completely predictable.

In the field of human-animal relations, this mode is perhaps most obviously exemplified by various animal rights movements: one of their guiding principles is indeed the recognition of subjectivity (sentience, pain, emotion, well-being) and autonomy to animals, going all the way to the concept of an animal person. As a political ideal or a utopia, this could be the mode of the animal-human, because the ultimate recognition of subjectivity to the animal may possibly translate into a recognition of animal humanity. Such might be a possible interpretation for what Giorgio Agamben has described as an attempt 'to show the central emptiness, the hiatus that – within man – separates man and animal, and to risk ourselves in this emptiness: the suspension of the suspension [of the original suspension of the animal that institutes the exception of the human in the first place – *P. J.*].' (Agamben2004: 92) Since it is the human who is supposed to both risk his special ontological status and recognize the animal for an equal, this is possibly a project for an expansion of the limits of humanity.

But the animal face in selfies is a good illustration of how the recognition of animal subjectivity might be less about abolishing the conceptual gap at the foundations of self-conscious humanity and more about exploring animality through human aesthetic consciousness. The suspension of the suspension, if there is one in this case, is, then, an openness to intentional animal plasticity and corporeity, and an animal personhood which is not necessarily wholly predefined. Take, for example, the animal selfies made by the highly professional Allan Dixon (Figures 7 and 9 above, Figure 12, Figure 13 below). One can see very clearly how he achieves the effect of the animal face by mimicking the movements of the animal partner, especially movements of the mouth, but also posture, levelling, distance and moments of attention. However, it is just as important that the animal produce these movements, too. In cases of success, there is a suspension of a unilateral human-animal relation and we can no longer be sure who is mimicking whom. Of course, the selfie as product is Dixon's idea, but as far as faces go, how can we tell whether it was the animal or the human who smiled first? The animal did do something to produce a certain configuration of the frontal part of the head which under the circumstances of the genre – wholly intended by the human partner – we are able to recognize and interpret as a genuine animal smile. Thus, in a limited sense, the animal has co-authored the selfie.



Figure 12



Figure 13

It follows from this that the animal may be understood as looking at itself and sharing its enunciative position, which is something that happens in the course of a life trajectory consciously constructed by a subject. The deer in Dixon's selfie is not just an animal that he encountered and photographed; at the same time, it is also an animal that was going about its day when it encountered Dixon and took a selfie with him. The same goes for the dog in Figure 14. Together with the human partner, the dog is there near its or perhaps someone else's house, which in any case is a house that welcomes the two of them to be comfortable in its vicinity. It is one of these selfies where it is not that important to actually show the surroundings or the timing of its taking; the important thing is being there, wherever and whenever one is, and sharing this fact of being with others. By showing its face, the dog is doing this no less than its human partner – it is reminding others of itself, of its outlook upon its own life in the making.



Figure 14

Once again, I have been discussing an effect of meaning by which humans might understand animals as participants of interactions on social media, and not an animal cognitive capacity of some sort. This meaning effect of an animal life trajectory – a sort of animal everydayness and horizon of meaning – is a significant development in animal selfies as a site for the human understanding of animals because it opens up new possibilities of imagining, organizing and living animal lives.³ As a mode of meaning, Manipulation is best understood as part of a dynamic system, together with other modes, namely Programming, Adjustment, and Accident. In this broader perspective, the exemplary animal face highlighted thus far is a peculiar case of a larger variety of animal selfies. In these other kinds of selfies, there are no faces: instead there are either ordinary animal heads and snouts, or different kinds of animal masks. Using Landowski's framework, I will describe these as different modes of a human encounter with animals or animality.

Programming: the distant animal

Let us proceed to Programming, a mode based on the principle of regularity. When an interaction is conceived in this mode, it is seen as a realization of a predefined underlying program that only needs to be executed, avoiding technical failure. According to Landowski, there are two types of regularity, causal and symbolic. As animal selfies are part of an interaction based on representational practices, it is the second type of regularity and thus a symbolic programming of human-animal interactions that we discover in them.

This animal selfie variety is akin to the more general and well-established production of certain types of narratives where animal figures are treated like costumes for inherently human characters, interests and passions (as in the proverbial fox being smart and the wolf being goofy or cruel). Symbolic regularity stems from sociocultural constraints, routines and automatisms. Animals or animality, in this sense, are vehicles for representing imaginary or mythical regularities of human behaviour. They are employed with regard to strictly human interactions and become instrumental. In this sense, there is no interference between the human and the animal, even if the animal is actually discovered inside the human. For example, such a relation is at work when explaining human behaviour in animalistic terms and considering men to be sexually aggressive and women submissive because they are 'male' and 'female'; or, when considering utopian or mythical men and women, like Adam and Eve, to have lived in a non-human state of perfection together with the animals, but still have had fallen because, indeed, their non-humanity was only an irretrievable origin of humanity. The important thing in these cases is that animality is rationalized or stabilized into a conventional morality (man and woman must be aggressive or submissive because of 'nature') or a mythical principle (animals are innocent, unlike man) that has nothing to do with actual animal presences. To stress

this exteriority of the animal to the human, I shall describe Programming as the mode of the distant animal.

In animal selfies, this mode is well exemplified by Figures 15 and 16: in the first one an animal makes up the objective background of a human situation; in the second, an animal constitutes a conventional envelope, an imaginary animal figure that stands in for a human experience. In both cases, the animal is used as a supplement to the human, as a sign indicating the wild and the untamed (but it might as well be the cute, the interesting, the strange, the funny, the exotic etc), as it is experienced by humans.



Figure 15



Figure 16

In Figure 15, the human subject is surrounded by wilderness, which has thus become a spatial circumstance of his enunciative act. The wilderness exoticifies human life as reported by the selfie since it is a place where humans – the ones looking at the selfie – are not generally present. The animal is, thus, a conventional sign of a special occasion in a human life. In Figure 16, the animal is a metonymy for the technologically enhanced human ability to see the road. The boar is part of the road – an implication stressed by an almost camouflage-like colour and texture of the figure in relation to the background – and the human person is not, she is inside the car, looking at the road through the camera. In order to cross the road without undesirable perturbation, the human needs to avoid boars or any other animals, and the camera is a mediator that will allow the human to do this with less effort than before. All in all, the happy animal in this fictional selfie is a ludic imaginary expression of a human state of safety and relaxation.

I have described the animal of the mode of Programming as *distant*. It is a distance measured by essence: the human is real, and the animal can only be symbolic. In addition to the aforementioned examples, this mode also includes selfies of people holding their cats (Figure 17) or people wearing animal masks that hide the human face but at the same time amplify its humanity because they do not transform it in any way (Figure 3). In comparison to selfies with an animal face, the important feature of this mode is the absence of an animal enunciative po-

sition and personhood. Here, animals always stand in for something that is essentially human, as they are not ascribed a capacity to see or show themselves.



Figure 17

Adjustment: the present animal

In Landowski's systematic articulation, the mode of Programming is abandoned by passing to the mode of Adjustment. Instead of distance, Adjustment is based on immediate sensible presence, sensibility, and a dynamic acting-together of the partners of interaction. For the purposes of this paper, the passage could be explained as a modification of the conditions under which the human partner has access to the animal partner: in the mode of Programming, the animal is distant in terms of essence, to the point where an encounter in the strict sense becomes impossible; in the mode of Adjustment, on the other hand, the animal is *present*, it comes forth and makes itself felt, disrupting the essential distinction. Adjustment emerges as a rediscovery of animal existence that is able to permeate the human. It is a break with the programmatic principle of prefigured meaning for the animal and its non-interference with the human.

A possible example of such rediscovery is the perplexity of Jacques Derrida who acknowledges feeling ashamed when seen naked by his cat, but also ashamed to be ashamed, because in a more fundamental sense, 'the gaze called "animal" offers to my sight the abyssal limit of the human' (Derrida 2008: 12). In other words, it is an inherently weird experience to see oneself seen by an animal, to rediscover one's human presence in the presence of an animal. This is not an experience that is reserved to philosophers: many of us have had milder versions of it when our paths have occasionally crossed with those of wild animals, whose gaze, body and disposition is always so different from our domestic animal possessions and friends. The experience is also possible in art. For example, *Untitled (Human Mask)* by Pierre Huyghe (Huyghe 2017) shows a macaque wearing a Japanese *No* theatre mask, a wig and a dress, exploring an

abandoned building. There are many aspects to this work, but seeing how what is indicated by likeness to be a human girl is carried into movement by the body of a macaque is indeed an impression in which the sensible presence of an animal corporeity breaks through the comfortable layer of what the animal signifies in conventional human terms.

And it is in an inherently artistic selfie practice that an imaginative rediscovery of animal presence is attempted. There is a peculiar carnivalesque subgenre of animal selfies that brings the animal forth and intentionally conflates it with the human, as much as possible with the means chosen. This happens in some selfies of people wearing animal masks. They could be called animal mask selfies, but there is an important distinction to be made first between different types of masks: the animal mask only brings forth the sensible presence of the animal in cases when it destroys the human face and replaces it with an animal head.⁴ If the animal mask leaves intact the eyes, the mouth, the hair, the ears, the nose etc. (Figure 3), it remains decorative, it is 'just a mask', and instead of making us rediscover the animal it stresses the human behind it. If, on the other hand, the animal removes or transforms the elements of the human face in one way or another, then it conflates the human with the animal.

Such are the marginally popular horse and unicorn mask selfies in Figures 18 and 19. In their own carnivalesque way, these selfies are the contrary of the anthropopoietic animal face found in the mode of Manipulation – instead of the animal face, they make use of the zoo-poietic human head, i.e. a human head that has become animal. Of course, this is a ludic confrontation on imaginary grounds – in these masks, there is no sensual relation to actual animal corporeity, just a sort of absurdist figurative play that fuses imaginary human and animal corporeity. Hence, the procedure is not as dramatic as the aforementioned philosophical inquiry. But it does disrupt the conventional use of animality for predefined signification, and opens up to an immediate encounter between the human and the animal in the imaginary sphere.



Figure 18



Figure 19

With regard to other animal selfies, this absurdist procedure is a denial of the exclusively human character of enunciation. It debunks two mutually reinforcing selfie conventions: the proverbial use of animals as vehicles for human experiences and the belief that the only possibility for humans and animals to actually interact as peers is for the animals to acquire faces. As the animal head mask dominates the human body, it reminds us that the symbolic usage of animality is potentially disruptive no less than it is reassuring of humanness. And as the animal headmask visually destroys the human features of the face without, however, annihilating the selfie itself, it reminds us that the selfie face is actually a construct, a face-object and is not the only way to embrace animality.

Accident: the pure animal

In Landowski's systematic articulation, Adjustment is succeeded by the mode of Accident, based on irregularity. According to Landowski, the impossibility to control (by programming), to negotiate (by manipulation) or to affect (by adjustment) anything under this mode is not wholly negative but can be taken advantage of by various kinds of positive practices, both scientific, like mathematical probability, and superstitious, like amulets, talismans, incantations etc. Such practices have recourse to Programming or Manipulation in order to produce either programmed accidents, where irregularity is subjected to a peculiar kind of prediction, or motivated accidents, where a volition is postulated beyond any access by negotiation or contractual relations (Landowski 2015: 65–71).

In terms of general tropes of the human-animal relation, Accident is perhaps best exemplified by the pure animality that emerges from the infinite and forgotten depths of the human. It may be an instinct, an outburst of rage, a rush of energy or perhaps a serene sheepish calmness and ignorance that overwhelms the human and takes control. Such pure animality may take various guises, but they are all united by the more abstract movement in which the animal, a completely uncontrollable force, emerges from inside the human. But pure animality is not always disruptive. Sometimes, the human is already disrupted by some other forces (society, physical disability, mental illness etc.) and is actually aided by the animality that takes over. A case like this is evoked by Alphonso Lingis in *Fantasy space*, where he quotes from a letter, written by a man suffering from a very painful degenerative nervous disease:

I have animals in me, the stallion as well as the plowshare horse (my legs) the white crane, the great blue heron, and a multitude of underwater aliens, that will tolerate abuse for the sake of love. [...] Then the Wolverine and the Tiger both took over and I became so powerful, so able to withstand the pain, enjoying the power, watching with fascination in the mirror my body change into unhuman shapes. (Lingis 1998)

Unsolicitable and unpredictable, animality emerges from the depths of human fantasy and corporeity in order to help the person for whom 'regular humanity' is of no use anymore. The animal shows itself despite the human that is deficient. This kind of animality is beyond humanness, but, by contrast to Programming, it comes extremely close to the human; in fact, it institutes itself at the very center of the human person.

In animal selfies, the workings of the pure animal are once again less dramatic, but they do provide the ground for a special type of human-animal interactions. We could divide animal selfies under the mode of Accident by the two types of accident mentioned above, programmed and motivated. The programmed accidents in animal selfies concern those selfies which are taken by animals themselves under circumstances pre-arranged by humans: such are the famous macaque selfies taken with the equipment of David Slater (Figure 1 repeated below), or this 'elphie' made by an elephant using a camera belonging to Christian LeBlanc (Figure 20).



Figure 1



Figure 20

In most of these animal-made selfies, despite the animal head being fully present, there are no animal faces such as presented in previous chapters.⁵ But even if there is no animal face in these animal-made selfies, there is an obvious animal act of enunciation and thus an enunciative position taken by an animal. The difference that the absence of a face makes is that the selfies do not present an enunciative position that could be shared with a human spectator. Without a face, the animal in a selfie remains inaccessible; it emerges from its inaccessibility as a glimpse of real, pure animality. And yet these photos are selfies nonetheless (see the discussion in part 1). This contradictory configuration provides for a catastrophic value: the animal intrudes into 'human media', reminding humans of hidden dimensions behind the usual 'human' circumstances of space and time. Such are animal selfies in the mode of programmed accident.

The motivated accident in animal selfies takes the guise of a contemporary practice of animal totems. The most characteristic instance of this practice are Snapchat animal filter selfies. The filters are augmented reality tools that add to the face of the user different animated animal body parts, or transform parts of the human face to make it look animal-like. The filters suggest adding animal ears, a nose, a tongue, a mouth, enlarging one's eyes (to make them cuter) and enhancing the skin. Here are some of the possible results:



Figure 21



Figure 22



Figure 23

In contrast to the different kinds of masks discussed above, and to the selfies taken by animals themselves, the transformation of the human face as an effect of meaning is a revelation of an inner animality of the human person. In most cases, it is a cute animality; but, as Figures 21 and 22 demonstrate, cuteness can acquire rather different undertones, such as horrible-ness, ugliness or weirdness. In this case, animality is not so much a fixed sign of cuteness (this would be a case of symbolic regularity), but an aid in expressing the more-than-human, less-than-human or other-than-human character of one's personality. The human subject cannot program the effects of this aid or negotiate with the animal agent, because it is anonymous; it only works by way of a minor catastrophe which is the sudden intrusion of animality upon the human face.

In terms of human interactions with animality, this is a significant choice for the human partner, because he actually risks compromising the recognizability of one's person. In other words, one risks losing one's face to the animal. Just like in the familiar tropes of 'uncontrolla-

ble rage' or 'wild desire', the pure animal in these selfies acts like an anonymous amplifier that is able to suppress whomever is making use of the amplification. As it amplifies the human person with certain animal characteristics, it also dehumanizes it. At some point, we can no longer be sure whether this is a person anymore. In this sense, animal filter selfies are the spatial opposite of accidental selfies taken by real animals: the latter introduce animality as something exterior to the human selfie sphere, whereas in the former, animality requires to be accepted as something interior to the human act of enunciation, posing the threat of a disintegration.

Final remarks

In the course of this article, I hope to have demonstrated two things. First, that the animal selfie is a complex phenomenon. For one, studying it requires at least some presuppositions about what a selfie in general is and how it means anything; but then it is also important to see how varied animal selfies are in their own right. While selfies with animal faces seem to me to be the most significant development so far, some of the other types are just as interesting, like the animal selfies based on transformations of the human face, for example. Also, the types described here might undergo further developments – or a lack thereof, which might be reason for a more value-driven critique than the description presented here. With the fate of animals on the planet ever more uncertain, using such developments as the animal face for easy-going entertainment purposes only might not be the most commendable choice and could thus be the point of departure for a more radical semiotic thought.

Second, I hope to have shown that animal selfies, despite being an entertainment-driven practice of representation, are a legitimate site for looking into human-animal interactions. A semiotics of animality is potentially important both for the broader culture and for semiotics itself, since nowadays, following the heightened interest in the universally human during the last century, we are faced with the novel demand to better understand our humanity in a broader ontological framework. Hopefully, further explorations of new media phenomena like selfies will also open some revealing vistas in that regard.

NOTES

1 The effect can also be found beyond the selfie phenomenon. Motion captured and computer animated realistic animal faces have become somewhat prominent in films, for example, *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* (2011, dir. Rupert Wyatt), *The Jungle Book* (2016, dir. Jon Favreau), *Mowgli: Legend of the Jungle* (2018, Andy Serkis).

2 An interesting creative exploration of this problematic on social media are the online profiles

of artificial persons, such as *lilmiquela* on Instagram. Miquela calls herself a robot and posts snapshots, portraits and selfies with a computer-rendered realistic human face. With continued posts accompanied by textual pronouncements, a non-human personality has emerged that does not seem all that different from the personalities found on the profiles of real live people. On the one hand, it is a character like thousands of others in literature or the cinema. On the other hand, it is a being that is not confined to any textual space or time – its face can wear many appropriate bodies photographed anywhere in the world, thus allowing Miquela to travel, go places, meet people, in other words, have an indefinite multiplicity of experiences. 3 This last part works both ways, because on the one hand, the animal that has a life integrated with social media is cared for in a different way than an animal that is not, at least in terms of activities in which it is invited to participate; on the other hand, the human partner maintaining the social media profile of the animal is also living a different, much more ‘animal’ life from someone who does not partake of such activities.

4 It is not in the scope of this article, but these selfies should probably be considered in light of what Gilles Deleuze has written about the face and the head in the works of Francis Bacon.

5 It might be possible to argue that David Slater’s macaque selfies are a liminal case because of the animal itself: the physiognomy of the macaques has allowed the capturing of expressions that are selfie-face-like in themselves and, to a limited extent, they have made the selfies themselves. This case should be discussed in a separate paper. For the purposes of this paper, I will consider them as no-face animal selfies.

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Semiotics of the Selfie: The Glorification of the Present.¹

Massimo Leone

After anecdotic evidence providing biographic background for the author's interest in selfies, the semiotic question of their meaning is tackled, distinguishing between the signification of taking selfies and the meaning of selfies thus taken. Both entail authorial, reception, and structural meaning, to be studied in the long period of the cultural history of self-representation and in the context of a specific semiosphere. Selfies can, hence, be interpreted as symptoms of an emerging and increasingly hegemonic temporal ideology in which escape from both traumatic past and anguishing future gives rise to a valorization of the present expressing itself also in the new visual format of the selfies: they attempt at bestowing an ontological aura to the insignificance of the postmodern present.

Keywords Selfies, Cultural Semiotics, Identity, Temporal Ideologies, Postmodern Conception of Time.

'This above all: to thine own self be true'
William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 1, III

Confession of a Selfiest

First, a confession: I have been and, to a certain extent, I keep taking selfies. I started when a new technological device — a mobile phone with back camera —, the platform of a social network — Facebook —, and a new format of photographic discourse (I do not remember when I first saw a selfie, but surely it was at a time when everyone was taking photos of this kind) were made available to me. I cannot retrieve my first selfie either, but I can surely recover the first selfie that I published on Facebook (Fig. 1): it represents me in Australia, my head inexpertly peering into the photographic scene, a lazy and cute kangaroo in the background.



Figure 1: My first selfie, Australia, probably Brisbane, 2008.

The passion for taking pictures of my face with animals of various kinds in the background — especially cats but also exotic animals — has remained a constant in my selfie production, in keeping with a popular trend, itself deserving further semiotic interpretation (why do people like so much taking and seeing selfies with animals?).²

My selfies have included in their backgrounds landscapes, monuments, works of art (very few artworks, to tell the truth — for including them in my selfies would somehow hurt my bourgeois sense of distinction) and, of course, people, sometimes individual friends or acquaintances, sometimes groups of them, sometimes strangers or groups of them; many of my past selfies would include my ex-wife (Fig. 2), while the following partners have never obtained this symbolic privilege, because either they or I have not wanted it, the symmetry of the desire for appearing in a couple selfie perhaps being as rare as love. I took some selfies with my brother but rarely with my mother and never with my now deceased father; although I now regret a little not having any selfie with him, such representation would seem to me almost sacrilegious, a brutal invasion of the present *époque* into a remote one.

In most selfies I smile, so as to abide by the euphoric imperative of the digital social networks, but also so as not to worry my mother, who follows my journeys through the images that my brother forwards to her from Facebook. One of the most touching moments of my digital social life occurred when, upon returning for a short Christmas vacation to the town where I was born, in Southern Italy, I realized that my mother had printed, framed, and hung in my room — a room almost always empty in the last twenty-five years — meticulous collections of the selfies that I had so absentmindedly taken during my travels, neglecting them immediately after having posted them on Facebook (Fig. 3).



Figure 2: Last selfie with my ex-wife (taken without knowing that it was the last one)



Figure 3: Analogic maternal love

The style of the selfies that I have been taking has slowly but incessantly changed with the development of technology and in order to follow a rhetorical tendency of spontaneity, quite common today or even hegemonic; the selfie cannot be unintentional and, therefore, excludes the possibility of spontaneous self-representation. Nevertheless, in the most recent selfies and, generally, in the photos that currently circulate in digital social networks, many efforts are made so as to give the impression that the represented subjects have been caught *in medias res*, that is, in the middle of the flowing of their lives. Stretching the arm, indeed, and without ever using the horrific *selfie-sticks* — a true stigma of lower-class photographic style — one can give a selfie the format and, thus, the connotation of an image that someone else has

taken from close distance, especially if one removes from the picture all the traits that could communicate, conversely, a narcissistic premeditation of the photo (Fig. 4).



Figure 4: Pseudo-spontaneous selfie

Taking a selfie that does not look like a selfie is not easy but can be achieved. Obviously, one must not check the appearance of one's own countenance on the mobile screen while taking the selfie itself; this 'retrospective' anxiety would be the equivalent of Orpheus's backward look: it would have all suggestion of spontaneity and, therefore, life, immediately perish. The desire for appearing in a selfie that looks like an unintentional self-representation is motivated by the socio-psychological status that the selfie attributes to one's identity, with an always ambiguous connotation between loneliness and solitude, fashionable affirmation of individual independence and fear and, therefore, rejection, of any suspicion of marginalization. In selfies, people want to appear as solitary travelers, not as lonely journeyers.

Despite the variety of visual contexts represented in my selfies, and the change of style therein — from the quite naive selfies of the neophyte until the super-careful and edited ones of the expert — what appears in these images is mainly my head, with my face, my hair, a part of my neck, a part of my back, and sometimes even a portion of my thorax. I appear with more or less beard, shorter or longer hair, fatter or slimmer, progressively older.

The meaning of selfies

I always include the same question in the written test for the students of my course of visual semiotics: what is the meaning of a selfie?³ I do so with a selfish purpose: I hope that, one day, a genial student will write an answer revealing the deep and ultimate meaning of this

new discursive practice and the texts it produces. Until now, however, responses have always disappointed me, which indicates that the social omnipresence of the selfie has given rise to its naturalization: we have stopped asking ourselves why we take this kind of photos.

In order to 'denaturalize' the meaning of a selfie, different levels of analysis must be articulated. First, one must distinguish between the meaning of the practice itself of taking selfies and the meaning of selfies as individual images. In addition, one must consider that, as has been suggested earlier, there are selfies whose nature of selfies is concealed in their communication (*crypto-selfies*), images that circulate as selfies but that are not actually such from the point of view of their empirical production (*pseudo-selfies*), and representations of social contexts in which selfies are taken (*meta-selfies*, a sub-genre that, as we shall see, politicians widely adopt).

The practice of taking selfies and the images thus produced, then, result in meanings that can be distributed according to Umberto Eco's famous hermeneutic trichotomy. In selfies there is, first, an *intentio auctoris*, that is, the meaning that a subject wants to express in a more or less conscious way through this photographic format and its content; second, an *intentio lectoris*, or the meaning that emerges from a selfie or a set of selfies as they are observed and interpreted by a receiver; and, third, an *intentio operis*, that is, the meaning that this practice, its format, and the texts that they produce implicitly entail in the context of the history of culture and, especially, in the structure of the semiosphere. The existence of such *intentio operis* implies that, beside the individual psychology that motivates the creation of selfies, and next to the sociology of their reception that attributes to selfies a certain connotation of meaning as they are published, a semiotic structure is intrinsic to this form of self-representation and produces meaning independently of any individual psychology or collective sociology, because it essentially depends on the place that the selfie occupies in the history of the culture of representation and self-representation of the body and, above all, the face. An analysis of the meaning of the selfie can be complete only if it considers these three hermeneutical dimensions and their interrelations.

Intentio auctoris

An evident relation obtains between the individual tendency to publish selfies and a psychology characterized by a certain narcissism, a certain exhibitionism, and even a certain dependence on the judgment of others (Eler 2017). Whoever takes a lot of selfies enjoys controlling the representation of his or her own face, its inclusion in photographic scenes of social distinction — such as those of exotic travel experiences, for example —, its exhibition in social networks, and the positive judgment it might receive, in terms of *likes* or praising comments. When taking a selfie, we do not think only about storing an image of something memorable, or

about the probable prestige that it will result from showing this picture to others, but also and above all about the fact that our own face will be looked at, admired, and praised in conjunction with the background of the selfie. In other words, we do not take a selfie with a famous actor because we want to remember, in the future, this memorable encounter, or because we want the actor to be seen and admired by those to whom we shall show his picture, but because we want to associate the image of our own face with that of the actor, and attract admiration toward the former by situating it in the 'visual aura' of the latter.

Whoever produces and publishes a number of selfies that is statistically high in comparison to those taken and published by the other individuals in the same community implicitly or explicitly attributes an essential value to creating and diffusing tangible signs of her or his presence through the visual representation of the face, its circulation, and the look that others will project on it. This trend may become even disturbing, and be interpreted as a neurotic symptom, when the selfies that an individual takes – and especially those that she or he publishes – are excessive in relation to the other visual formats used, or when these selfies suppress or marginalize the background of the photographic scene and present themselves as solipsistic icons of an isolated face. In these cases, selfies turn from a format of social distinction into a source of ridicule or even stigmatization: excessive selfies will be interpreted as a symptom of a personality that is insecure of its own presence and social desirability.

Nevertheless, even in the domain of the psychology of the selfie, the format and especially the context of the images that such format produces are characterized by a stylistic variability that also carries psychological connotations. Such variety can give rise to a typology that considers the traits of the individuals that take selfies. For example, investigations conducted so far seem to show that there are some stylistic features that are prevalent in female selfies – such as the female tendency to take and spread self-images that do not represent the whole face but fragments of it (Losh 2015) – and others that are prevalent in male selfies.⁴ Other features depend on age, class, nationality, and the contextual situation in which the selfie is taken. For instance, Lev Manovich's laboratory has demonstrated that selfies 'smile' more in certain cities of the world than in others (Manovich and Tifentale 2015).

Intentio lectoris

In addition to this inner articulation, even more important is the requirement not to stop at a superficially psychological analysis of the selfie. The selfie arises from the encounter between a narcissistic tendency and a set of technologies, devices, and platforms that allow such tendency to express itself. This expression, however, is always characterized by the potential presence of a viewership, that is, by the dimension of an *intentio lectoris*, which is the object of study of a sociology of reception. The zero degree of the audience of the selfie is a kind

of Bakhtinian social interlocutor, that is, an implicit and often internalized notion of who will see, interpret, and even evaluate one's selfies. This interlocutor, however, is almost never an individual or a collective empirical observer, but rather a model observer, that is, a hypothesis of cognitive, emotional, and pragmatic reactions than viewers will show upon observing the selfie. These are taken, edited, and posted with the idea that they will help building, for the fraying and fluctuating viewership of the social networks, an image of oneself that will produce effects also outside the digital world.

In this field too, then, one can distinguish between good and bad communicators of selfies, among those who are aware of the semiotic characteristics of this format, of their own semiotic objectives, and of how to best reach the latter through the former, and those who, conversely, fall victim to aberrant encodings and decodifications. At one end of the spectrum, there will be public figures like Pope Francis or most powerful politicians. They, or rather their communication experts, astutely use selfies so as to convey the idea of these VIPs' proximity to the people and their communicative manners; there is a fundamental difference, indeed, between the selfie of the powerful and that of the unknown person. Powerful people appear in the selfies of others, but do not take selfies, for this would imply an expression of existential uncertainty. In fact, what the powerful post in their social networks are not so much selfies as pseudo-selfies, or even meta-photos and -selfies (that is, selfies in which other individuals or groups are depicted while taking selfies), representing the people's desire to take a selfie with the powerful and underlining, thus, their charismatic capacity for attributing existential presence to whomever appears in a photo at their side. On the other side of the spectrum, many common people take and publish selfies without any awareness of their semantic and pragmatic effects, and even obtaining a reception that is contrary to the expected one. For example, those who take and post selfies in order to seduce a particular contact in their digital social network may, conversely, send out an impression of being excessively narcissistic, frivolous, and even too conscious of the aesthetic judgment of the others.

Intentio operis

Nevertheless, the dimension of the meaning of the selfie that most interests semiotics or, from another perspective, the dimension of it that semiotics can study in the most interesting way, is neither the set of psychological motivations that lead to take, publish, or admire selfies, nor the social connotations that selfies communicate, but the intrinsically meaningful and communicative structure of the selfie, its position and role in the diachronic and synchronic development of the semiosphere of a community of interpreters. Reflecting on the selfie in the framework of a semiotics of cultures pursues several objectives; from the most general and abstract to the most particular and concrete: first, using the cultural semiotics of the selfie as

a case study to develop epistemological hypotheses about the relation between technological innovation and change in the prevailing semiotic practices (Leone 2019 *El giro*); second, proposing analyses that interpret the selfie and its practices as symptoms of a more general semiotic ideology, concerning the relation between meaning and time (according to this interpretation, each selfie implicitly affirms, in the semiosphere in which it appears and circulates, a certain temporal and aspectual ideology); third, developing a phenomenology of the selfie, of what happens to a face when it is represented by this format, and to a gaze when it observes a face thus displayed.

In the study of the selfie as a phenomenon of meaning, the methodological framework proposed by José Luis Fernández in his book *Plataformas mediáticas* ['media platforms'] (2018) is essential: one cannot articulate a syntax, a semantics, and a pragmatics of the selfie without carefully dwelling on a) the *semiohistory* of the selfie, or its relation to other devices, techniques, practices, formats, and styles of self-representation; b) the socio-semiotic state of the selfie, taking into account, for example, gender differences expressed through this semiotic form; c) the discourse of the selfie, which only abstractly can be seen as isolated but in fact always occurs in conjunction with complex sets of texts and other fragments of representative discourse.

Selfies and the Ideology of the Present

The essay will now interpret selfies as a symptom of temporal and aspectual ideologies, that is, of the ways in which, in the current semiosphere, texts, discourses, and practices implicitly or explicitly express a certain axiology of time, a modality of understanding its meaning in relation to the construction of language. The hypothesis that guides such reflection is that the contemporary digital semiosphere is mainly characterized by an ideological valorization of the present time – especially among *millennials* and members of the Z Generation –, a valorization that manifests itself also in the dissemination of selfies.

On the one hand, hinting at the possibility of an ideological emphasis on the present time might seem pleonastic or even absurd: human beings experience the present moment after moment, and they can conjure a past or imagine a future only by temporarily distracting themselves from the present in which they inexorably live. Mental images of the past and the future, moreover, although 'encouraged' by signs of the latter (relics) and of the former (omens) that are disseminated in the present, can be semiotically and even linguistically constructed only from the point of view of this last temporal eon. As Émile Benveniste first formally intuited, the abstract enunciation point from which the future and the past, as well as any beyond, can be linguistically evoked, inevitably places itself in the phenomenological present that is occupied by the mind and the body of the speaker. I can say 'I shall buy a car tomorrow', but this verbal evocation of a future state of the world has its technical roots in the present, in here, in my persona.

An essential dissymmetry, then, holds between the ideological valorizations of the past and the future, on the one hand, and apparently similar ideological valorizations of the present, on the other hand.⁵ ‘Cultures of the present’ basically arise as a result of the systematic effort of blocking the switch between the present awareness and the imaginary transportation to either the past, through remembrance, or the future, through fiction (the separation between the two mental processes is, of course, not so sharp: there is a lot of fiction in remembrance, and a lot of remembrance in fiction) (Leone 2019 *Chronillogicalities*). Ideologies of the present are not, nevertheless, more ‘natural’ than ideologies of the past and the future. They might seem so, because human beings phenomenologically live in the present, but that is also a consequence of an ideological construction (Huber 2016). In reality, blocking the switch that leads from the phenomenology of the present to the remembrance of the past or to the fiction of the future requires a considerable effort.

As regards the switch between the present and the past, ‘blocking’ or ‘hampering’ is ‘unnatural’ both at the individual and at the social level, as demonstrated by the fact that an *ars oblivionalis* [‘technique of the oblivion’] does not exist; an equivalent of the many mnemotechniques that have been invented and experimented with more or less success throughout history, and on which an abundant literature is extant, does not exist as regards the art of forgetting. That was a central preoccupation of the late Umberto Eco, who underlined in several essays that there is a semiotic dissymmetry between forgetting and remembering (Eco 1988); probably for evolutionary reasons, our cognition exerts an active agency as regards remembrance (to a certain extent, at least), meaning that we can voluntarily decide to remember a phone number or the name of a person, but no agency whatsoever as regards oblivion (we cannot in any way decide to forget a word, or a face).

That has probably to do with the fact that memorizing and keeping in our mind, at least for a certain time, the memories of past unpleasant events and experiences is useful for us not to undergo the same experience again; were we to exert direct and intentional agency on our memory, on the opposite, we would be inclined to immediately remove any painful trace of the past, losing, thus, the possibility of learning from it (Draaisma 2013). Blocking or thwarting the switch from the present phenomenology to the recollection of the past is, therefore, somewhat unnatural, in the sense that, at the individual level, it gives rise to an attitude and practice of systematic removal, a condition on the pathological implications of which abundant psychoanalytical literature exists.

Removal, though, can permeate a temporal ideology also at the level of society (Plate 2017). There are human groups in which such systematic oblivion of the past is not spontaneous but imposed by power with the aim of bringing about that which commonly goes under the name of *damnatio memoriae* (Augé 1998): with the advent of the new leader, the society as a whole is encouraged, and sometimes even forced to get rid of all signs that might work as relics of an undesired past: in these cases, the temporal ideology that prevails works symmet-

rically to the monumentalization of the past that is typical of nationalisms. The two trends and their relative practices can actually coexist, for instance in dictatorships that simultaneously remove all traces of previous democratic regimes and figures and build their symbolical pantheon and pedigree by extolling the memory of previous dictatorial periods and protagonists (Mussolini with Caesar, for example).

Both the social and the psychological ideologies of the present operate by eliminating from the personal or social entourage a series of signs that are closely or even remotely connected with a past epoch (Weinrich 2000): a person will avoid certain streets, pictures, or songs etc. so as to limit or avoid any access to a past whose remembrance is saddened with the presence of a lost beloved one; a society will reduce or erase statues, plaques, festivities, etc. so as to block the temporal switch that leads from the present to a previous painful or disdained historical period.

Temporal ideologies of the present, however, usually do not involve only the systematic erasure of such or such wounding or enemy memory, but the disabling of the switch itself that allows individuals and especially groups to transfer from the phenomenology of the present and its ontological fullness to the fantasmatic phenomenology of the past.⁶ In radical or even extremist ideologies of the present, it is not a particular memory that is eliminated, or a range of souvenirs, but the practice itself of passing from the perceived present to the conjured or recollected past. Those individuals or groups that, voluntarily or involuntarily, adhere to such ideology do not limit themselves not to remember something; they do not remember anything; and that is the case not because they cannot remember, as in the circumstance of a pathological amnesia, but because they do not value the access to reconstructed mental images of past events any longer. Hence, an amnesic aesthetics takes place.⁷

Given the natural propensity of human beings to refer to the past, developing an individual or social amnesia does not usually involve an effort but is the consequence of a trauma: the individual is so anguished by the possibility of reminiscing some painful events that he or she does not try to eliminate a specific memory, or a range of souvenirs, but puts the entire mechanism of remembrance itself into brackets. The same goes for societies: those of them that embrace, often unconsciously, an extreme temporal ideology of the present, do not forget only one period, or one memory, or a determined series of them, but rather adopt the moral suggestion of the famous Neapolitan song: "those who have received, have received, those who have given, have given, let's forget about the past, we're all from Naples, comrade!"⁸ In more explicit terms, in extreme temporal ideologies of the present, people and groups live in a constant obnubilation, in which any mental or psychosocial bridging toward the past is systematically discouraged. Ideologies of the present are quite successful in times of crises of various kinds for they are, at least at first sight, relaxing: anything that might bother from the past is simply erased from the scene, and the entire past with it.

Similarly, a society that does not cultivate a reasonable devotion to the past is condemned

to repeat its mistakes. That does not mean that the mere commemoration of the past is sufficient to generate progress in human history, and to avoid that, for instance, meaningless wars are waged around the globe. Unfortunately, thus far, the construction of monumental war cemeteries has not prevented societies from engaging in devastating wars over and over again. On the contrary, reacting to the ideologies of obnubilation should entail refraining from yielding to the opposite risk of embracing chauvinistic ideologies of the past, or to sterile self-victimizing, and should encourage cultivating, instead, the art of reasonable etiology, which is part of the more encompassing art of historical hermeneutics. In the present, that which matters is not remembering the past per se. What matters is, first, discovering, in the past, patterns whose configurations are analogous to those that are observed *in fieri* in the present; and, second, formulating plausible hypotheses about the genealogy of the present into the past. That is the case at both the individual and the social level.

Radical ideologies of the present, however, do not cause only the obliteration of the past, but also that of the future. As it was suggested earlier, ideologies of the past are frequently embraced by human beings and groups so as to soothe the uncertainty of the future: given the empty ontology and the statutory unpredictability of this temporal eon, individuals and societies start obsessively delving into their past, diverting their attention from the present but, above all, from the future. Extreme ideologies of the present are motivated by the same anxiety but they give rise to different side effects. Indeed, although the mania for relics of nationalist pseudo-monuments distracts a collectivity from the anxious need for imagining a future, it does not disrupt, notwithstanding, the faculty of imagination itself too. Reconstructing the past from traces or pseudo-traces of it, indeed, inevitably relies on the human cognitive capacity for switching from the present perception of the world to the imagination of possible worlds, which are ontologically absent but semiotically suggested by their relics. The nostalgic, the nationalist, and the hipster do not abdicate such faculty of imagination but simply reorient its efforts toward the past instead of aiming at the imagination and planning of the future.

The ideologies of the present, on the contrary, do not obliterate only the past and the future, but also the human propensity itself for mentally and linguistically accessing possible worlds. From this point of view, the radicalization of these ideologies is even more dangerous. It leads to the paralysis, or at least to the ankylosis, of an essential human faculty, one that has been probably selected throughout natural history as adaptive for its ability to allow human beings and groups to better adapt to sudden modifications of the environment, and not through experience but through prevention. In the long perspective of natural history, the superiority of the latter approach over the former is evident: those who must experience dangers in order to avoid them are likely to succumb to them in the short period. It is only through imagining both risks and opportunities before they present themselves that the individual (as well as the society) can survive in an ever changing natural and cultural context.

The current ideologies of the present, instead, are usually characterized by abnormal val-

orization of experience over planning. Accumulating experience in all fields of human activity, from the sentimental one to the professional one, seems to have become the moral imperative of the present time; many young people in the west do not know when and if they will secure a permanent job; when and if they will have a house; when and if they shall give rise to the next generation. As a reaction to the current difficulty or even impossibility of planning a future, they are successfully marketed an aesthetics of the present in which they even pay for accumulating experience without ever building or planning anything solid in the future. They travel, eat, love, and, more generally, consume by simply exposing themselves to experiences whose purpose is neither that of accumulating as memories of the past, nor that of turning into the basis for devising a future, but to remain encircled within an epidermal aesthetics, which soothes the natural anxiety for the future and its empty ontology by caressing the senses with increasingly sophisticated and sundry immediate environments. In relation to them, what matters is not to learn how to better react to a certain context, but to enjoy the superposition of sensations earned in *Umwelten* that present themselves as constantly changing and in which prevision is not an issue.

Conclusion

The selfie constitutes the photographic glorification of this attitude: not only do I look at reality through a camera, that is, through the idea of a visual present that is attributed the aesthetic validation of a memorable past, but I even turn my back to reality, and do not look at it directly anymore, not even in the margins of my visual field (Kuntsman 2017); in the selfie, I take an image of the present that includes myself as being a memorable person, objectifying, so to speak, the memory of myself as remembered person (by myself). In the selfie, again, I do not take a picture that will allow me to remember how I was (as in the case of photographic portraits or self-portraits, for instance (Beyaert 2018)), but I take a picture that allows me to perceive myself as someone to be remembered. The selfie, as most present-day digital photographs, is a way to bestow to the vanishing present — isolated from any memory of the past and any plan for the future — the aura of a visual souvenir, of something that will survive me in the future. That, however, does not disrupt the aesthetics of the ideological valorization of the durative aspect of the present but reinforces it: I shall never look back at my selfie, because I am already looking at it in the instantaneous and durative moment in which I take it. The selfie conflates the present moment of the making of a picture of myself and the potential future moment in which I shall look at such picture in order to remember how I was: in the selfie, I look at myself as I am in the making of the selfie itself, and yet this looking at my own image in the present is not the same as looking at myself in the mirror. It shares the narcissism of the mirror but at the same time it absorbs the durativity of a photograph and its traditional connotations

of memory device. The selfie is, as a consequence, the perfect synthesis between mirror and camera, between a visual device that captures the present state of myself – delivering an image of it that, nevertheless, will vanish with my moving far from the mirror – and a visual device that captures the present state of myself for a potential future spectatorship. It is as though, by taking selfies, I was granting myself the possibility to attach a temporal dimension to my mirror, stretching its reflected image into a possible future (Godart 2016). The purpose of a selfie, however, is not functional but symbolic: I shall never look at my selfies again, yet I take them as if they were to become future images of myself to be looked at as visual deposit of my past identities. From this point of view, being a semiotic hybrid between a mirrored image and a photographed one, the selfie works as an index – meaning that it would not be there if the camera had not been in physical contiguity with my body in the *hic et nunc* – but also as an icon – meaning that this mirror actually retains a permanent picture of such indexical presence of mine – and as a symbol. The symbolic function of a selfie exactly derives from its conflating indexical and iconic properties: with digital photography, the ontology of the photographed object becomes uncertain; by connecting it with the idea of a firm physical contiguity with my body (through my arm or its prosthesis, the selfie-stick), I attribute an indexically ontological aura to digital icons of myself. Selfies are so popular because, in a temporal ideology of the present, reassure us about our own ontological continuity. They provide a present version of the temporal ideology of the past and its memories. Selfies are a visual device to remember the present as present and not as past. They attribute to experience the phenomenological aura of memory. In a selfie, I remember my present. It is the epitome of the radicalization of the temporal and aspectual ideology of the instantaneous, durative present.

Such ideology, then, manifests itself in a myriad of everyday experiences and gadgets, which nevertheless propose, in the present-day semiosphere, always the same temporal and aspectual attitude: do not look at the past, it is painful; do not look at the future, it is anguishing; look at the present, at a present that is disconnected from what precedes it and from what follows it, at a present that manifests itself as continuous instant, without the burden to remember or to plan, without the bother to accumulate, without the pain of imagination and its risks of disillusion.

NOTES

1 This article was presented for the first time to the students and researchers of the Faculty of Communication of the University of Buenos Aires on August 17, 2018, on the occasion of a roundtable organized by José Luiz Fernández, with the participation of Pablo Semán, entitled 'Encuentro alrededor de nuevas retóricas en la Plataformas Mediáticas' ['Encounter around the New Rhetorics of Media Platforms']. I thank José Luiz Fernández for this opportunity, and

I am grateful to all those who, at the end of my presentation, proposed comments and questions.

2 In my essay 'Brève histoire topologique du monde' (Leone 2019 Brève), which also reflects on the new obsessions of digital identity, I have formulated the hypothesis that the selfie is produced as an attempt at self-monumentalization, where the marble statue is replaced by one of pixels and, therefore, animals appear in images of this sort like horses in equestrian monuments. There are more motivations, however: tender animals such as cats or dogs or those whose representation presupposes a risky journey, such as lions, gorillas, snakes, etc. are included in selfies in order to define the identity of those who take them. Taking selfies with animals has also produced several accidents, injuries, and even deaths, since their production often involves the obviously dangerous move of turning one's back to susceptible animals. There is even a fashion, in the web, of circulating pseudo-selfies taken by animals; I have dealt with this argument in my article on 'The Semiotics of the Face in Digital Dating' (Leone 2019 *The Semiotics*).

3 Scholarly literature on the selfie is growing but is often too attached to the psychological framework of narcissism. Explaining the diffusion of selfies in these terms is, perhaps, too simplistic (Pavoncello 2016; Riva 2016; Di Gregorio 2017). For a recent survey of the literature on the selfie, see Peraica 2017 and Tinel-Temple, Busetta, and Monteiro 2019; for a critical perspective, Kuntsman 2017, Stavans 2017, and Storr 2017.

4 See the forthcoming article of Federica Turco in Leone 2020 *The Face / Il volto*.

5 For an in-depth discussion, see Leone 2017.

6 Connerton 2008 articulates social oblivion as follows: repressive erasure; prescriptive forgetting; forgetting that is constitutive in the formation of a new identity; structural amnesia; forgetting as annulment; forgetting as planned obsolescence; forgetting as humiliated silence; that which is at stake here is similar to Connerton's "structural amnesia"; see also Connerton 2009.

7 Such 'amnesiology' would be a counterpart to Derrida's 'hauntology' (Derrida 1993).

8 Song *Simmo 'e Napule paisà* (1944); lyrics by Peppino Fiorelli; music by Nicola Valente.

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Selfie-taking: a key semiotic practice within the 'show of the self'

Sebastián Moreno

During the last couple of years, the action of taking selfies has emerged as a common everyday life practice, mainly among young people, but not limited to them. Selfie-taking is a meaningful practice that requires a semiotic analysis. In this paper I reflect on the semiotic character of selfie-taking, particularly by discussing its nature and a possible segmentation in smaller units. Moreover, I argue that in the current scenario of extended online exhibition that anthropologist Paula Sibilia calls 'show of the self', selfie-taking plays a key role as a way of making evident the presence of the 'real' offline author in the identity narrative that is being constructed online. Within the dynamics of online self-representation and in line with the idea that online identities are actively constructed, I discuss why selfies should be regarded as heterogeneous and semiotically complex devices, and particularly how they contribute to the creation of the online identity of its authors.

Keywords selfies, self-representation, everyday life, semiotics

Introduction

During the last couple of years, the action of taking selfies has emerged as a common everyday life practice, mainly among young people (Deeb-Swihart et al. 2017: 7), but not limited to them. As new practices usually foster the emergence of new concepts to be referred to, the word 'selfie' started invading daily conversations and academic discussions, and in 2013 it was chosen as the Oxford Dictionary Word of the year. From a scholarly perspective, selfies have been studied and discussed mainly as a practice linked to narcissism and attention-grabbing needs (Halpern, Valenzuela and Katz 2016; Fox and Rooney 2015; Sorokowski et al. 2015; Carpenter 2012). Within the research, 'little attention has been given to [...] how much the introduction of social media technology changes semiotic practices' (Vigild Poulsen et al. 2018: 593).

Reducing the practice of selfie-taking to a homogeneous attention-drawing phenomenon does not reflect its true nature: selfies are heterogeneous and semiotic complex devices that represent a 'new genre of identity performance' (Deeb-Swihart et al. 2017: 9). As such, they are the 'material output' of a particular practice, that is, a way of doing something: *selfie-taking*, a practice that belongs to the realm of everyday life and that implies the deployment, consciously and not, of 'auto-fictions', i.e., representations created by individuals that have a relation with their 'personal identity' (the self) and that are governed by a certain repertory of cultural codes following a referential pact based on the autobiographical genre (Lejeune 1975). Selfie-taking is to be regarded as a *semiotic practice*, one that consists of 'a situated set of mental, emotional and bodily activities linked by things, contexts and conventions' (Tiidenberg 2018: 133). As such, selfies require a thorough semiotic analysis to be properly understood. Due to this complex nature, in 2018 it could be said of selfies what Roland Barthes wrote in 1980 about photography: it is an 'anthropologically new object' (1980: 88) implying new ways of doing that are meaningful to individuals.

Drawing on the work of semioticians like Jean-Marie Floch (1990) and Jacques Fontanille (2008), a semiotic account seems appropriate to shed some light on the meaning these practices have for the individuals that carry them on. In *A Theory of Semiotics*, Umberto Eco argues that a general semiotic theory should be capable of explaining 'every phenomenon of signification and/or communication' (1976: 3). Given that selfie-taking can be clearly regarded as a signifying practice that is ruled by particular social codes, semiotics seems entitled to have a word on this very recent phenomenon. Therefore, in this paper I approach the practice of selfie-taking through the lens of semiotics. After discussing some methodological considerations, I examine the practice of selfie-taking from a semiotic stance and I argue why this represents a key practice within the context of what Paula Sibilia (2008) calls the 'show of the self'. Under the belief that semiotics is in a privileged position to foster a 'real and effective' interdisciplinarity (Floch 1990: 4), this paper considers both the semiotic and the sociological dimensions of the practice of selfie-taking, as the two are strongly intertwined.

The semiotic examination of everyday life practices

Everyday life practices can be powerful 'ways of operating', as suggested by Michel de Certeau (1978), who believed that 'many everyday life practices (talking, reading, moving about, shopping, cooking, etc.) are tactical in character' (1978: xix). De Certeau argues that these 'multiform and fragmentary' practices conform to certain rules, what suggest the idea that there might be a logic underlying them (1978: xv). It is not a surprise that some years later semioticians started paying attention to such practices. Due to the fact that 'social media is integrated into our everyday social practices, such as waiting for the bus, socializing with col-

leagues, or scheduling a date' (Vigild Poulsen et al. 2018: 593), selfie-taking practices belong to the realm of everyday life. As Deeb-Swihart et al. (2017: 9) suggest, 'selfies are in general quite ordinary, depicting everyday life rather than the ridiculous and the improbable'.

The semiotic study of practices has its roots in Ferdinand de Saussure's conception of semiotics as the discipline that should study the life of signs in the framework of social life. Departing from this seminal idea, the semiotic approach to practices aims at analyzing a broad spectrum of 'ways of doing', taking as its object of study a set of heterogeneous and diverse practices by means of which social life is constructed, reproduced and maintained (Lorusso 2010: 3). In this scenario, the unity of the object of study is given by the lens through which these are examined, that is, in Eco's words, 'a unified method of approach to phenomena which apparently are very different from each other' (1976: 8). The focus of semiotics lays on how meaning emerges, circulates, and is consumed within the webs of inter-subjectivity that constitute what we call 'culture' (Geertz 1973: 5). In this sense, semiotics of practices should be regarded as interested in understanding 'meaning in action' (Lorusso 2015: 4), i.e., how meaning is conveyed by specific ways of *doing*. What matters is to understand how *semiosis* happens, that is, how meaning is constructed based on a specific temporal succession of events. Eco argued that 'the whole of culture *should* be studied as a communicative phenomenon based on signification systems' (1976: 22), and practices are included in this conceptualization.

When trying to understand the dynamics of self-representation that are facilitated by social and digital media, a semiotic analysis of the practices as meaningful seems appropriate: when producing a simple and apparently innocent self-portrait posted for public consumption on a social network like Facebook or Instagram, or privately shared on a messaging app like WhatsApp, individuals have a particular *intention*: taking a selfie can be a way of actively reinforcing social relationships, for example by connoting a bond of intimacy or trust with the addressee (Paccagnella and Vellar 2016: 55). As Deeb-Swihart et al. (2017: 9) write, 'the most believable way to indicate that you are social is to take a photo with another person or a pet'. Therefore, to understand why and how individuals carry on these practices a closer look to the semiosis attached to them is needed.

From a methodological perspective, semiotics usually takes as its object of study the analysis of the *text*, a concept understood in a broad sense as a 'configuration of meaning' that is somehow empirically perceivable (Marrone 2011: v) or intelligible (Floch 1990: 4). Within the discipline, the concept has become a central one to describe, refer and understand a broad spectrum of phenomena, implying the use of the concept of text as a *model* for other social phenomena, like social practices. These can also be studied as texts (Floch 1990: 21) provided that they have a *closure* that individualizes the practice as a relatively autonomous totality with an internal structural organization that allows its methodological segmentation in smaller units of analysis (Floch 1990: 21). As it will be argued later, selfie-taking, just like the trajectory that an individual does in the Parisian subway (Floch 1990), is not a random chain of actions:

there is a logic behind it, one that reflects its *orientation* towards a goal (Floch 1990: 22). As Fontanille (2008: 3) argues, when analyzing practices from a semiotic perspective, their value should be looked for not only in the content of their goals, but also in the syntagmatic organization of the process itself.

The focus of this paper is set in the *practice* of taking selfies and not in analyzing selfies as *images*, a task that would require an analysis from the perspective of visual semiotics. The focus is not set in the selfie as a text itself (its topologic, eidetic and chromatic dimensions), but on the meaning that the practice of selfie-taking has for the person that carries it out. When analyzing the dynamics of online identity construction, a semiotic approach can be helpful by providing useful insights on two main fields: how these practices are meaningful to the individuals that carry them on, and how they produce meaning (Fontanille 2008: 3). Before proceeding to the analysis of these practices, and departing from the idea that selfies are meaningful practices that contribute to a particular way of performing one individuals' identity online, some clarifications need to be done regarding the concept of identity.

Identity as a social construction

Arguing against realist approaches to identity – those that take identity as something given, defending some kind of essentialism–, constructivist accounts argue that it is through social interaction that identities are constructed (Bullingham and Vasconcelos 2013: 104). In this scenario, alterity plays a key role: it is through the existence and the look of the Other that one defines, recognizes and confirms his/her own identity. This theoretical framework opens up the field for a conceptualization of the self that is dual: there is an individual that perceives an 'I' and there are others that also perceive that 'I'. Therefore, identity implies a process of social co-construction between the individual and the others (Paccagnella and Vellar 2016: 26) and can hence be conceived as a 'relational position' (Arfuch 2005: 31), depending on the recognition and interpretations of other individuals.

When analyzing selfies from a semiotic perspective, this duality regarding the self is of utmost interest: based on his/her past experience, an individual has a perception of who she/he is and tries to generate an *image*, which should communicate the perceived self to others. From a semiotic point of view, in this dynamic a *ratio* between a dimension of the content (the perceived self) and one of the expression (the image, that is, the reflection of that perceived self) is established, and it is in this framework that the practice of taking selfies should be analyzed.

When dealing with the self in relation to others, revisiting Erving Goffman's ideas about the presentation of the self in everyday life can be of use. In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1956), Goffman developed a theoretical framework aiming at explaining how indi-

viduals manage the impressions they produce in others. Using the metaphor of a ‘theatrical performance’, Goffman argues that within the social sphere ‘the part one individual plays is tailored to the parts played by the others present, and yet these others also constitute the audience’ (1956: ii). Within this logic, ‘the individual will have to act so that he intentionally or unintentionally expresses himself, and the others will in turn have to be *impressed* in some way by him’ (1956: 2). That is why Goffman speaks of a work of ‘impression management’, an active strategy aimed at controlling how others perceive us (1956: 3), which involves the existence of a *front* and a *backstage*, referring to public and private life, respectively. As it has been argued, practices of online self-presentation also fall under Goffman’s account, even if physical co-presence is not there (Bullingham and Vasconcelos 2013: 110). Here, the online realm constitutes the frontstage, while offline life is to be regarded as the backstage, and ‘users are now editors and creators – designing and creating their self-representations, choosing what to bring to the foreground or hide in the background’ (Bullingham and Vasconcelos 2013: 103). As evidence has shown, individuals ‘often attempt to re-create their offline selves online, rather than actively engaging with persona adoption’ (2013: 109), linking both realms –online and offline. As Deeb-Swihart et al. (2017: 2) argue, ‘by placing ourselves, our bodies, in the photos we take and share via social media, we come full-circle to Goffman, in some sense blending the online and offline selves together in this new practice’.

When considering online identities as a process of active *creation*, the use of resources (words, images, emojis, etc.) should be regarded as modes of *doing*, of *acting*, of *performing* (Sibilia 2008: 38). Hence representation – particularly self-representation – constitutes a key dimension to be analyzed when trying to understand how an individual comes to be a ‘self-conscious self’ (Arfuch 2005: 24). There is a narrative – and hence symbolic – dimension of identity that brings into the spotlight what particular ‘strategies of enunciation’ (Arfuch 2005: 25): given that the author is creating a product that is closely related to the perceptions he/she has about him/herself, the generated image needs to honor the implicit autobiographical contract between enunciator and addressee. In the online environment, ‘with enhanced potential for editing the self’ (Bullingham and Vasconcelos 2013: 110), selfies are another tool available from a broad repertoire that an individual has at their disposal in order to show the others who she/he ‘is’. It is important to keep this ‘to be’ in quotation marks, because assuming that there is an *actual* self could be risky from an ontological point of view, as this would imply a naïve realism that is usually criticized by constructivist accounts. When speaking about who someone is, this is to be regarded as the interpretation someone does about who he/she is – the ‘selfhood’, in Ricoeur’s (1992) terms–, which is also a construction.

At this point the caveat of iconism needs to be addressed. Both from a generative and an interpretative semiotic account, Peirce’s iconism has been catalogued as an illusion. Floch believes that iconism does not imply a relationship of the representation and ‘reality’, but that it is ‘the result of the production of a sense effect of ‘reality’” (1986: 28), and hence implies a *ma-*

nipulative enunciation (1986: 31). Eco, meanwhile, argues that iconism is a naive conception about how copies work (cfr. 1976: par. 3.5) and states that 'similarity is also a matter of cultural convention' (1976: 204). Although it might seem intuitive to believe that the self-representation that a selfie implies is an iconic copy of a 'real' self, it is ontologically questionable if such thing as a 'reality' exists. In the best case, it should be spoken of a *model*, that is, 'the real that the utterance claims to resemble' (Lejeune 1975: 23), a 'real' that is a cultural unit of meaning (Eco 1976) and that does not imply an ontological commitment with realism.

The 'show of the self'

During the last years, selfie-taking has become an extended practice. This has happened not only as a result of the technological developments that have made them possible, but also due to a new socio-cultural context that has enhanced the appropriateness of these practices. This new context has been facilitated by these technological developments, but is not purely based on them. In fact, it could be argued that it is another unfolding of a set of social transformations that have been shaping societies around the globe for decades: changes in how social relationships and privacy are conceived (Turkle 2011; Eco 2014), consumerism (Bauman 2007), processes of personalization and individualization (Lipovetsky 1983), the so-called 'society of the spectacle' (Debord 1967; Vargas Llosa 2012), a shift from the linguistic to the visual (Sartori 1998), and the mediatization of society (Hepp 2013; Hjarvard 2013), among many others.

Anthropologist Paula Sibilia refers to this context as the 'show of the self'. In her book *La intimidad como espectáculo [Intimacy as Spectacle]* (2008), Sibilia critically describes the new 'confessional practices' that take place online and that consist of publicly exposing one's intimacy (2008: 32). In the 21st century, personality has become, according to the author, 'a visible subjectivity', 'something that can be seen', and 'a way of being that is shaped to be shown' (2008: 32). In this same line of thought, Sherry Turkle argues that there has been 'a shift in how we create and experience our own identities' (2011: xi).

From a semiotic perspective, the interest lies in the analysis of the output of these practices of exhibitionism. According to Sibilia, individuals become craftsmen and women, in the sense that they permanently work on 'creating their own personalities'. This new context gives place to a 'spectacle' oriented towards the others, which Sibilia calls 'the show of the self': a permanent exhibitionism of who we (believe we) are and what we do. In her account, when posting content online for public consumption in platforms like Facebook, Instagram or Snapchat, individuals are creating a *product*, which is supposed to *reflect* who they are (2008: 165). Following Barthes, we can call it their *image* (1980: 11). When posting online about themselves, individuals create an image, which re-creates their own personality (2008: 165) by

using the tools made available to them by private companies, with a very particular feature, one that is of utmost interest for semiotics: in that product, the author, the narrator and the character are blended into one (Sibilia 2008: 37). When an individual uses online and/or digital media to 'show' others who he/she 'is', there is an empirical enunciator (Mary), who at the same time is the narrator of the story that is being told (Mary tells you a story about...), and the main character as well (Mary tells you a story about Mary): the three dimensions, usually distinct, are merged into one. This blend is heavily based in the fact that the identity narratives that are constantly being told online rely on the acceptance of a referential pact of verisimilitude, involving the existence of a real, offline individual, which reflects the logics of the autobiographical genre (Sibilia 2008; Robin 2005; Lejeune 1975).

Selfie-taking as a meaningful practice

I come now to the semiotic analysis of selfie-taking as a meaningful practice that links a dimension of the expression (the image of the self) with a dimension of the content (the 'real', offline self). Why is selfie-taking a *semiotic* practice?

To start with, selfie-taking is a type of active and conscious *production*. Except for infrequent cases in which animals like the monkey Naruto snap selfies without knowing what they are doing, when taking a selfie, someone does something consciously –a labor, in Eco's terminology (1976: 152). It is as a result of this action that selfies –the material output of a way of doing– come into being. There is an act of *poiesis*, a creation that implies something being done aiming at a specific goal: boosting the self-image, reinforcing social bonds, etc. Hence, selfies are creations, 'artifacts', something done with a particular intention that is oriented toward a goal.

Secondly, when taking a selfie, a connection between a dimension of expression and one of content is established. As Paccagnella and Vellar (2016: 28) suggest, selfies imply a 'circular relation' [*rapporto circolare*] between the offline and the virtual dimensions. In this sense, selfies are *referential* texts, a feature that Barthes already attributed to photography in general: as he argued, photography does not invent anything – 'it is authentication itself' (Barthes 1980: 87), it 'attests that what I see has indeed existed' (1980: 82). In this sense, 'every photograph is a certificate of presence' (1980: 87). Every selfie has, just as photography when Barthes wrote *Camera lucida*, a 'photographic referent' (1980: 76), which is to be regarded as 'the necessarily real thing which has been placed before the lens, without which there would be no photograph' (1980: 76). When seeing a selfie, we can 'never deny that *the thing has been there*' (1980: 76). In this sense, selfies could be considered forms of the autobiographical genre (Lejeune 1975: 22).

This is the reason why selfies are intuitively regarded as mere iconic copies of the real

offline individual. The most that can be affirmed is that selfies are *self-referential*, that is, their content is the offline self. As Barthes writes, 'what I want, in short, is that my (mobile) image, buffeted among a thousand shifting photographs, altering with situation and age, should always coincide with my (profound) "self"' (1980: 12). When taking a selfie, the author creates a product using him/herself as the subject, a feature that is inherited from the practice of photographic self-portraits, although selfies pertain to a different, more complex, genre. Because of being self-referential, the dimension of the content of a selfie is to some extent limited: it can only refer to the 'cultural unit' of the self, particularly to its *body*.

Moreover, although there might be exceptions (I will come to this point later on), selfies are normally taken to be shared, publicly or privately, and consumed by others. As Paccagnella & Vellar write (2016: 29), the process of production of online content is aimed at producing a reaction of appreciation, commenting or sharing by the addressees. In this sense, a selfie becomes an object of communication. Furthermore, selfies are meaningful to the individuals that take them. As previously mentioned, a selfie is the result of a labor that comes from an *intention*: it can be to reinforce self-esteem (e.g. the mirror selfie), to document a presence in a particular place or event (e. g. in a museum), to reinforce social bonds (e.g. group selfies) or to generate trust (intimate selfies), among others (Paccagnella and Vellar 2016: 55). From a semiotic perspective, a typology of selfie-taking could be proposed based on this point, as I will do in the next section.

Given that selfie-taking is a type of production, this practice implies *making choices*, conscious or unconscious: who is going to be in the frame, what from the background will be framed and what not, from which angle it will be taken, which gesture should be displayed, etc. This is an essential feature of selfies, one that shows the *stylized* character of this kind of photograph and that supports the idea that selfies are not mere copies of the individual, but constructions in which cultural parameters play a role. Displaying a particular gesture like the duckface is a good example of this, as well as the well-known 'legs or hot dogs' selfie: they aim at reproducing preexistent models that are valid within a particular culture.

In view of the fact that selfies are forms of self-representation, it is possible to speak of selfies as instruments of *self-stylization* (Sibilia 2008: 256). As Barthes (1980: 10) wrote on photography, 'once I feel myself observed by the lens [...] I constitute myself in the process of "posing", I instantaneously make another body for myself, I transform myself in advance into an image', a thought that also applies for selfies as a particular genre of photography. In this sense, Barthes (1980: 13) writes that portrait-photography implies the intersection of four 'image-repertoires': 'the one I think I am, the one I want others to think I am, the one the photographer thinks I am, and the one he makes us of to exhibit his art'. In the case of selfies, these repertoires are blended and reduced to only two, given that who is posing for the picture and the photographer are usually the same person. However, the distinction between self-perception and desired image remains.

Due to technological developments, it is possible to *stylize* in different ways how to represent the body in a selfie, for example by the existing possibilities of *modifying* the self (the body, the face) with filters (artistic, like the ones Instagram has, and/or funny, like the ones Snapchat offers). When analyzing faces from a semiotic perspective, Massimo Leone underlines the importance of the *possibility of alteration*, a practice that seems to be attractive among the young: ‘millions of teenagers, today, daily enjoy exchanging Snapchat images of their faces, heavily transformed through flamboyant visual effects’ (2018: 28). As Paccagnella & Vellar write (2016: 55), filters alter the way in which the photograph is perceived and hence the message conveyed by it. In this sense, selfies could be seen as mechanisms of control of the self-image, clearly for public consumption, but also for private use, as a way of checking how the self-image is. I will come back to this point later on.

All in all, selfie-taking is a socially *codified* practice: there are non-written, underlying rules that regulate it. Good examples of this are the forced smiles, the sexy faces, the need to look at the camera, or even the decision regarding the percentage of one’s legs and of landscape to be shown in the ‘legs or hot dogs’ type of selfie. When taking a selfie, individuals recognize the codes and try to reproduce them in their own selfies in a way that is acceptable and understandable (Eco 1976: 152), that is, *conventional*. As selfie-taking constitutes a meaningful practice, a grammar of selfie-taking, ruled by certain codes and conventions, could be postulated, as I will proceed to do in the following section.

Selfie-taking: a syntax and a typology

I have argued why the practice of selfie-taking could be considered as meaningful and hence deserves a semiotic account, specifically by having a look at the dynamics that these practices involve. Jean-Marie Floch argues that a trajectory can be analyzed from a semiotic perspective if it has a closure and a structural organization that allows its decomposition in minor units of analysis (Floch 1990). As discussed, selfie-taking is a practice that is socially coded and hence ruled by ‘internal, but culturally shaped, deliberations surrounding taking, editing, posting, sending and deleting’ (Tiidenberg 2018: 133). These deliberations need to be examined. In this sense, the following five moments of selfie-taking could be identified for a semiotic analysis:

1. *Recognition of a ‘selfie-situation’*. In this first moment, the individual recognizes a specific situation as appropriate for taking a selfie. This recognition involves the presence of normative criteria of appropriateness, which are culturally coded and identified based on specific cues, like being on a touristic spot, with a celebrity, or being involved in any other situation that would justify taking a selfie. The recognition can take place while being in an infrequent situation, like the ones mentioned, but also when doing

everyday life tasks, like waiting for the bus (Vigild Poulsen et al. 2018: 593). In this recognition there are normative social conventions based on the principle of appropriateness that play a role and allow the individual to identify the situation as a possible 'selfie situation' (or not).

2. *Pre-production.* The second moment consists of the employment of aesthetical and general cultural codes for choosing the 'good' scenario/frame for the picture: Which angle should be snapped? What should be on the background? How should I pose? All these questions come, consciously or not, to the perception of the individual that will take the selfie. Furthermore, what is the image that wants to be projected? Evidence shows that 'users posting selfies try to construct an identity that appears attractive, fashionable, wealthy, and/or important' (Deeb-Swihart et al. 2017: 8). Here also conventional cultural categories – gender, social status, nationality, etc.– play a role. As Bulligham and Vasconcelos (2013: 106) have shown, the desire to look 'professional', 'feminine', 'fun' or 'creative' have an incidence when carrying out practices of self-representation online. In this regard, the conclusions by Veum and Moland Undrum (2017), regarding the similarity between selfies shared on Instagram and visual representations in advertisements and image-banks, is especially enlightening, since they show that there is a norm that is taken into account when conceiving how the selfie should look like. The recognition of different sub-genres of selfies (e.g. touristic selfie) also plays a role in this 'pre-production' phase: as Deeb-Swihart et al. (2017: 8) argue, 'in the Travel category users often pose in such a way that their face occupies a small region of the image, giving the background a larger prominence in the image'. As it can be seen, in the 'pre-production' moment, many decisions are taken, and these are based on the recognition of culturally codified social conventions (aesthetic, ethical, technical) that have a normative power mainly by establishing boundaries to what is appropriate.
3. *Taking the selfie.* This is the moment of creation the selfie, that is, the material outcome of the process, which implies a technical dimension involving the sharpness of the image, an appropriate selection of the angle, an adequate frame, the correct use of light –all these codes belonging to the aesthetical repertoire –, but also the recognition of particular conventions regarding the content: what to frame, how to pose, how to look like, to smile or not, etc. Usually, there is a tendency to display a forced smile, what shows the recognition by the individual/s on the picture of normative cultural conventions on how the image should look like.
4. *Evaluation.* After having taken the selfie (one or more) comes the moment of its evaluation, in which the individual (or individuals) involved in it analyze(s) and control(s) the material outcome of the previous moment. When evaluating the outcome, many social codes, mainly aesthetical ('does it look good?') but also ethical ('is this appropriate?') are in play. Regarding the aesthetical, Deeb-Swihart et al. (2017: 9) argue

that ‘users overwhelmingly attempt to appear attractive over appearing intentionally unattractive’, and they add that ‘it seems selfies follow conventional beauty standards, with individuals wishing to appear fashionable, clean, and put-together’ (2017: 9). Regarding the ethical dimension, Deeb-Swihart et al. (2017: 7) found out that usually ‘people want to appear *effortlessly* happy, healthy, and successful rather than showcasing the intermediate stages or the failures that had to occur to achieve that lifestyle, position, or appearance’. This is an ethical decision dealing with hiding some things and showing others, following Goffman’s dichotomy between a back and a frontstage, respectively. When evaluating the selfie, there is a correspondence of the codes in play with the ones present in the ‘pre-production’ moment: the selfie will be evaluated as appropriate if it reflects the normative codes identified in that earlier stage. If this is not the case, the selfie will probably be taken again until the desired outcome is met.

5. *Finalization*. It would be naïve to believe that the practice of selfie-taking ends with saving the selfie as the material output of the process: usually it goes on to a finalization phase, in which the selfie is edited and manipulated, in a process based on the recognition of and compliance with many codes, mainly aesthetical. This is a distinctive feature of the practice of selfie-taking: its output can be controlled – embellished (Bullingham and Vasconcelos 2013: 107) –, mainly by means of the use of photographic filters.

Going back to the idea of the recognition of certain codes that rule the practice of selfie-taking, we could draw on Floch’s (1986) typology of photography to have a better understanding of what individuals might be aiming at. In *Formes de l’empreinte*, Floch presents a dichotomy between *referential* and *constructivist* photography, according to the type of relationship that is established between the photographic discourse and ‘reality’. According to Floch (1986), while referential photography presupposes the existence of meaning and tries to capture it, making of photography a sort of *testimony*, constructivist photography considers that meaning is produced by the photographic discourse itself. Following this classification, when taking selfies, some individuals just aim at ‘saving’ and/or ‘sharing’ the moment they are living, as a sort of testimonial document (a ‘carrier of memory’) without any self-representative intention behind it. However, in many other cases, when taking a selfie, individuals are trying to construct a particular *image* of themselves, making of the selfie a *communicative* device and not only a ‘carrier of memory’. As an example of the first type of selfie we could think of someone who is not literate in the practice of selfie-taking, an amateur, while in the second case we can think of one of the many teenagers who are fully aware of the image they are projecting by means of the selfie they share, and are in possession of both the technical knowledge and the aesthetical and ethical codes to control that output. The well-known semiotic square proposed by Floch (1986: 20) could be employed to better illustrate this differentiation:

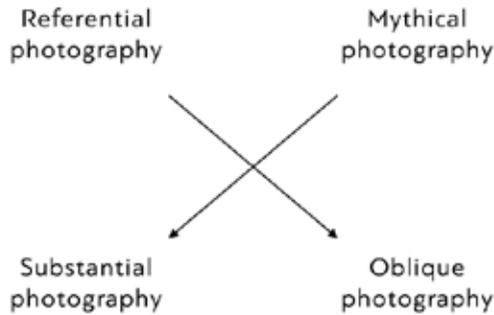


Figure 1

Attributing a clear interpretative function to photographic discourse, *referential* photography tries to reflect the world 'as it is' and hence to create a testimony of 'reality' - therefore, photography is a mediator in 'letting reality speak' (Floch 1986: 20). From a semiotic perspective, what is at stake here is the production of the effect of a *referential illusion*, an 'effect of reality' (Barthes 1968); however, as discussed before, considering iconism as a *reflection* of reality is ontologically risky. The negation of this referential function is what Floch calls *oblique* photography, a type of photography that plays with the limits and possibility of referentiality by addressing the paradoxical and by employing double senses (Floch 1986: 21). On the other hand, based on a constructivist approach to photography, *mythical* photography implies an articulation that creates meaning based on what is being photographed. In this sense, 'reality' is only the basis for a second discourse that goes beyond the figurative dimension, showing precisely how meaning is constructed through discourse (Floch 1986: 22). The negation of mythical photography is called by Floch *substantial* photography, which displays a tension with the 'real' (Floch 1986: 23). These four categories can be useful when trying to understand the practice of selfies-taking, particularly when paying attention to the possession of a repertoire of cultural codes (technical, aesthetical, ethical, situational) that the individuals taking the selfie might possess. Therefore, while individuals with no literacy in selfie-taking might be closer to the referential pole, a young influencer, fully literate in the practice, should be placed closer to the mythical pole.

Selfie-taking and its function in 'show of the self'

Taking now a more sociological stance, a discussion of the function that selfie-taking fulfills within the socio-cultural context of the 'show of the self' described before should be conducted. Drawing on Goffman's account on the presentation of self in everyday life, two main

features should be stressed out in order to understand how selfies play a specific role in the process of impression management: on the one hand, in the process of presentation of the self, signs play a key role, as they are the *carriers* (sign-vehicles) by means of which impressions can be managed. As Goffman writes (1956: 19), ‘while in the presence of others, the individual typically infuses his activity with signs which dramatically highlight and portray confirmatory facts that might otherwise remain unapparent or obscure’. On the other hand, Goffman attributes a role to idealization in the game of performing the self. As he writes (1956: 23): ‘when the individual presents himself before others, his performance will tend to incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of the society, more so, in fact, than does his behavior as a whole’. The presentation of the self, both offline and online, is ‘molded and modified’, in Goffman’s words (1956: 23) by underlying rules, that is, institutionalized conventions – or codes. These ideas go in line with the concept of stylization presented before. According to Eco (1976), stylizations are ‘apparently “iconic” expressions that are in fact the result of a convention’ and that are easy to recognize by the interpreter of the sign as the result of ‘large-scale overcoding’ (1976: 238). It is probably in this sense that Sherry Turkle believes that ‘on social-networking sites such as Facebook, we think we will be presenting ourselves, but our profile ends up as somebody else – often the fantasy of who we want to be’ (2011: 153). As Barthes wrote on photography, selfies are ‘images partially true, and therefore totally false’ (1980: 66). In this process, the ‘self’ we create is not an actual *reflection* of who we are, but a stylized copy, ‘molded and modified’ by the values of society we recognize as institutionalized: coolness, cuteness, sexiness, etc. Turkle further argues that ‘our online performances take on lives of their own. [...] Sometimes we see them as out “better selves”’ (2011: 160). Both idealization and stylization imply the recognition of a code that is seen as meaningful and that conditions our performances. In this sense, within the impression management dynamics, selfies fulfill the function of letting individuals have some control on how they *will* be seen, following a logic of ‘check and balances’, or on how they *would* be seen: in fact, selfies are not always meant to be *actually* shared.

On the other hand, there is a central feature of selfies that make them so special and interesting from a semiotic perspective: they anchorage the offline self to the online narrative. I believe it is in this feature where it’s essential value within the ‘show of the self’ lies: the online environment offers many possibilities of self-representation, but only selfies are a guarantee that something really happened in a particular ‘here and now’, as stated by its author/character. As Barthes wrote, photography ‘*authenticates* the existence of a certain being’ (1980: 107), contrary to what happens with written text, which presents ‘the object in a vague, arguable manner, and therefore incites me to suspicions as to what I think I am seeing’ (1980: 106). On June 21, 2018, to celebrate the selfie day, Facebook published the following message about selfies: ‘Whether they’re silly, sweet or stunning, selfies are a way to show the world, “This is me, right here, right now”’. This apparently naive text addresses the essence of selfies: it anchors the author/narrator/

character to a specific 'here and now', that is, to a spatial-temporal situation. This is what Barthes had in mind when he wrote that 'what the Photograph reproduces to infinity has occurred only once: Photograph mechanically repeats what could never be repeated existentially' (1980: 4). In this sense, selfies constitute a particular and interesting form of *débrayage* including an actor (me), a space (here) and a time (now) that generate the illusion of *authenticity*.

In this regard, Sibilía argues that as a result of growing mediatization of society, people are more and more interested in authentic, *non-staged* experiences (2008: 221). As a result of this craving for 'the authentic', there is a need for authors to introduce 'effects of reality' into their life-stories (2008: 224), a need that turns the anchorage of the story told online in the offline life to be irresistible, even when offline life might be banal and dull (2008: 231). As Paccagnella and Vellar argue (2016: 27), the process of online identity construction requires an incorporation of signs that send the reader to the 'real' offline dimension, and selfies are one of the few devices by means of which the body of the author enters into the digital world (Paccagnella and Vellar 2016: 54). That is why I believe we can speak of an *anchoring function* of the selfie, consisting of introducing and making visible the 'real' offline self, bounded to a specific 'here and now', into the identity narrative that is displayed online. Although both dimensions are strongly linked, they shouldn't be confused: the 'self' that is shown in a selfie is not the offline self; the Mary shown in the selfie is not a copy of the 'real' offline Mary: it is a stylized copy that is 'molded and modified' according to underlying codes that are socially institutionalized. Nevertheless, the selfie is the closest occurrence we might have of bringing the 'real' offline dimension into the online environment, as it shows the offline self bounded to specific date, time of the day, geographical location, etc. As Barthes writes, due to its nature photographs are a 'false on the level of perception, true on the level of time' (1980: 115), a statement that also includes selfies. Barthes uses the concept of 'biographeme' to refer to the biographical features of the photographers' life that are present in the photograph (1980: 30). In this sense, selfies are biographemes in themselves. As Deeb-Swihart et al. (2017: 8) argue, they 'serve as photographic evidence for a persons' behavior or interests.'

Based on these remarks, it could be argued that selfies belong to the *autobiographical* genre (Sibilía 2008; Robin 2005), a genre that implies a reading contract between enunciator and addressee which unifies the identities of author, narrator and protagonist (Lejeune 1975: 5; Robin 2005: 45). As Sibilía writes (2008: 45), facts narrated in autobiographical stories are considered truthful. Moreover, the addressee assumes that the facts that are being narrated are *verifiable*, that is, 'claim to provide information about a "reality" exterior to the text' (Lejeune 1975: 22). There is an implicit 'referential pact' between enunciator and addressee, 'in which are included a definition of the field of the real that is involved and a statement of the modes and the degree of resemblance to which the texts lay claim' (Lejeune 1975: 22). The selfie is a genre that is *contractual* (Lejeune 1975: 29); in this contract, the proper name, referring to a particular cultural unit attached to a referent, is an essential element.

However, in practice it might be tricky to draw a clear line between fictional and veridical narratives: as it has been discussed in this paper, the cases of online self-representation are a clear proof of this challenge. That is why it might be more appropriate to follow Robin (2005: 46) in arguing that instead of 'autobiography' it should be spoken of 'auto-fictions', as the stories being told are to some extent fictional constructions based on 'reality' that are mediated by cultural codes: there is never a full correspondence between author, narrator and character, even though in the narrative it might look like they are the same as a result of the referential nature of selfies. Processes of stylization, embellishment and modification are usually in play.

Concluding remarks

Our goal was to approach the practice of selfie-taking from a semiotic perspective, focusing on why it plays a key role within the 'show of the self'. Regarding the first point, I have argued that selfies are the output of a photographic practice that is meaningful to individuals because it mobilizes codes that are culturally institutionalized. Identifying these codes and the function they play during the selfie-taking process is essential when trying to understand how individuals perform their identities online. I have also suggested that a syntax of selfie-taking could be formulated and tried to come up with one – it was only one of many other possible segmentations. Semiotics, by studying how the emergence of meaning is made possible, is in a favorable position to investigate the signifying processes related to the practice of selfie-taking. Moreover, the hypotheses developed within the semiotic framework could be tested empirically within the context of sociological and ethnographic studies: very interesting insights could be found out by seeing 'meaning in action'.

Regarding the second point, I have tried to argue that selfies play a key function in the 'show of the self' because they anchor the offline into the online narrative. Much more could be said about this relationship between the offline dimension and the virtual, but I believe I have made my point by arguing how the selfie constitutes a semiotic device in which the dimension of the content and the dimension of the expression become very close, but still don't blend, as this blending is ontologically impossible: a selfie might seem as a copy of 'reality' – a 'resemblance to the truth', in Lejeune's (1975: 22) words –, but, in the best case, it is '*vraisemblable*' (Barthes 1968): in the process of taking selfies, as another unfolding of the general process of presentation of the self, there are always stylizations, idealizations, and modifications based on institutionalized codes that establish an essential ontological difference between factual and fictional dimensions of life. Nevertheless, compared to other tools for online self-representation, what is undeniable is that a selfie, just like Photography, 'always carries its referent with itself' (Barthes 1980: 5), and it is here where its popularity as a new genre within the contemporary digital culture could be looked for. In this sense, Roland Barthes wrote in

1980 that 'what characterizes the so-called advanced societies is that they today consume images and no longer, like those of the past, beliefs; they are therefore more liberal, less fanatical, but also more "false" (less "authentic")' (1980: 118). Almost 30 years later, this statement seems to describe our present in an appropriate way.

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Fitness Selfie and Anorexia: A study of 'fitness' selfies of women on Instagram and its contribution to anorexia nervosa

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The stares of others driving and encouraging the deliberate transformation of one's body into a fit body has become a common narrative of fitness selfies. Research findings show that women who share self images on social media have higher levels of dietary restraint and overvaluation of shape and weight than those who do not (Mclean 2005). Similarly, women who post fitspiration images on social media have a higher drive for thinness and compulsive exercise (Holland 2017). This paper attempts to study the process behind fitness influencers' production and sensory-motor performance of 'fit' visuals as factors contributing to anorexia nervosa and other eating disorders. The theoretical framework of the study draws from semiotic photography theory, which explores the gestural aspects of a visual. Participant recruitment used a purposive (a type of non-probability sampling) approach, coupled with snowball sampling. In-depth interviews were conducted with the participants who are female fitness influencers from India. The semiotic analysis of the selfies shared by the participants substantiated the interviews. The selfies analysed were chosen on the basis of their curation choices, as well as on the number of likes and comments they receive.

Keywords Fitness Selfie, Mental Health, Anorexia, Instagram Influencers, Photography Theory

Introduction

Social media, today, has witnessed a proliferation of fitness narratives. This can be partly explained by the ubiquity of non-communicable diseases that are closely related to the aesthetic body and hence to diet, exercise, and personal care. These chronic non-communicable

diseases or lifestyle diseases result from a relative cessation of physical activity, sedentary daily routines leading to high blood pressure, high blood sugar levels, and at times even premature death (Tabish 2017). The popular narrative around non-communicable diseases emphasizes the risks of obesity that leads to an increased affinity to insulin resistance, cancer, hypertension and the like (Ali and Crowther 2005). These medically ratified criteria of health allow for the legitimization of the 'thin body' as opposed to the 'fit' body and provide social media influencers with material to justify their stance on fitness. Social media fitness narratives are advanced as solutions to these fundamental issues, where individuals present themselves as role models to help others keep lifestyle diseases at bay. The body, then, is used as a site for making health claims, dominated by mediated representations of ideal, fit bodies. This article recognizes that such visual self-portrayals of fitness are not limited to images of the body alone. They also make use of certain other elements—such as sharing of one's current location through GPS coordinates, gym locations, running tracks, distance covered, heart rate measures etc. (Laan 2016) – to depict 'fit' lifestyles.

Through selfies shared on social media applications, such as Instagram, individuals can now display their 'fit' bodies to the digital audience. A majority of fitness-centered visuals track muscle growth, especially mirror selfies that exhibit one's pride in adhering to 'fit' lifestyles, and often, these are accompanied by posts that relay emotions pertaining to soreness, post-exercise exhaustion, etc (Laan 2016). These selfies also involve 'before and after' pictures that indicate the bodily changes occurring over a period of time. All of these together enable the user to share and promote fitness-oriented lifestyles on the premise of being healthy. Popular Instagram micro-celebrities like Kayla Itsines, Rachel Brathen and Mary Helen Bowers use images of their thin, 'fit' bodies to promote workouts ranging from yoga to ballet (Fisher 2018). However, displaying one's body for public scrutiny, specifically on Instagram, could lead to increased pressure on the user to maintain an ideal image of fitness. In pursuit of fit and slender representation, communication becomes competition amongst women when what they can do to their own body becomes an expression of their power (Burke 2006). To cater to their audience, individuals undertake excessive exercise, which in itself, has been linked to eating disorders, specifically anorexia nervosa (Grange and Eisler 1993). Anorexia nervosa is a mental disorder, prevalent mostly amongst adolescent girls and adult women, characterized by a severe fear of weight gain, body image issues and often starving, purging and excessive bodily exercise (Zipfel et al. 2015). Anorexia is constructed as a contradiction between the need to fit in a social group and the production of patriarchal structures that potentially serve as the source of women's alienation (Gatti et. al 2014: 306). This alludes to a space in which femininity can only be controlled by extrinsic systems of signification. In this sense, anorexia is put symbolically as a construction against which the masculine order and the male gaze may be reiterated as a means to returning things to their 'normal' and 'orderly' predispositions (Burke 2006; Gatti et. al 2014). In such a scenario, the female gaze is construed as being una-

ble to distinguish 'normal' from 'excessive', it is implicated in misinterpretations of recognition; particularly in the context of distinctions between what is feminine and what is not, and what looks ailing and what is termed healthy.

Fitspirational and health-fitness blogging entails an elaborate process of creating, manipulating and sharing fitness-related, mediated selfies on Instagram. These selfies often promote a thin, 'fit' body type achieved through excessive emphasis on dietary restraint and excessive exercise. Influencers, through Instagram fitness accounts, represent fit, muscular bodies and uphold these as ideal. With time, hashtags such as #fitspiration and #thinspiration gained popularity, establishing connection to ideal body types.

However, there have been indicators showing that exposure to fitspiration images through new media, have latent, negative consequences including lowered self-esteem and body-comparison, specifically amongst women (Tiggemann and Zaccardo 2015). A study amongst adolescent girls further noted that there was a correlation between frequency of selfie-sharing on social media and levels of body-dissatisfaction, overvaluation of shape and internalisation of the thin ideal (McLean et al. 2015). Further, eating disorders, issues with menstruation and fertility, dietary restraints and guilt-induced eating patterns have been recorded amongst health bloggers (Boepple and Thomson 2014). Often, ideal bodies, as promoted by Instagram accounts, require such bodily features as a thigh gap or the recent 'Toblerone tunnel.' While the thigh gap features a gap between the thighs in a neutral body stance, the 'Toblerone tunnel' is a triangle-shaped gap that allows a woman to fit a bar of Toblerone (a triangle-shaped brand of chocolate) between her upper thighs (Miller 2018). These largely restrictive ideals are then touted as standard, desirable and achievable, body types that women should aspire for.

This leads to the creation of the culturally ideal body that commiserates and condescends the 'unfit' body. It seeks to encourage women to achieve mediated, culturally and medically defined results. In addition, the predicament with 'fitspiration' is connected to its derivation and subsequent development from 'thinspiration'. While largely shunned at present, 'thinspiration' involved an objectification of the anorexic body, justifying it as a lifestyle choice (Bizjak 2015). It used images that validated mental distress and starvation measuring up to anorexia (Bizjak 2015). Fitspiration rejected the concept of emaciated bodies, incorporating health claims into the work put in towards achieving 'fit' bodies. The ideal image, though, still remains a thin frame accompanied by muscle definition. This new ideal involves the encouragement of exercise as a tool to achieve the ideal body. This is often communicated by photographing and circulating 'fit' bodies through Instagram selfies. The quandary, here, is whether these mediated Instagram posts, could lead to interpreting oneself through a body-negative lens and hence encourage adoption of maladaptive exercise behaviours (Bizjak 2015). In several cases, obsessive and maladaptive behaviours underlie the construction of these selfies, manifesting themselves through such disorders as Anorexia Nervosa. The semiotic relations between anorexia, contagion and the female gaze are evidence of the damaging consequences of the

absence of a female gaze within phallogocentric discourse and the impossibility of articulating a uniquely feminine desire within its sexually differentiated symbolic (Baudrillard 1983: 183). The simultaneous objectification of the body as a site for incorporating specific health standards, muscle tone etc., as upheld by fitness bloggers on Instagram, could then present patterns that are somewhat analogous to anorexia nervosa.

In the late twentieth century, the voluntary act of self-starvation was most commonly known as a signifier of anorexia nervosa, an illness dominantly impacting young women in affluent western cultures (Allwood 2010). Ellman (1993) in his research identifies it as a discourse in which the signifier 'anorexia' directs not so much to a clinical ailment but to a range of frequent contradictory arguments related to the production and consumption of imageries of slender femininity, female spectatorship. Anorexia for its semiotic entanglement between embodiment and representational paradigms suggest that the female body presents the necessary circumstances of otherness that is essential to the reproduction of meaning within dichotomous and hierarchical constructions of gender and its representation (Fuss 1992: 715). Judith Butler (1993) identified the chaotic body of woman as the site; against which the dominance of singular, phallic and libidinal economies of reasoning and rationale, has seen the structure of matter and flesh as 'the unrepresentable' or 'the outside' of systems of representation (as cited in Gimlin 1994: 109). Therefore, the alignment of the feminine with this apathetic semiotics of the body is supportive of the cause for its repression and control.

Bordo (1993) discusses how the aspect of disembodiment is the epicenter of exploring anorexia as a cultural embedding. The anorexic woman's withdrawal from the context of embodiment, Bordo argues, is culturally moulded and entails a rejection of the body in its conventional, discursive and symbolic meanings (1993: 145). Bordo approaches anorexic disembodiment amidst a fencing of primarily dualist relations, where the hegemony of mind over body is an integral element of the anorexic impulse to 'get rid of', or 'get out of the body'. In discussing anorexic behavior and its role as a complex symbolic site in popular constructions of idealized femininity, Krauss (1994) does not theorize anorexic subjectivity. He foregrounds the maternal body as a symbolic site in which the principle of orality is of primary significance; he also discusses some theoretical continuities in which the subjective negotiation of images and food is identified specifically as feminine (Krauss 1994; Kelly 1987). Thus, Krauss suggests that through its over-conformist tendencies, the excess of female spectatorship is aligned with a failure to perceive boundaries between the sick and the healthy, the feminine and the freakish, and results in the embodiment of already represented symptoms. In this way, anorexia is tied to conceptions of a hysterical female gaze which through its 'embeddedness' in a disorderly (sexual) body, is pathologically bound to reproduce the symptoms of other bodies and other femininities. In a fitness driven culture on Instagram, this body finds itself performing for the various onlookers and their interpretations of a fit body.

It is against this backdrop that this article attempts to study the process behind fitness in-

fluencers' production and sensory-motor performance of 'fit' selfies and corresponding factors that are analogous to Anorexia Nervosa and other eating disorders. Negotiations between Instagram's 'fit' visuals and the incidence of anorexia amongst women has been analyzed through selfies of 'fit' bodies, studied in the Indian context. This article aims at understanding the hermeneutics of 'fit' selfies posted by women on Instagram. Photography Theory applicable to selfies (Frosh 2015), centered on the 'fit' anorexic body, has been employed. It specifically aims to ascertain whether and to what extent the documentation and embodiment of health ideals by women on Instagram is indicative of anorexia nervosa. This study looks at how the fitness influencer allows her selfies to be guided by the 'mediated voyeur' and hence, uses and manipulates her body and its representation, in ways that can lead to maladaptive behaviours. The manner in which women somatically engage in the production of such 'fit' selfies, therefore, is also a concern that the article engages with. The article also contends that women shape their bodies in ways that embody societal ideas of 'beauty,' and represent this through their Instagram selfies.

Literature Review

a. Selfies and Mediated Voyeurism

Selfies can be understood as photographs that portray the subject either photographed via a mirror or holding a camera/device with an outstretched arm, the camera turned to face the subject (Donnachie 2015). In many respects, they are similar to historical self-portraits. However, as Donnachie (2015) argues, the modern selfie cannot be perceived simply as a derivative of the historical tradition of the 'self-portrait.' It is a contemporary manifestation involving discrete composition, technique, networked distribution, consumption and inundation (Donnachie 2015). While the selfie itself may not be a natural progression of the self-portrait, it is, however, shaped through the gradual, historical emphasis on the self. In this regard, Yesil (2001) traces a history of media voyeurism and exhibitionism and notes that by the end of the twentieth century, mediated emphasis was largely self-centered and self-absorbed. American society believed that outward appearances and public representation offered insights into one's inner personality, heightened by increased emphasis on physical and mental well-being achieved through beauty and wellness regimes (Yesil 2001). Given this context and its bearing on modern discourse, the self is now presenting itself in ways that legitimizes voyeurism. In an age of the Instagram selfie, voyeurism (not limited to its sexual connotation) allows individuals to shape their bodies and behaviour in ways that empower the 'mediated voyeur.' One can structure and manipulate the semiotics of the self based on the positive or negative responses that the Instagram selfie gains. A future selfie would be informed by the responses to past

posts/stories, allowing the voyeur to play a central role in determining how a subject chooses to present oneself. This follows from the principle of self-control of one's semiotic behaviour, of shaping one's behaviour and affective tones in a systematic way in the present, leading to a gradual shift to new experiences (Visakko 2015). It is in this sense that Calvert's (2002) conceptualization of 'mediated voyeurism' gains ground. According to him, 'mediated voyeurism' is 'the consumption of revealing images of and information about others' apparently real and unguarded lives often yet not always for purposes of entertainment but frequently at the expense of privacy and discourse, through the means of mass media and Internet' (Calvert 2002: 2). The 'mediated voyeur,' as this article contends, is an audience of the fitness selfie, informing the future behaviour and actions of the subject of the selfie. In the context of Indian women who pursue fitness, a validation of 'mediated voyeurism' could lead to the adoption of excessive exercise, which is analogous to anorexia.

b. Beauty and Fitness

Fitness, in terms of health, is defined as optimum levels of cardiorespiratory endurance, muscular endurance, muscular strength, body composition, and flexibility (Caspersen et al. 1985). Of these, muscular definition and body composition are manifest in the physical body and are often used to justify mediated, aesthetic and 'fit' bodies. Aesthetically and visually pleasing bodies do not simply serve as ideals of health and longevity but are considered sexually attractive. For instance, through subscription to body composition (measures of fat, bone, muscle and water in the human body), Etcoff (1999) identifies categories of sexual attractiveness. She asserts that women with low waist-to-hip ratios, body symmetry and smooth skin are innately considered sexually attractive (Etcoff 1999). Incidentally, mediated ideals of physical fitness are analogous to categories that define women's ideals of sexual attractiveness. These ideals are then embodied to achieve 'fit', 'sexually attractive,' ideal bodies identified by such parameters as 'low body fat' and 'muscle definition.' These ideals are often synonymous with social ideals of beauty.

One of the behavioral differences between women and men lies in the dissimilar ways in which girls and boys are socialized into society. Contemporary scholars tend to agree that gender is an acquired characteristic; it is socially and culturally constructed (Butler 1990). Therefore, most feminine and masculine characteristics are not innate, but learned through association with others and the mass media. Despite the notion that these characteristics are learned, feminist scholars have argued that society assigns gender to a certain sex. Just as definitions of gender are perpetuated by society, so too are the ways in which people inherently learn to see the female body. In his celebrated book *Ways of Seeing* (1972), John Berger proposes the idea that 'ways of seeing' are culturally constructed, and research has shown that 'our culture privileges male looking' (Shields & Heineken 2002: 83). There is nothing inherently 'natural' about

seeing women as objects, or celebrating the female beauty ideal of today (a very thin, toned women with large breasts). Many feminist theorists convey that women are positioned—and conditioned—as objects to be looked at by men (Berger 1972; Bordo 1999; Freidan 1963; Mulvey 1975; Wolf 1992).

With the recent exposure to structures of global capitalism, female beauty, specifically, has gained considerable social prominence, coupled with the possibility of beauty becoming a prerequisite of health (Edmonds 2008). Further, Edmonds (2008) argues that the drive to achieve beauty, regardless of the context and methods, can translate as outcomes that either boost or deteriorate physical health. It must be noted here that structures contributing to the achievement of these ideals of ‘beauty’ and ‘fitness’ often come at the cost of the same physical and mental health that one seeks to achieve.

c. Social media and body ideals

Through a comprehensive review of literature, Perloff (2014) concludes that exposure to mediated images of ‘ideal bodies’ predicts patterns of body dissatisfaction and eating disorder symptomatology amongst preadolescent girls and young women. This particular demographic is especially susceptible to the negative effects of body images on social media, as they largely subscribe to content on social media (Perloff 2014). Such content is more persuasive as it is somewhat removed from conventional images of larger-than-life celebrities, and instead champions those images and lifestyles that are promoted by micro-celebrities/attractive peers (Perloff 2018). This observation is essential, as women who are influenced by images of peers are led to believe that these ‘thin-idealising’ lifestyles are within their reach. They are often driven by the belief that ‘fit bodies’ can be achieved by simply aping the lifestyle of a thin/fit peer. However, users’ experiences of body satisfaction are not simply a result of media exposure, but the process of internalizing mediated and societal ideals (Cramblit and Pritchard 2013). Hence, it has been noted that women exposed to more health and fitness magazines are more susceptible to anorexic and bulimic behaviours and exhibit an increased drive to be thin (Botta 2003). Further, Cramblit and Pritchard (2013) suggest that women exposed to athletic bodies through conventional media (like magazines) internalize a thin, toned female ideal. The idea is to be muscular but within the threshold that is socially permissible for women. Young women’s increasing exposure to frequent social media images suggests a shift from conventional magazine readership to social media. Social media’s circulation of fitness oriented, inspirational body images has negative consequences on body image. This includes body dissatisfaction, body-surveillance, self-objectification, internalization of the thin ideal and body shame (Fox & Rooney 2015; Manago et al. 2015; Meier and Gray 2014; Tiggemann and Slater 2013). Photo Sharing applications, like Instagram and Pinterest, then, become the sources of exposure to images of athletic bodies that can lead to subsequent internalization.

Equating personal body goals to mediated body goals and resultant body dissatisfaction when these goals aren't met, are an integral part of such a process of internalization (Agliata and Tantleff-Dunn 2004). These mediated ideals are often images of women who champion athletic lifestyles, who are themselves driven or limited by societal ideals of the 'perfect female body.' For instance, Dworkin (2001), in his study on women in fitness, subscribes to Connell's (1987) conception of a fitness-related glass ceiling for women. This suggests that women who seek muscular strength may be limited not just by biology, but by societal ideals of femininity that prescribe upper limits to women's muscularity and strength (Connell 1987). Applicable to his study, Dworkin (2001), noted patterns where women in fitness (moderate weight-lifters) expressed the need to neither gain fat nor extremes of muscle. Extreme muscularity, as embodied by female bodybuilders was shunned and a toned, athletic, thin physique was instead positively graded (Dworkin 2001). Hence, it must be noted that fitness influencers on social media, often themselves embody and promote societal ideals of feminine, attractive bodies. This implies negligible emphasis on improving those medically prescribed fitness parameters that cannot be expressed in bodily terms. Reade (2016) examined representations of 'fit bodies' on Instagram and concluded that female bodies endorsing muscle definition and strength were simply an extension of the conventional, slender, youthful, white and sexualized female ideal. Hence, the present study finds it necessary to move beyond the examination of the effects of mediated images of ideal bodies. A study of the physical, psychological and social processes behind the creation and promotion of 'fit body' selfies by women in fitness is undertaken. Here, the resulting inspirational 'fit' Instagram selfie is seen as a representation of factors corresponding to the 'fit' lifestyle.

d. Thinspiration and Anorexia

The internalization of the 'thin, slender, youthful' ideal and its active pursuit has led to several notable trends on social media. Photo-sharing applications like Instagram and Pinterest often use hashtags with words like thinspiration and fitspiration that are designed to collate inspirational fitness information, otherwise spread across the platform. Talbot et al. (2017) conducted a content analysis of fitspiration, thinspiration and bonespiration on social media platforms including Instagram and found that both fitspiration and bonespiration were variants of thinspiration. While bonespiration idealised bone protrusions, fitspiration emphasized muscle definition, specifically in the abdominal area (Talbot et al. 2017). However, both of these simultaneously idealized the 'thin' body. Hence, the ideology behind 'fit' mediated bodies could be understood as an extension of the messages propagated through thinspiration.

Many researchers conclude that the thin body ideals frequently shown in media may lead to body dissatisfaction and the development of an eating disorder. This may be the result of women becoming dissatisfied when they cannot reach the ideal thinness presented in media

(Thomsen et al. 2001). Thinspiration, through its online presence, has actively participated in the online pro-ana movement, where websites offer content and images that inspire people to aspire for bodies that are closely associated with anorexia nervosa (Johnson and Denver 2015). Here, Johnson and Denver (2015) applies Csipke and Horne's (2007) definition of 'pro-eating disorder websites' conceptualized in the context of internet communities. Here they suggest that content on pro-eating disorder websites either recognizes anorexia as a disorder but discourages treatment or simply justifies it as a personal lifestyle choice (Csipke and Horne 2007). In addition, Boniel-Nissim and Latzer (2011) suggest that members subscribing to pro-ana websites undertake extreme weight loss measures, that are analogical to methods adopted by those diagnosed with anorexia nervosa. They found that college women who frequently expose themselves to social media that exhibit the 'thin-ideal' are more likely to be dissatisfied with their bodies and thereby, more prone to undertaking unhealthy measures of bodily transformation such as guilt-based starvation, self-restricted eating, consumption of weightless pills, etc.

Eating Disorder (2004) acknowledges that one of the defining characteristics of an eating disorder is the distortion of body image and self-perception. Harrison and Cantor (1997) and Bissell and Zhou (2006) discovered that viewing thinness-depicting and thinness-promoting media (TDP) is a catalyst for developing eating disorders and the drive to be thin. In 2012, following controversies around online pro-ana communities, Instagram banned pro-ana content including phrases like 'thigh-gap' and 'thinspiration,' among others (Reynolds 2016). However, despite Instagram's moderation of pro-ana content, users still propagate the idea by using lexical variants with the addition, omission or tweaking of letters (Chancellor et al. 2016). This includes the usage of words like 'thinsporation' or anorexias.' In a similar vein, and in a subtler manner, the ideology behind thinspiration has been re-asserted through fitspiration and its emphasis on excessive exercise.

e. Excessive Exercise and the Anorexic Other

The popular understanding of anorexia is often characterized by an emphasis on the issues of starvation and behaviours related to food. Exercise, as a contributor while mapping out behaviours in anorexia nervosa is often overlooked. However, Grave (2008) notes that excessive and compulsive exercise is clinically observed in close to fifty percent of eating disorder patients, especially those suffering from anorexia nervosa. In this article, excessive and compulsive exercise refer to physical exercise exceeding the duration, frequency and intensity required for physical health, resulting in an increased risk of physical injury and behaviours related to unhealthy prioritization of exercise over other activities (Grave 2008; Davis and Fox 1993; Adkins and Keel 2005; Physical Activity Guidelines Advisory Committee 2008). It is used by individuals to burn calories, maintain shape and elevate mood, with repercussions includ-

ing the maintenance of eating problems (Grave 2008). It must be noted that fitness-oriented Instagram handles often promote exercise as the preliminary route to achieve fitness. The internalization of exercise as the cardinal mode of achieving the 'fit' body can have physical, behavioural as well as psychological repercussions, similar to ones experienced by those diagnosed with anorexia nervosa. For instance, Jong (2017) found that young women exposed to ubiquitous fitness-oriented handles on social media encountered advice urging them to modify behaviour to achieve fitness. This could include a push to exercise or to cut out certain foods from the diet. In addition, encountering such narratives and images brings women to engage in restrictive eating, over-exercising, with the risk of developing an exaggerated view of one's own body (Jong 2017). Hence, the process behind the creation and circulation of photographs, specifically Instagram selfies, is studied in the Indian context. The analogy between a 'fit' body and anorexia is studied largely through the components of excessive and compulsive exercise. This article argues that such behaviours are driven by a fear of being 'Othered' by the Instagram fitness community. Here, Jensen's (2010) concept of 'Othering,' which derives from Spivak's (1980; 1985) conceptualization of the same is utilized. As such, 'Othering' refers to a process where powerful groups, irrespective of their numerical strength, attribute reduced and inferior characteristics to subordinate groups, hence encouraging identity formation amongst the subordinate (Jensen, 2010). Here, women that document their fitness routines through selfies present as the dominant group that represent the idealized 'fit,' slender, muscular body. These women, through their Instagram content, influence other women who seek mobility away from the excluded, 'unfit Other.' As noted above, studies have largely documented the process of identity formation, where this 'unfit Other' is exposed to images of fitness influencers. In order to achieve these idealized, unrealistic 'fit' bodies, the 'Other' then adopts unhealthy behaviors like excessive exercise. However, this study explores the process of 'Othering' by fitness influencers and the relationship between their Instagram selfies and anorexia. In addition, it also looks at the ways in which the fear of lapsing into the 'Other' (by losing muscular definition etc.) drives these influencers to resort to maladaptive eating and exercise behaviour, in addition to editing and manipulating an image of the self.

Theoretical Framework

Frosh (2015) draws from Charles Sanders Peirce's idea of the indexical sign to place the analysis of selfies in a semiotic perspective. Unlike symbolic and iconic sign relations, indexical relations do not represent agencies but act as a stimulus directing our attention towards them. Although natural signs had long been surfaced, Peirce's concept of the index is nevertheless distinctive; Peirce offers various criteria for what accommodates an index: somewhat sporadic category which is at times divided into sub categories. Indexical signs turn the attention

to their objects by blind compulsion (Chandler 2007: 37). Indexicality is characterized by contiguity. Anything that reflects an individual's personality is also indexical (Peirce 1991: 145). This includes handwriting or a distinctive individual style exemplifying artist or photographer. While photographers are also perceived as visually resembling their subjects, Pierce (1991) notes that they are not only iconic but indexical. Photographs, especially instantaneous photographs, are very instructive because we know that in certain respects they are exactly like the objects they represent. But this resemblance is due to the photographs having been produced under such circumstances that they were physically forced to correspond point by point to nature in that aspect then they belong to the class of signs by physical connection [the indexical class] (Chandler 2007).

For this, Frosh invokes the term 'kinesthetic sociability.' He argues that 'selfies conspicuously integrate still images into a technocultural circuit of corporeal social energy that I will call kinesthetic sociability. This circuit connects the bodies of individuals, their mobility through physical and informational spaces, and the micro-bodily hand and eye movements they use to operate digital interfaces' (Frosh 2015: 1609). He uses terms such as indexicality, composition, and reflection to assert the fecundity of selfies.

- Indexicality, according to him, refers to the immediate presence of the subject of the photograph before the camera. It accounts as both a 'trace' of the temporal past as well as an indication of the corporeal performance involved in the act of clicking a selfie. The selfie, here, asserts 'see me showing you me' (Frosh 2015), where the roles of both the producer and the referent are performed by the same person.
- The composition of the selfie allows for the space of the photographic production to be merged with the space in the picture itself. Since the producer of the selfie is also its object, there is no scope for a spatial cleavage between the subject, the camera and the photographer. This specifically accounts for three actions - calculating the angle of the photograph (action of moving the camera before the body for an image), adjusting the body's sensorimotor projection, especially of those parts of the body that serve the purpose for which the image is recorded and the visual and spatial coordination of the body and the camera to arrive at an image on the screen. Such performativity is achieved by conditioning the body to effectively perform a 'fit selfie.' This article accounts, here, for such motor functions as flexing relevant muscles and allowing these to be presented through the proper positioning of the camera in addition to the lighting, etc. It also accounts for the processes of digital editing that serve to achieve a motor-camera coordination beyond the ordinary process of clicking a selfie.
- Moreover, selfies are reflexive on two levels. Firstly, they are self-referent as images. Even with the use of mirrors, the selfies assert a conscious performance of the self. Secondly, selfies are personally reflexive and mimic reflexive verbs in that they record

a self, enacting itself. It is similar to the verb “see” in a sentence like ‘I see myself,’ where ‘see’ would linguistically replicate the selfie in a visual expression.

The implications Frosh draws from employing these three categories is that the selfie, through its performative gestures summons the viewer to respond through sensorimotor actions like reactive selfies, tweets, comments, likes and so on. In general, this implies that the body engages in a circuit of actions that involves the selfie, the reaction and further reaction. This further reaction, in the context of fit-selfies, may involve the embodiment of responses by means of maintaining the visibly fit body. This occurs when women adopt maladaptive practices like compulsive exercise. This framework connects semiotic analysis of the selfie with somatic and psychological themes which this article studies. We are using, thus, Frosh’s concepts as the basis for reading the selfie as a sign, considering that the fit-anorexic body is often involved in incorporating and thereby, embodying the responses directed at the selfies. However, since women undertake fitness initiatives this often leaves distinct marks of the same on their bodies.

Methodology

This article intends to explore the relationship between Indian women’s ‘fitness’ selfies on Instagram and anorexia nervosa, characterized by excessive, compulsive exercise. The analysis of these selfies is based on Frosh’s approach to selfies, as outlined above. Through this, we envision a sensory-motor, somatic and performative continuity between Instagram selfies, responses to them and embodied responses in terms of excessive, compulsive exercise.

Our study focuses on the selfies of Indian women with Instagram fitness accounts. These have been supplemented with semi-structured, qualitative, in-depth interviews of approximately thirty minutes each with select women who are fitness influencers. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews are largely used in qualitative interviewing as they allow interviewer to deeply assess the social and personal matters of individual interviewees (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree 2016). These fitness influencers are Indian women aged between 18 to 35 and who have more than 1000 followers on Instagram. These participants perform and promote weight-bearing exercises like weight-lifting and yoga as opposed to cardiorespiratory exercises. This is in keeping with this article’s analysis of ‘fit’ selfies as opposed to ‘thin’ ones. Their accounts, however, are not verified on Instagram, a feature that is characteristic of Instagram celebrities.

Analysis

The selfie as a sensory-motor trigger that allows women fitness influencers to embody received responses becomes problematic when these responses are attached to the context of anorexia. These patterns, in the context of a 'fit' selfie and the 'fit anorexic', emerge when women resort to compulsive and excessive exercise to generate continuous positive responses. Here, and as Frosh (2015) indicates, embodied responses characterize a sensory-motor circuit, where the selfie simply serves as the reflexive verb between the 'I' and the 'myself' and the body versus the body as an embodiment of 'fit' responses received on Instagram.

We will proceed with the analysis of selfies as gestural images using the above categories of Indexicality, Composition and Reflexivity. These three are combined to explore the relationship between the 'kinesthetic sociability of the selfie' and its somatic manifestation in terms of excessive and compulsive exercise, analogous to anorexia nervosa. To substantiate our thesis we study selfies of Fitness Influencers on Instagram, taking into account, in addition, the lived sensory-motor and affective experience of these women corresponding to fitness selfies and the subsequent responses.

a. Indexicality

The selfie often serves as an index that provides a connection between a temporal past as well as the performance involved in producing the image at that point in time. In the context of 'fit' selfies, there is often a continuity between exercise performed by women and the selfie taken. Most fitness selfies are taken in the gym and often use a mirror to communicate the complete range of motion that the body is capable of. Take for instance, the selfies of Participant 1. Most of her selfies are full-length images taken before the mirror. She avoids direct eye contact with the self in the mirror, but instead looks into the camera. The eye-contact with the camera instead of the mirror delivers a certain kind of message since she directs her gaze at the audience as opposed to her self. It fulfills Frosh's idea of performativity as saying 'see me showing you me' as opposed to 'see me looking at me'. This serves as an invitation to the audience indicating that their sensory-motor responses are crucial to performing and celebrating the 'fit' body and subsequently, the selfie itself.

The setting is the gym and the moment frozen in time is often a selfie taken after her workout at the gym. In one such image on her Instagram profile, two selfies are cropped and attached next to each other. One shows her standing before a mirror and staring at the camera. The second, is her crouching forward into a squat position and still staring at the camera. The caption reads, 'Changes don't appear in one or two days!! Consistency and dedication are two main things that play a role', which highlights the indexicality of the image. The performative body, having performed the exercise, draws the audience's attention to the temporality of

the image. The image, frozen in time, is not simply a narrative of the time in question but also of the sensory-motor dedication and consistency in workouts that have brought the 'fit' body into being with time. The existence of the selfie, itself, is dependent on the efficiency of the fitness performance prior to and immediately before the performative act of clicking the selfie.



Figure 1: Participant 6



Figure 2: Participant 2



Figure 3: Participant 12

The Instagram profile of Participant 2 abounds with 'fit' selfies that are taken with a partner, both posing before a mirror. The two women pose in their gym wear, the setting being the gym itself (Fig. 1). This is an indication, allowing the performed sociability of physical exercise to transcend the realm of the digital. Selfies of Participants 3, 15, 27 and 6 include a set of two parallel mirror selfies, each frozen at a distinct moment in time. Women are seen in their gym gears in both parallel selfies, seemingly 'fit' except that in the second images they are distinctively 'fitter' and showcase more muscle definition. Captions often indicate their journey from the first selfie to the second, often mirror selfies, the second recording the physical work that has led to progression from the first. Similarly, Participant 1 said:

It is not healthy for women to be below a certain fat percentage for a sustained period. I usually take most of my fitness selfies on Instagram at a time when I'm at an extremely low body fat percentage. I, then, slowly release these over the period of a month or two. I cannot sustain the body in the image for long periods in real life. This helps me get sponsors. (Participant 1, July 30, 2018, personal communication).

This indicates the temporality of the fit body. Yet, the selfie, and the medium of Instagram allow for a morphing of time-space realities where bodies are transported across time, but superficially account for current time. Given that audiences internalize these images, such time-space

discontinuities become problematic. It is within such indexing that selfies necessitate conditions that harbour maladaptive practices in the context of exercise. When the temporal fit body and its multiple images cannot provide substantial content for the fitness-influencers' fitness accounts, they are pushed to embody that level of fitness that characterized their initial set of 'fit' selfies.

The Instagram's feature called 'Stories' enables the display of images and videos that are accessible to viewers only for twenty-four hours post the upload. Fitness influencers are largely using this space for selfies, as opposed to the permanent Instagram profile itself. Participant 16 said, 'I usually post selfies as stories. They are more personal. My Profile, otherwise, has images from photo-shoots', (Participant 16, September 6, 2018, personal communication). The fitness selfie, then, is an expression of a personal invitation to respond and to replicate. The structure of a 'story,' further morphs the space-time continuum where it is perceived that the selfie had been taken in the past 24 hours, consolidating further the temporal indexing of the body photographed.

b. Composition

The performance of the 'fit' selfie becomes specifically important here, as the selfie allows the woman to produce an image of herself that she can manipulate in real-time. This works by accounting for the sensory-motor coordination of the parts or the whole of the woman's body, of the phone camera, and of the dynamics between the camera and the body itself. This kind of performativity is tied to the physical performance of the woman's body during exercise, which is transferred into the act of clicking a selfie. An important component of this involves the angle employed in a selfie. Participant's 4 selfies are mostly taken at a top-down angle and the face is a poker face. Half or whole of her body is vertically under the camera and the face is tilted up, arm outstretched. This pattern is evident in most of her selfies. As Frosh (2015) says, the performance in a selfie is not natural to the body, but a learned act. Here, Participant 4 has trained her body to apply sensory-motor coordination patterns that repeatedly produce a selfie that displays a lean but fit body. Participant 24 further adds, 'The top-down angle makes my face look less chubby and my body look lean', (Participant 24, August 25, 2018, personal communication). Similarly, Participant 15 added, 'I flex relevant muscles when I take selfies. These selfies are also taken under good lighting. Besides, I'm a professional fitness athlete. I find that I get more sponsors when my images are edited. I use basic Instagram filters to edit these selfies', (Participant 15, September 6, 2018, personal communication).

Here, flexed muscles, adjusted to good lighting, serve as a recipe for a good 'fit' selfie. The most recent selfie of Participant 6 (Fig. 2) portrays her wearing a pink gym tee and tights, body placed straight before the camera, the eye again looking into the camera. Inscribed onto the image itself is a phrase that reads, 'Lighting behaves today.' It must be noted that in this selfie, as with most, a poker face is displayed with mobility. Emphasis is on the mobility and capability of the performed, fit body as opposed to an inviting face. The selfie, then, is an in-

vation to somatic feedback and action. The act of flexing muscles is especially reflective of this. Such flexing serves to communicate the work that goes behind the specific flexed muscle that makes such flexing capable in the first place. The 'fit' selfie, then, is a ground for asserting those kinesthetic and somatic achievements that distinguish the 'fit' body from the 'unfit' one. The emphasis on the aesthetics of the soma, can in turn, lead to oblivion of the maladaptive psychological processes that characterize such emphasis.

c. Reflexivity

All fitness selfies are reflexive as ideas of referring to the self, as well as serving as an interface between both the somatic and sensory-motor performance and the subsequent response. All respondents, here, agreed that their selfies consciously cater to the audience at hand. The bridge between the 'I' or the body and the 'myself' or the body embodied with responses is evident in the phenomenon of parallel past and present selfies that indicate progressive journeys of 'fit' bodies. Here, within this reflexivity and a moulding and remoulding of the body and its image, is a recognition of multiple 'Others,' but specifically two categories of the 'Other.' The first involves individuals aspiring to emulate the bodies of women considered 'fitter' because of their muscular physique, rigorous exercise regimes, and dietary controls, etc. With a host of Instagram celebrities (with verified profiles) dedicating their entire profiles to fitness, these aspiring individuals recognise their own selves as the 'Other'. The second, and the more significant one is a conscious, condescending distinction from the 'anorexic Other.' Such a distinction serves to both recognize the body at the center of 'thinspiration' as unhealthy and to mask the problematics involving excessive exercise that characterize one's own body.

The fitness influencers studied within this article do not just post selfies of themselves but also of those that they aspire towards. For instance, Participant 3 has re-posted a selfie taken by Instagram fitness celebrity @anlella_sagra who has 10.9 million followers. Participant 3, on the other hand, has 1000 followers. Similarly, Participant 4 has re-posted a selfie of @chessiekingg who has 398.000 followers while Participant 4 has only about 2000 odd followers. It must be noted that both @anlella_sagra and @chessiekingg have a blue tick (verification) accompanying their names that Instagram uses to distinguish celebrities from non-celebrities. Further, the selfies of celebrities re-posted by Participant 23 and 24 are distinct from their own, in that celebrity selfies allow for affective dimensions of the face to emerge, as opposed to their own selfies that focus almost exclusively on the body. There is, then, a recognition of the superiority of the celebrity as someone who is 'fitter', and hence, a representative of a certain kind of body that one should aspire for (a status not available to the participants' of this survey since they seemingly have relatively 'less fit' bodies). The aspirational model, then, is not the mere corporeality of the celebrity, but the corporeal as mediated by the selfie.

However, in this context, it is the second 'Other' that becomes more problematic. This pro-

cess of Othering involves the condescending call to the 'Anorexic Other,' to join the bandwagon of the 'fit' body. This call to fitness, communicated by 'fit' selfies and accompanying captions, is an allusion to the anorexic body that was tied to the now shunned trend of 'thinspiration.' Within the sensory-motor projection, specifically flexing, there is an aspiration towards popular mediated 'fit' bodies and simultaneously, a condescending invitation to 'unfit' or 'less fit' bodies to mimic bodily processes that qualify this selfie as 'fit.'

For instance, Participant 11 states, 'One of my biggest mistakes in my fitness journey was doing almost an hour of cardio earlier', (Participant 11, July 30, 2018, personal communication). It must be noted here, that cardio and its associated lack of muscle definition points condescendingly to the 'Anorexic Other.' It is this process of condescending 'Othering' that allows for a masking of maladaptive behaviours analogous to anorexia. Instead, it emphasizes the achievement of the mediated 'fit' body, consolidated in the selfie. This invitation, to the Other, also involves a prohibition of the self from lapsing into the 'Anorexic Other' or the 'unfit.' Here, lean, fit bodies are promoted. Such a process of condescension, invitation and prohibition is closely attached to the sensory-motor responses that characterize a 'fit' selfie. For instance, Participant 17 states, 'I love the praise that I get on social media. It keeps me going in my exercise routine', (Participant 17, August 4, 2018, personal communication). Similarly, Participant 19 states: 'The responses to my selfies are extremely important to me', (Participant 19, July 30, 2018, personal communication). The picture, however, is not limited to the selfie as a field that collates responses. Consider the following statement by Participant 4:

When I started working out, muscle definition showed and I took selfies tracking my progress. Several people messaged me on Instagram asking me for advice and complimenting me. I was an inspiration to many. However, to keep this fitness level up, I had to exercise twice everyday for 90 minutes each. I even exercised when I had an injury and had no time for a social life. It was the positive comments on Instagram that kept me going. (Participant 4, August 25, 2018, personal communication)

These sensory-motor responses to the selfie, even if positive, often trigger excessive exercise in catering to the Instagram audience. Tendencies analogous to anorexia emerge when digitized technologies like selfies allow for an embodying of responses in corporeal somatic terms, thus competing Frosh's circuit of kinesthetic sociability. This is precisely why we use the term 'Anorexic Other' indicating the potential presence of 'fit-anorexia' amongst participants given their compliance to excessive compulsive exercise. For instance, in addition to Participant 4, all other participants also admitted to working out for approximately three hours a day, most days of the week. They also admitted to perceiving their workouts as a priority and the presence of uneasiness or paranoia attached to weight-gain or muscle-loss when they miss workouts. This is applicable not just to participants who lift weights but also those who make

movements like yoga a priority. For instance, Participant 8, who has an Instagram account that tracks her yoga practice, states: 'For a long time, I was pushing my body to do certain postures just so that I could post a social media image. It has injured my body quite a few times' (Participant 8, September 9, 2018, personal communication).

Such a tendency is triggered with the formation of what we call the 'selfie-response-embodied response' continuum. The act of clicking a selfie, its display and subsequent responses lead the fitness influencer to embody those responses. This 'selfie-response-embodied response' continuum allows for a range of sensory-motor actions to inform exercise and self-image patterns of fitness influencers. Within this, women hope to distinguish themselves from the 'Anorexic Other', referring to the disapproval of the body at the heart of 'thinspiration.' Yet, the adoption of exercise as a means to maintain and achieve kinesthetic sociability can lead to maladaptive exercise patterns analogous to anorexia. The urge to distinguish oneself from the 'unfit' Other attached to the 'thinspiration' body, instead introduces maladaptive behaviours that now allow fitness influencers to distinguish themselves from the 'Anorexic Other.' Such a tendency involves the conditioning of one's self and its behaviors as analogous to those displayed by clinically diagnosed Anorexic patients. There is a similar justification of the chosen lifestyle just as there was in the tradition of 'thinspiration'.

This article has explored the relationship between the emergence of tendencies analogous to anorexia in the 'selfie-response-embodied response' continuum where the 'selfie' serves as a crucial catalyst in the interplay between the digital, the sensory-motor and the kinesthetic, under the broad umbrella of the psychological. In her classic article 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1975), Laura Mulvey describes the pleasure in looking as being split between woman as an image (passive) and men as the 'bearer of the look' (active). She explains that 'the determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly'. Mulvey contends that women are displayed for men's viewing pleasure as sexual objects that embody their desires. Because women are continually positioned as objects, such a schema has come to seem completely natural to both men and women. Furthermore, society's ability to decide what feminine parameters are, puts men at an advantage of subduing people (Shields and Heineken 2002). Thus, patriarchal society is able to control women by 'ways of seeing'.

Kinesthetic Sociability and the Indian Fitness Influencer

The 'kinesthetic sociability' in the context of Indian women as fitness influencers is not just limited to the continuum of 'selfie-response-embodied response.' Other complicated layers arise when one considers the concerns regarding objectification and prohibition informing the continuum. With objectification, several participants stated that many responses to their

selfies were from men, some who objectified their bodies and others who placed limits on their musculature. Participant 6 states, 'I know that eighty percent of my followers are men. I also receive messages from men that sexualize my body', (Participant 6, September 3, 2018, personal communication). Similarly, Participant 12 (Fig. 3) adds, 'Indian men often respond to my selfies saying that they prefer a little bit of meat on my body. They don't want me to have as much muscle definition as I have', (Participant 12, July 31, 2018, personal communication).

Similar claims place a ceiling on women's somatic performance through exercise and on the performance in the act of clicking a selfie. Women often restrict themselves from exercising harder because they are afraid that they will get too muscular and look manly. Sometimes, these remarks come from the women's families. This also includes a certain self-censoring of the body parts on display in the 'fit' selfie in order to cater to the sensibilities of their families. For instance, Participant 24 adds, 'I do not strip down completely to my inner-wear in selfies. I have family on Instagram and they will not be okay with that', (Participant 24, August 25, 2018, personal communication). Similarly, Participant 17 adds, 'I had to hide my weight-lifting activities from my husband's family for a very long time. I often told them I'm taking up a class to cover for all the time I spent lifting', (Participant 17, September 9, 2018, personal communication).

Most participants never completely strip down to their inner wear in fitness selfies like most Instagram Fitness Celebrities often do. Even if the midriff was shown, their selfies always involved cropped or full leggings to cover the lower body. This indicates a certain restriction and self-censoring that serves the larger theme of patriarchy. This theme is closely intertwined with the Anorexic potential explored in the 'selfie-response-embodied response' continuum.

Conclusion

This article has explored the selfies of Indian women Fitness influencers and their relationship with anorexia nervosa. Previous literature has indicated the correlation between anorexia nervosa and compulsive exercise. Here, we further find that the sensory-motor coordination required to click a 'fit' selfie is a continuity of the somatic processes that constitute exercise. The selfie, then is a gestural, self-reflexive image (Frosh 2015), whose sensory-motor and somatic performance manifests a direct invitation to be seen. This allows the audience or the mediated voyeur (Calvert 2002) to respond in terms of likes, messages, comments, etc., which are in turn embodied by the influencer through exercise. Adding to this circuit of Kinesthetic Sociability (Frosh 2015) are contexts of limits to fitness as an embodiment of responses that prohibit a too-fit or exposed body. These responses largely correspond to objectification and norms of patriarchy. Within these emerge patterns of excessive and compulsive exercise that add to the aesthetic value of Instagram selfies but hamper the physical and psychological

health of fitness influencers. It is through these sensory-motor and somatic performances that Instagram selfies are connected to exercise behaviour analogous to anorexia nervosa.

The study can be expanded to the study women's participation from a consumerist perspective where the exercising and dieting industry contribute to the growing discourse on health, beauty and femininity, through emphasis on the slender, anorexic body. This functions towards fulfilling the requirements of masculine pleasure. Here, the pleasure is derived through encouraging the women to participate in body management strategies which again caters to the male gaze and its control over the women's body. The future scope of this study can also dwell on the cultural practices that contribute to encourage anorexia nervosa through excessive exercises. The role of the smartphone apps in creating elements of stylisation in the photographic method also can be explored further to understand the visual domain's contribution to the aestheticisation of the anorexic body.

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Review Article

Multimodality, film, and cinematic metaphor: an evaluation of Müller and Kappelhoff (2018)

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Introduction

Müller and Kappelhoff's *Cinematic Metaphor: Experience – Affectivity – Temporality* (2018) is the fruit of a collaboration in the *Languages and Emotion* project, further developed in the *Cinepoetics* Center for Advanced Film Studies, both based at Freie Universität Berlin, Germany. It proposes a new framework for analyzing metaphor in film that is based on dissatisfaction with (1) Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory; (2) cognitivist-oriented applications and adaptations of this theory in the field of multimodality, specifically as operating in film (e.g., Forceville and Urios-Aparisi 2009; Forceville 2006, 2016, 2017; Rohdin 2009; Fahlenbrach 2010, 2016; Coëgnarts and Kravanja 2012, 2015; Ortiz 2011, 2015); and (3) cognitive film scholarship (e.g., Bordwell 1985, 2013; Smith 1995; Plantinga 2009, 2013; Grodal 2009).

Given the status of the authors of this monograph, its serious criticism of the aforementioned theories and approaches deserves an equally serious response. This paper can be considered as an extended review of *Cinematic Metaphor*.

Some background

Together with Ortony's (1979) *Metaphor and Thought*, Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) *Metaphors We Live By* galvanized the connection between metaphor and thinking. Lakoff and

Johnson introduced Conceptual Metaphor Theory (henceforth: CMT), and thereby profoundly changed metaphor studies. Metaphor was now seen as one of the fundamental mechanisms structuring man's capacity for thinking rather than as a purely verbal phenomenon mainly operative in poetry and rhetoric. The authors provided the following description: '*the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another*' (1980: 5, emphasis in original). A crucial tenet in CMT is that humans systematically conceive of abstract, complex 'things' in terms of concrete, more basic 'things' – the latter being sensorily perceived or bodily experienced (via locomotion and via physical encounters with other bodies, objects, and the environment). Indeed, 'the "embodiment" of meaning is perhaps *the* central idea of the cognitive linguistic view of metaphor' (Kövecses 2010: 18, emphasis in original).

A key implication of Lakoff and Johnson's approach is that 'metaphor is primarily a matter of thought and only derivatively a matter of language' (1980: 153). For many years, however, almost all CMT scholars analysed predominantly verbal (more specifically: written) manifestations of conceptual metaphors. Subsequently, two branches within metaphor studies began to take seriously Lakoff and Johnson's characterization by analyzing discourses that are not, or not exclusively, verbal. The first focused on the combination of gesturing and spoken language. Cornelia Müller herself (e.g., Müller 2008; Cienki and Müller 2008) was among the pioneers in this field. The second branch examined visuals (e.g., Forceville 1996). Subsequently, combinations of visuals with other modes began to be investigated. Metaphors in which two or more modes partake were labelled 'multimodal metaphors' (Forceville 2006a; Forceville and Urios-Aparisi 2009).

In the meantime, multimodality scholars in the cognitivist metaphor paradigm began to expand their scope. Although a big problem within the quickly growing discipline of multimodality is the lack of consensus about what counts as a 'mode' (see Forceville 2006a for discussion), there is fairly general agreement that written language, spoken language, visuals (arguably to be subdivided into static and moving ones), sound, and music deserve mode-status. The development thus ran from studies focusing on monomodal metaphor (typically: the 'written verbal' and, later, the 'static visuals' variety) via multimodal metaphor involving two modes (gesture + spoken language; static visuals + written language), and is now faced with the challenge of accommodating multimodal metaphors drawing on more than two modes. Film, of course, is a multimodal medium *par excellence*.

Although there had been some earlier work on metaphor within film studies (e.g., Carroll 1996; Whittock 1990), the analyses of metaphor in (audio)visual images that saw the light of day in the last two decades originated with metaphor scholars knowledgeable about film rather than with leading scholars working in cognitive film studies – but the two strands of research are fully compatible. Cognitive film theory was developed as an alternative to "that aggregate of doctrines derived from Lacanian psychoanalysis, Structuralist semiotics, Post-Structuralist literary theory, and variants of Althusserian Marxism" (Bordwell and Carroll 1996: xiii). Bord-

well and Carroll propose that cognitivism is best characterized as a *stance* toward whatever it is that is to be studied. 'A cognitivist analysis or explanation seeks to understand human thought, emotion, and action by appeal to processes of mental representation, naturalistic processes, and (some sense of) rational agency' (1996: xvi).

Müller and Kappelhoff's (2018) criticisms of language-oriented CMT

Müller and Kappelhoff (henceforth: M&K) present cinematic metaphor as a 'poiesis of film-viewing' which moreover 'heals the break with rhetoric established by conceptual metaphor theory' (2018: 8). They continue:

Rather than conceiving of metaphors as instantiations of image schemas or primary metaphors, we consider metaphoricity to be emerging locally from the spectator's experiencing of movement-images in the moment of film-viewing. [...] [W]e lay out an understanding of embodiment that is informed by phenomenology and that has been extremely influential in contemporary film theory. Embodied experience is taken to be intersubjective, reflexive, and dynamic, and integral to cinematic meaning-making. We show how this differs from the universalist and individual model of embodiment advocated by cognitive film and metaphor theories (2018: 8).

I agree with the authors that one of the limitations of CMT, at least in its early stages (henceforth: 'classic' CMT), is that it has paid very little attention to how metaphors play a role in persuasive and aesthetic discourse. But many of its later practitioners have started to redeem this omission, for instance by forging links between CMT and critical discourse analysis (e.g., Charteris-Black 2004; Musolff 2016). And clearly, the notion of embodiment as discussed in phenomenology (a vital influence on Müller and Kappelhoff 2018) surely is not something totally different from the version advocated in CMT. Indeed, although rather late, Lakoff and Johnson express their indebtedness to 'the two greatest philosophers of the embodied mind': Maurice Merleau-Ponty and John Dewey (1999: xi). Even 'neuroscience', as promoted by Lakoff (2008), is less alien to M&K's approach than they think, particularly given the now generally accepted importance of 'mirror neurons' for human empathizing. As Plantinga states, 'brain processes involving mirror neurons enable us to understand faces and bodies in action and link us to other people's activities and feelings. Such processes allow us to understand and respond affectively to human events and behavior, whether on the screen or in the extrafilmic world' (2013: 101). In a passage in which M&K discuss a shot from Hitchcock's *Suspicion* they say that 'we experience the quality of a disturbing thought and its consequences (the [heroine's, ChF] fainting) as a quality of the cinematic movement composition. In the process of watching this

part of the scene, viewers feel the falling and fainting in their own bodies' (2018: 109). My hunch is that neuroscientists would find that fMRI scans reveal the firing of mirror neurons in spectators' brains in this instance.

But attributing the view that metaphors are 'instantiations' of image schemas (first theorized by Johnson 1987) and primary metaphors (Grady 1997) to CMT scholars is downright misleading. Inasmuch as complex metaphors are embodied, they *make use* of image schemas such as UP-DOWN, CONTAINMENT, SOURCE-PATH-GOAL, DARK-LIGHT, or primary metaphors such as GOOD IS UP and GOOD IS LIGHT – but are not *reducible* to them. As formulated in Forceville (2017): 'Image schemas are profoundly embodied building blocks for meaning-making. They have minimal structure. *In a given context* the basic meanings they have can be, and usually are, enormously enriched, for instance by being deployed as source domains in complex metaphors' (251, emphasis in original).

In another passage M&K comment:

In conceptual metaphor theory and in cognitive film studies, the historical-cultural dimension of human thinking only contributes incidentally to analyses of visual representations. By explaining the meaning of visual representations through recourse to a physiological level of universal hard-wired cognitive structures [...] the concrete situatedness of meaning is turned into something secondary (2018: 19).

Leaving a discussion of CMT-applications in the (audio)visual realm until later, I grant M&K that 'classic' CMT indeed was not really concerned with the 'historical-cultural dimension of human thinking'. The historical component is largely ignored even today (for a critique, see e.g., Gevaert 2005), and this is an issue that requires remedying. But the implication that CMT disregards the role of culture in metaphorizing has simply not been true for many years. Beginning in the 1990s, CMT-inspired work has increasingly shown awareness that the study of 'nature' needs to be complemented by the study of 'nurture' (e.g., Gibbs and Steen 1999; Yu 1998; Charteris-Black 2004; Kövecses 2005, 2015; Ibarretxe-Antuñano 2013; Musolff 2016).

Müller and Kappelhoff's (2018) criticisms of cognitive film studies

M&K present their own approach not only as a theory that avoids the supposed weaknesses of CMT; they also consider it as an alternative to cognitive film studies. Their approach 'replaces the idea of a spectator as information-processing computer as in cognitive approaches to film' (2018: 8) as 'there can be no understanding of the processes of meaning-making of audiovisual images which ignores the fundamental historicity of cultural processes of meaning-making' (2018: 17). For them, 'the situatedness of meaning-making is essential, as is the

character of the medium in which this happens' (2018: 19). '[T]he poiesis of film-viewing differs fundamentally from a code model idea of communication' (2018: 37).

This is a complete distortion of the paradigm Müller and Kappelhoff set up as antagonist. Since David Bordwell has the same status in cognitive film studies as Lakoff and Johnson have in CMT, I will here take him as representing this paradigm. To begin with, *of course* the spectator is not a computer: 'Seeing is [...] not a passive absorption of stimuli' (Bordwell 1985: 32), and 'plainly, many cognitive activities are performed in making sense of narrative' (Bordwell 1985: 37). 'Decoding' is always only part of interpreting film: 'in the course of constructing the story the perceiver uses schemata and incoming cues to make assumptions, *draw inferences about current story events, and frame and test hypotheses about prior and upcoming events. Often some inferences must be revised and some hypotheses will have to be suspended while the narrative delays payoff*' (Bordwell 1985: 39, my emphasis, ChF).

Moreover, this mental activity does not just pertain to the processing of information: 'It should be evident that emotion is not at all alien to the process of filmic comprehension' (Bordwell 1985: 39). True, Bordwell does not discuss the affective features of film viewing, but

this is not because I think that emotion is irrelevant to our experience of cinematic storytelling – far from it – but because I am concerned with the aspects of viewing that lead to constructing the story and its world. I am assuming that a spectator's comprehension of the films' narrative is theoretically separable from his or her emotional responses (Bordwell 1985: 30).

Accusing cognitive film studies of ignoring socio-historical dimensions and medium-specific manners of meaning-making is even more baffling. Bordwell (1985) devotes a substantial part of his classic study to discussing Hollywood film, Art-cinema, Soviet montage film, 'parametric narration', and Nouvelle Vague, meticulously as well as eloquently demonstrating how these types of films are each characterized by their own style and filmic techniques to make meaning. And the introduction of his co-authored 800+ page *Film History* whets the reader's appetite as follows: 'by studying how films were made and received, we discover the range of options available to filmmakers and film viewers. By studying the social and cultural influences on films, we come to understand better the ways in which films may bear the traces of the societies that make and consume them' (Thompson and Bordwell 1994: xxvi).

M&K go on to claim that cognitive film studies constitute:

a theoretical model that is secured through two hypothetical premises which mutually support each other. On the one hand, universal schemas of ordinary perception are presumed and transferred to film. The second premise refers to knowledge of poetic conventions, genres and folk psychology. Whatever cannot be explained with one premise, is allocated to the other and vice versa. What remains hidden is

the question of the relation between cognitive processes of film understanding and shifting historical, cultural, and media conditions of perception (2018: 31).

Again, this is a caricature. Yes, cognitive film theories have always insisted that spectators heavily draw on schemas of perception (and knowledge) familiar from their ordinary lives to make sense of film, particularly narrative film; and, yes, knowledge of conventions and genres is recruited by spectators. But all these are adapted, transformed, or even contradicted in their encounter with a specific film. *Of course* the stylistic techniques of the medium (including ‘mise-en-scène, cinematography, editing, and sound’, Bordwell 1985: 50) are crucial in the spectator’s sense-making process: ‘In the fiction film, narration is *the process whereby the film’s syuzhet* [= plot, ChF] *and style interact in the course of cueing and channeling the spectator’s construction of the fabula* [= story, ChF]’ (Bordwell 1985: 53, emphasis in original). Bordwell’s interest in film style led him to devote a separate monograph to its history (‘the way movies look has a history; this history calls out for analysis and explanation; and the study of this domain – the history of film style – presents inescapable challenges to anyone who wants to understand cinema’ [1997: 4]) and another monograph to its aesthetics (Bordwell 2008). In short, Bordwellian cognitive film scholarship (a) is fully cognizant of the socio-historical and cultural idiosyncrasies of film movements and unique films; (b) by no means considers the film spectator a ‘computer’ that passively absorbs a film; (c) judges emotion and affect essential for the pleasure of film-viewing; (d) emphasizes that film’s medium-specific techniques are precisely what transforms a story into a plot – and thereby makes interpreting and enjoying film different from interpreting and enjoying events in ordinary life (or in other media, for that matter).

Müller and Kappelhoff’s (2018) criticism of CMT-inspired multi-modal/ audiovisual metaphor studies

Since M&K grant me the honour of calling me ‘one of the leading figures in applying conceptual metaphor theory to audiovisual media analysis’ (2018: 20), I will take the liberty of holding high the flag in *this* arena. They begin by claiming that cognitive film-metaphor scholars ‘refer to audiovisual images as sequences of static images, rather than as *moving images*’ (2018: 20, emphasis in original). There are no bibliographical references here – unsurprisingly, since no film scholar I ever met holds this view. A second objection M&K raise is that CMT film-scholars ‘typically refer to “content” as if it was “contained” within the image and readily interpretable. Instead of considering the image in its media and aesthetic composition, it is immediately identified as an audiovisual *representation* of some real-world circumstances’ (2018: 20, emphasis in original). I plead guilty to often using the word ‘representation’, but this self-evidently does not mean that I subscribe to a naïve idea of film as being a mere copy of

reality – only that spectators recognize and understand a large part of what they see in a film because it resembles persons, things, and events they know from the real world. Coëgnarts and Kravanja, and Forceville, are claimed to believe that ‘the identification of a universal cognitive schema would fully answer questions of meaning and function’ (2018: 21). This is simply untrue. Coëgnarts and Kravanja (e.g., Coëgnarts and Kravanja 2012) are intent on laying bare the role of image schemas and conceptual metaphors in understanding film in order to persuade both language-oriented CMT scholars and cognitivist film scholars unaware of CMT of the pertinence of such schemas and metaphors, but they would agree that there is much more to film than identifying schemas and metaphors. M&K specifically mention that ‘what gets lost is a reflection of the media-specific [...] character of [...] film’ (2018: 21). In fact, Coëgnarts and Kravanja are highly sensitive to medium-specificity. They distinguish between filmic information that transpires in the *mise-en-scène* (and thus would also work, for instance, in a theatre play), and ‘the antifilmic reality as transformed by the exclusive capacities of the cinematic medium’ such as ‘montage or editing, superimposition and cinematography’ (2012: 103). The latter techniques are also the focus of attention in Ortiz (2011, 2015). All the metaphors identified in the films Ortiz analyses result from combining *mise-en-scène* with the affordances provided exclusively by the medium film. The same can be said of Fahlenbrach’s discussion of the metaphor *TIME IS A PHYSICAL FORCE* in Tom Tykwer’s *Run Lola Run*: ‘in the running-sequences the tempo and rhythm of Lola’s movements, of the camera, the editing, and the music merge to create cross-modal gestalts of a dynamic force resolutely moving forward along linear paths’ (2018: 85). All these analyses meet the desiderata of M&K’s ‘poiesis of film-viewing’.

M&K refer to only a few of the 20+ studies I (co-)authored that pertain to metaphors in moving images (both commercials and film scenes) – or the “movement-image” as they call it, using a Deleuzian term. If they had read more of these (see my Google scholar profile for details), they would have had to acknowledge that many, perhaps most, of the supposedly new aspects of the ‘cinematic metaphor’ approach they advocate are commensurate with, and often anticipated by, my analyses – although my terminology and emphasis sometimes differ from theirs. But let me here limit myself to my analysis of Ruth Lingford’s short animation film *Death and the Mother* in Forceville (2017), which M&K contrast with their own ‘cinematic metaphor’ approach (2018: 22-29). Again, they vastly exaggerate the differences, partly by misrepresenting my analyses and partly by selectively quoting from them. Here are some details.

M&K continually insist on the dynamic nature of metaphorizing (e.g., Cameron et al. 2009; Cameron 2018). They refer to my proposal for the modes that operate in film (visuals, language, music, sound, Forceville 2006a) as if I suggest that these modes work in isolation (2018: 22). *Of course* they don’t! But to see how they function in creating metaphorical and non-metaphorical meaning, it is vital to decide what counts as a mode; assess the affordances and constraints of each mode to generate meaning; and then chart how combining them creates meaning not cued by the modes on their own. The goal here is pattern-finding and develop-

ing well-defined analytical tools – not to do justice to the persuasive, affective, and aesthetic qualities of the commercial or film under discussion. So stating that it is ‘the additive understanding of multiple modes which typically characterizes research on “multimodal metaphor”’ (2018: 23) is another unfair criticism.

By calling Forceville (2017) ‘a conceptual metaphor analysis’ (2018: 23) of Lingford’s film, M&K make it look as if I consider charting cognitive schemas and conceptual metaphors as amounting to a full-blown analysis of *Death and the Mother*. No unbiased reader of my chapter, I trust, would think this was my goal. What I set out to show was that even making sense of a high-art, complex animation film requires viewers to draw, largely or completely subconsciously, on image schemas. I go on to argue that the literal use of the various FORCE schemas (first theorized by Johnson 1987) crucially invite additional *metaphorical* interpretation in Lingford’s film – much more so than these schemas do in a Bugs Bunny cartoon that I also analyse. For instance, the various instantiations of the FORCE schemas in *Death of the Mother* enable us to construe the metaphor SELF-SACRIFICIAL LOVE IS FORCEFUL SELF-MUTILATION.

Summarizing their critique, M&K state ‘What is being analyzed is the narrative that the researcher has produced by watching the film, not the process of film-viewing. In this way, audiovisual representations are considered self-evident. The crucial question of how we get to those media representations at all when viewing audiovisual images remains completely disregarded in such a restricted focus on those representations’ (2018: 28). I am confused about what I am being charged with here. For reasons of space I did not detail every step in how I see the FORCE schemas and the various metaphors as contributing to meaning-making, but what else is my report than the academically formulated result of my ‘poiesis of film-viewing’? And how does this differ from what M&K themselves do in their own case study reports in the book?

I fully agree with M&K that the woodcut print style is ‘extremely important for the poetics and aesthetics of the short film’ (2018: 24), and indeed briefly acknowledge this (Forceville 2017: 254). I also accept that ‘there is an uninterrupted connection between the metamorphoses of the animated woodcut pattern and the dynamics of the transforming perceptual sensations of the viewer’ (2018: 25). Describing these dimensions, however, was simply not the aim of my chapter. My brief was to highlight how embodied FORCE schemas constitute building blocks for the creation and apperception of the highly accultured elements of meaning that make the film so aesthetically impressive and moving – and thus worth watching in the first place. Being able to access a wide network of background assumptions is clearly essential for the interpretation of *Death and the Mother*, but I certainly do not claim that these assumptions are ‘automatically accessible, fixed, cognitive inventories of cultural-historical knowledge’ (2018: 29). After providing a non-exhaustive list of assumptions an ideal viewer possesses I add: ‘not all viewers will (be able to) access all of these assumptions, myths, and beliefs. Indeed, it is precisely because, by definition, cognitive environments among viewers vary that any discourse will yield minor or major divergences in interpretation by different recipients’

(2017: 253), and ‘metaphorical construal *always* takes place in a highly specific context: in *this* discourse, in *this* genre, in *this* medium, at *this* moment, in *this* place, issued by *this* creator, to *this* audience’ (Forceville 2017: 255, emphases in original).

Conceptual metaphor (Lakoff and Johnson 1980) versus creative metaphor (Black 1979)

M&K point out that due to the enormous impact of *Metaphors We Live By*, modern metaphor scholars all but forget the crucial contributions made by Max Black. Praising Black’s model, they ‘argue that Black’s idea of metaphors as cognitive instruments and creating new realities applies equally to metaphors in audiovisual formats’ (2018: 49). I am truly happy with the authors’ rediscovery of Black (1962, 1979); I consider myself a Black man. In fact, I start *Pictorial Metaphor in Advertising* (not quoted in M&K 2018) by acknowledging that ‘the theory of metaphor upon which I will ground my account of pictorial metaphor is Max Black’s (1962, 1979 [...] interaction theory’ (Forceville 1996: 4), and devote an entire chapter to explaining and commenting upon this theory.

Until quite recently, Black had disappeared from the radar of most cognitivist metaphor scholars. I suspect this is due to several things. In the first place, although Black intuited that metaphors might be ‘cognitive instruments’ (Black 1979: 39), it was Lakoff and Johnson (1980) who first explored this idea systematically. Second, Lakoff and Turner (1989: 131-133) summarily dismiss Black’s interaction theory because they claim (incorrectly, as I argue in Forceville 1996: 4-12) that he understands the target and the source domains of a metaphor as reversible (cf ‘that surgeon is a butcher’ versus ‘that butcher is a surgeon’). Thirdly, Black’s most important insight was that metaphors may create rather than capture pre-existent similarity between a target and a source. Metaphor thereby becomes an instrument to model novelty: it can provide truly new perspectives, both in poetry and rhetoric (as Aristotle of course had realized a while before). For Lakoff and Johnson (1980), however, Black’s focus on metaphorical creativity ran completely against their insistence on the ordinariness, pervasiveness, and systematicity of metaphorical thinking. Lakoff and Turner (1989) acknowledge that, indeed, there are metaphors that are truly novel (which, unfortunately, they baptized ‘image metaphors’) and thus are not rooted in conceptual metaphors, but they imply that these are rare. It would take too much space to dig deeper into this issue (for some discussion, see Forceville et al. 2006: §3), but there are good reasons to postulate a continuum between Black’s creative metaphors and Lakoff and Johnson’s conceptual ones. In my view, it is useful to distinguish between them (as I do in Forceville 2007, 2016), if only because studying creative metaphors helps remedy CMT’s ‘break with rhetoric’ (Müller and Kappelhoff 2018: 8).

Metaphor as dynamic and affective rather than as static and informative

Throughout their book, M&K deplore CMT's lack of attention to both the affective and the dynamic nature of metaphor in film. Inspirations here are both Müller's work on gesturing and dance – as intermittently discussed in Müller and Kappelhoff (2018) – and Cameron (e.g., Cameron et al. 2011, 2018). M&K point out that a metaphor can develop over time, both in spoken discourse (often accompanied by gesturing and facial expressions) and in film. Once a metaphor has been introduced it can be picked up, modified, or criticized later on, both by the agent that initially proposed the metaphor and by others. It is true that 'classic' CMT has never been much interested in the role of emotion and affect in metaphor. But in my own CMT-inspired analyses this is something I have always emphasized ('not only factual properties can be mapped [from source to target], but also emotions, connotations, and valuations', Forceville 2012: 116). It is worth adding here that nowadays the link between affect and moral evaluation is increasingly being acknowledged within CMT (Musolff 2016; Abdel-Raheem 2019).

The conventional A IS B formula, as M&K point out, downplays the fundamentally dynamic character of the trope. I think so, too (Forceville 2002), and have suggested as an alternative 'to conceive of metaphor as A-ING IS B-ING, since metaphor is always metaphor in action' (Forceville and Urios-Aparisi 2009b: 11). Moreover, I concur that a metaphor may develop, in the sense that a metaphor, or its uptake, may change in the course of a conversation or film. Whereas I have not explicitly addressed this issue, my analyses demonstrate my adherence to this idea. For instance, in a BMW commercial the latest model is metaphorically compared to a peacock. A mini-narrative develops in which the car is personified, and a 'contest' ensues between the car and the peacock about who is more beautiful, whereas the metaphor gains the additional meaning of a dialogue when the Papageno aria from Mozart's *Zauberflöte* is heard (Forceville 2003: 45-46). Obviously, a feature film enables much more resonance in this respect. In Forceville (1999) I argue that attentive viewers get multiple cues, via a variety of film-techniques, that they need to construe the metaphor COLIN IS A CHILD in Schrader's *The Comfort of Strangers*. While here it could be objected that this metaphor itself does not develop, analyses of films in terms of the metaphor PURPOSEFUL ACTIVITY IS SELF-PROPELLED MOVEMENT TOWARD A DESTINATION (e.g., Forceville 2006b, 2011; Forceville and Jeulink 2011) and DEPRESSION IS A DARK MONSTER and DEPRESSION IS A DARK CONFINING SPACE (Forceville and Paling 2018) clearly testify to my awareness of the dynamic nature of the metaphors under consideration.

‘Cinematic metaphor’ analyses: case studies in Müller and Kappelhoff (2018)

M&K’s monograph contains analyses of German TV news items and of film scenes. The ‘cinematic metaphor’ approach, inspired by studying gesture in face-to-face communication and a tango dance lesson, is captured by the idea that with the ‘staging of a temporal course, a cinematic movement is created that involves the viewers via its temporality in an affective experience’ (2018: 141 *et passim*) – a cinematic movement that can be metaphoric. As long as it is accepted that the experience is not *only* affective, and also involves mental activity to understand what is communicated (e.g., in TV news) or to construe the story from the *syuzhet*/plot (in narrative film), I have no problem with this formulation.

The analyses are conducted meticulously, and in great detail, and I find them by and large interesting, convincing, and sometimes very insightful. However, many aspects of these analyses go beyond what has hitherto been considered ‘metaphor’ or ‘metaphorizing’. In order to retain ‘metaphor’ as a useful analytical instrument, the term should not be over-stretched. Black (1979) warns against the tendency ‘to regard all figurative uses of language as metaphorical, and in this way to ignore the important distinctions between metaphor and such other figurative uses of speech as simile, metonymy, and synecdoche’ (1979: 20). M&K insufficiently heed Black’s caveat. What does not help either in trying to evaluate their proposals is that the authors seldom verbalize the metaphors they construe in the customary A IS B form (or a form that does more justice to metaphor’s dynamic nature). Moreover, they do not explicitly signal image schemas, although they heavily draw on this concept, so maligned by them. The price for this is that in many analyses it is unclear where ‘doing metaphor’ ends and ‘doing other tropes’ and even ‘doing film studies’ begins.

Let me first say a few words about ‘doing other tropes’. I have repeatedly insisted on the importance of linking metaphor studies and rhetoric (e.g., ‘the analysis of multimodal metaphor ties in with the study of rhetoric’, Forceville 2006a: 394). We need indeed to go back to Aristotle, Quintilian, and Cicero to study, and redefine, classic tropes from a cognitive perspective, as the dominant focus on metaphor leads both to tunnel vision and to over-stretching its meaning. ‘Classic’ CMT has gradually broadened its interest to include metonymy, and proposals have been made for other tropes (Gibbs 1993). More recently, cautious attempts have been made to apply these insights to non-verbal and multimodal discourses within the print-ad genre (e.g., Teng and Sun 2002; Forceville 2009; Pérez-Sobrinó 2017). This work is still in its infancy. Extending it to film, to be sure, is an even bigger challenge.

To clarify my problems with M&K’s analyses, I will briefly focus on their examination of the German ‘report Mainz’ news item on the winners and losers in the 2008 banking crisis. An observation such as ‘elaborating on the metaphorical vertical axis, the losing bankers are metaphorically described as “fallen” bankers’ (2018: 199) shows that the UP-DOWN schema is

used here in the primary metaphors GOOD IS UP and BAD IS DOWN. Similarly, stating ‘we see groups of [successful bankers] gathering around tables, all directed towards a shared center, an interior, forming a kind of “closed circle”’ (2018: 200) is perfectly rephrasable in terms of the CONTAINER schema. The news item also shows those ‘outside’ of the CONTAINER – a group of panicking account holders ringing the doorbell at a bank in an unsuccessful attempt to get “inside” so as to obtain access to their money. This scene is described as follows: ‘the camera movement establishes a sensation for walking as a group movement, which eventually transforms into a kind of tunnel-shaped goal-oriented forward motion’ (2018: 202). Fair enough – but, again, this can be fruitfully formulated in terms of the SOURCE-PATH-GOAL schema and its use in the PURPOSIVE ACTION IS SELF-PROPELLED MOVEMENT TOWARD A DESTINATION, or JOURNEY, metaphor. In the subsequent portrayal of the group of unfortunate bank clients, ‘everything is directed downwards: heads, eye gazes, perspective. This downward orientation continues in the following short montage’ (2018: 203). Both the SOURCE-PATH-GOAL and the UP-DOWN schemas are cued here. The authors end by referring to the contrast between the bankers and their clients as a ‘metaphorical opposition’ (2018: 206). This last phrase suggests that construing metaphors alone cannot do justice to the fragment. Indeed, much of the analysis suggests that we need a richer ‘tropical’ vocabulary – and my suggestion in this case would be to include a discussion of ‘antithesis’ (Tseronis and Forceville 2017).

In the analysis of Hitchcock’s *Spellbound*, M&K convincingly show how we need to pay attention to the director’s cinematic hints in order to construe both the metaphor of a psychiatric patient’s traumatically suppressed memory as a locked door (a construal that is facilitated by a superimposed text over the image of a closed door at the film’s beginning) and a metaphor that could be verbalized as ‘non-remembering a traumatic event is experienced as expression of successively intensifying experiences of downward immobility’ (2018: 211). In this latter case, the film viewer has little choice but to construe the metaphor, on penalty of not understanding the traumatized protagonist’s behaviour, and thereby the film’s revealing climax. But in other cases, there is more freedom to either ‘do metaphor’ or not to do so. Cues may be subtle or ambivalent, and often a scene or scenario can still be enjoyed and/or understood by the spectator even if no metaphor is construed. In Forceville (2008a), I discuss such pleasurably subtle scenes in *La Strada* (Fellini, 1954) and *American Psycho* (Harron, 2000). And a viewer who fails to construe the metaphor Bavaria beer is Olympic torch in a commercial discussed in Forceville (2008b) will still get the general message.

In short, I can happily go along with M&K’s analyses. My problems are of a different kind. In the first place, whereas for me ‘metaphor’ is no less, but also no more than one instrument among others to account for meaning in discourse, for M&K the trope needs to do so much work that it collapses under its burden – and thereby runs the risk of losing whatever theoretical or explanatory power it may have. Secondly, in my view unless a metaphor’s creativity requires Black’s (1979) perspective (as in *Spellbound*), M&K’s analyses could easily have been

presented in terms of the image schemas and metaphors that are the bread and butter of CMT, as their allegedly different “cinematic metaphor” approach yields few new theoretical insights. Although its analytical procedure is claimed to be ‘methodologically rigid in terms of accounting for temporality as producing an affective engagement that permeates processes of meaning-making (and of metaphor as a specific form of meaning-making) at any point of the analysis’ (2018: 227), I find the guidelines in the appendix (2018: 226-247) not very helpful. Instructing users, for instance, to ‘select scenes/sequences with candidates for metaphorical themes (foregrounding of metaphoricity)’ (2018: 230) presupposes precisely what I would expect the model to do for me: help identify a metaphor in the first place. The difficulty is that *anything* can be candidate for a metaphor, even more so if the analyst is not (just) interested in conceptual or structural metaphors but also in the creative type examined by Black (1979). Similarly, encouraging analysts to ‘describe the trajectory of expressive movement units that orchestrate a metaphorical theme or the temporal parcours of a cinematic metaphor’ (2018: 231) suggests a degree of clarity about what constitutes an ‘expressive movement’ that I cannot find justified. Fahlenbrach, a fellow-cognitivist, shares my doubts about the applicability of the model: ‘there seems to be a gap between the rich and convincing analyses of cinematic expressive movements [...] and the identification of cinematic metaphors’ (2018: 73).

Strengths and weaknesses in M&K’s model

Does this make the ‘cinematic metaphor’ approach redundant, then? No, I do think M&K emphasize aspects that are neglected or downplayed in other theories and paradigms. One worthwhile aspect of their approach is that they resolutely encourage studying ‘expressivity’ as a crucial element of both ‘doing metaphor’ and ‘doing film studies’. Metaphor-users as well as film-makers often want not just to inform their audiences of something, they also want to emotionally affect them, and focusing too strongly on image schemas, structural metaphors, and cognitive uptake may make analysts oblivious to this essential dimension of communication and (narrative) art. The authors also healthily insist on the dynamic, often changing, meaning of a metaphor. Particularly analyzing complete films one can rarely be content with simply identifying a metaphor occurring at one moment in a cinematic narrative or argument; the analyst should be keenly aware how a metaphor’s meaning may transform in the course of a film, often by its interaction with other meaning-generating elements. Furthermore, it is helpful that M&K propose not only to talk about embodiment in the CMT sense that human beings conceive of COMPLEX, ABSTRACT TARGET DOMAIN A in terms of BASIC, EMBODIED SOURCE DOMAIN B, but that people also respond physically to whatever they perceive and experience in both face-to-face communication and film scenes. Importantly, this enables the authors to talk about subconscious aspects of film-viewing without taking recourse to the

Freudian, psycho-analytic models that particularly many cognitive film scholars are so allergic to. M&K also usefully remind us of German scholars that have provided insights from which CMT can benefit, often long predating Lakoff and Johnson (1980), such as Helmuth Plessner (1982 [1925]) and Hans Blumenberg (2010 [1960]). And, as said, I really enjoyed the precise and persuasive case studies.

However, my problems with M&K's approach override what I like about it. Most importantly, the authors misrepresent or fail to acknowledge central aspects of CMT, cognitive film studies, and multimodal/audiovisual metaphor approaches. As a result, most of the time they attack straw men. Inasmuch as the analyses pertain to metaphor, they turn out to discuss image schemas and primary metaphors in a way that is not really different from what is customary in CMT. Criticisms that are to some extent justifiably raised against 'classic' CMT, such as insufficient awareness of the dynamic nature of metaphor and of medium-specificity, do not apply to multimodal and film metaphor approaches adopted by myself and colleagues such as Kathrin Fahlenbrach, Maarten Coëgnarts and Peter Kravanja, and María Ortiz. For the larger part, the kind of close-reading analyses M&K perform are moreover perfectly compatible with the kind associated with key cognitive film studies scholars such as David Bordwell.

Concluding remarks

M&K claim that their model can do justice much better to 'expressive movement' in film than various rival theories, but this claim depends on vastly over-stretching the concept 'metaphor'. They do fine film analyses but often without making clear which part of these analyses should count specifically as *metaphor* analyses. Their criticisms of CMT and multimodal metaphor scholars fail to acknowledge that these scholars try to do something different from what M&K present them as aiming for. CMT scholars argue that, and show how, metaphor plays a crucial role in meaning-making in *all* kinds of media and discourse genres. But while we live by metaphors, we live by many other things as well – by narrative, for instance, and by beliefs, and by the urge to survive and have meaningful relations with fellow human beings. CMT-inspired multimodal/audiovisual/film metaphor scholars do not at all hold that the analysis of metaphor (or any other trope, for that matter) in film alone amounts to a full interpretation of that film. In my understanding of their work that does not bother them in the least, since they consider analysing metaphor one instrument among others to make meaning.

Cato the Elder invariably concluded his speeches to the Roman senate with 'Ceterum censeo Carthaginem esse delendam'. Analogously, I will end with my mantra that M&K's insistence on *doing* metaphor, taking into account socio-cultural context, and being aware of medium-specificity makes clear once again that textual analysis in all media and genres is in dire need of a full-blown theory of communication (which can include, *pace* M&K, artistic varieties).

The contours of such a theory already exist, namely in relevance theory (Sperber and Wilson 1995) – but its development still requires a lot of work (Forceville 2014, in prep.).

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Book reviews

(Mis)reading Augustus

Karin Boklund-Lagopoulou

Pyy, Elina 2018. *The Semiotics of Caesar Augustus*. Bloomsbury Advances in Semiotics. London and New York: Bloomsbury, 209 pp., ISBN 978-1-4742-7722-8, £85.50, ePDF 978-1-4742-7725-9, £82.08, ePub 978-1-4742-7723-5, £82.08.

This is rather an odd book. It is written by a classicist, but approaches its topic largely as a thematic study in comparative literature or popular culture. It begins with an examination of interpretations of Octavian Augustus, the first Roman emperor, dating from his own lifetime or shortly thereafter, then skips to mid- and late-20th-century novels in which Augustus figures directly or indirectly, and finishes with depictions of Augustus in cinema and television from the 1960s to the early 21st century. The author herself calls it a 'study in cultural history' (p. 25), which is accurate enough if we take it as referring to the history of western European and American culture of the late 20th century.

Pyy's position, set out in Chapter 2, is that the image of Augustus was ambiguous from the beginning, possibly by his own design. He points out that Roman historiography as a genre was only partly concerned with recording events; it was equally preoccupied with ethical and political issues. The narrative techniques of Roman historiography simplify the characterisation of historical actors, making them representatives of virtues or vices. Roman historiographers therefore tend to portray Octavian largely according to whether they approve or disapprove of the outcome of his actions, which was to put an end to half a century of civil war and impose a new form of centralised, autocratic government to replace the old republic. Roman accounts of the life of Octavian, Pyy argues, are best approached as works of fiction, and as such have become 'the founding texts for certain literary archetypes that live on in modern representations of the emperor' (p. 30).

According to Pyy, the Roman sources tend to divide the career of Octavian into two parts: 'The end of the civil war splits his life in two halves, and in ancient literature the change in

his character reflects this dramatic break' (p. 30). During the civil war, Octavian is portrayed as a power-hungry schemer who does not hesitate to eliminate his rivals by violent and unscrupulous means. However, after the defeat of Anthony in 31 BC, and especially after 27 BC, when the Senate voted him the titles of *Augustus* and *Princeps*, he tends to be presented as a benign, paternal figure.

This ambiguity is inherent even in the emperor's portrayal of himself. He seems to have engaged in constant role-playing. His life is represented in the sources as a sort of spectacle, 'a magnificent show written and directed by the emperor himself' (p. 35), in which his subjects seem to have been willing participants.

Pyy's analysis of the Roman understanding of Augustus is fascinating and gives the reader an unexpectedly timely introduction to the complexities of Roman political life. It is based on numerous academic sources; studies of both modern and ancient readings of Augustus seem to be rather fashionable, and she has plenty of bibliographical material to work with.

The chapter then continues with an analysis of the use made of the image of Augustus in the mid-20th-century novel *God Bless You, Mr Rosewater* by Kurt Vonnegut. The discussion of Vonnegut's novel continues through all of chapter 3 and the first half of chapter 4 (the second half goes on to a different novel, Christoph Ransmayr's 1988 *Die letzte Welt*). In practice, this means that nearly half of the book is devoted to one novel by Vonnegut. Pyy's analysis of Vonnegut is convincing enough, but it is not quite what the book's title had led us to expect.

There is no doubt that the symbolism of Augustus figures largely in Vonnegut's novel. Pyy argues that Roman history, both of the Republic and of the Empire, plays an important symbolic role in American attempts to understand their own history. She sees Vonnegut's novel as a story of the conflict between two versions of the American Dream, 'the dream of freedom' and 'the dream of wealth', in which 'Vonnegut reconstructs ancient Rome as an historical analog to contemporary America' (p. 41). There is one difficulty with this juxtaposition, which she does not address, and that is that the symbolism is actually employed, not by Vonnegut himself, but by one of his fictional characters, a reactionary politician who uses the example of Augustus rhetorically to further his political career. Vonnegut does have a taste for allegory, but he certainly does not identify with the political opinions expressed by Senator Rosewater, so it feels a bit awkward to base an argument about the importance of Augustus 'as a sign and a symbol ... in times of cultural or ideological turmoil' (p. 49) on the fictional behaviour of a character in a novel.

That Augustus is seen as a political and ideological symbol, particularly in 'times of ideological turmoil' is the first of two central arguments in Pyy's book. The second is the postmodern position that any attempt to understand the past will inevitably be a fiction. She puts this quite eloquently in chapter 3 (pp. 63-64):

The past and the present continuously construct each other in cultural texts and discourses. History repeats itself, because we keep rewriting it that way, and because we keep constructing our ideas of the present on the basis of our historical narratives... but it is essential for us, as readers of these cultural texts ... to be aware of our responsibility as readers, as active creators of the past and the present.

This position is reflected in her choice of texts to analyse. She tends to be rather dismissive of historical fiction in the realist tradition and shows a clear preference for novels that explore themes central to the postmodern sensibility, such as 'the impossibility of prescribing a meaning' (p. 95) that she finds in Ransmayr's book.

After Vonnegut, the discussion of the other texts is much less developed and focuses on the two arguments I have identified above. John Williams's *Augustus* is analysed in terms of the use of political power to control meaning, to control 'the reading of the world' (p. 126), which she argues is the truly frightening aspect of dictatorship. The relevance of *Augustus* for the 20th century is as an example of 'autocracy born out of democracy' (p. 129), showing the fragility of the democratic form of government.

Chapter 6 turns to the uses of Roman antiquity in cinema and television. Pyy considers (briefly) the film *Cleopatra* by Joseph Mankiewicz (1963), the BBC adaptation of Robert Graves's *I, Claudius* (1976), Granada Television's mini-series *The Caesars* (1968), and four television productions: *Cleopatra* (1999, directed by Frank Roddam), *Imperium: Augustus* (2003, directed by Roger Young), *Empire* (ABC, 2005) and *Rome* (HBO, 2005-2007). She is quite clearly frustrated by the traditionalism and lack of postmodern sensitivity of these productions, which 'belong to the same essentializing narrative tradition of utilizing the ancient past to understand and explain the human experience in the contemporary world' (p. 145). Since she cannot really explain why such simplistic depictions of Augustus are popular, she falls back on the 'entertainment value' of 'mainstream art forms' that are not as sophisticated as postmodernist art (p. 155) but 'offered an escape from the anxiety-provoking contemporary world' (p. 156), which sounds suspiciously like a version of Adorno's and Horkheimer's culture industry recycled three-quarters of a century later.

Pyy consistently wants to explore the ideological agendas of the texts she examines and their relevance for 20th-century and early 21st-century situations and conditions. But to do this, she uses entirely traditional theories and methods of literary and cultural criticism. There is no attempt to use semiotic methodology in any systematic manner. Instead, she chooses the standard postmodern reading of 'the uncontrollable fluidity and ambiguity of meaning, the power over definition and interpretation, and the relationship between the author and the reader in the creation of meaning' (p. 177) – a relationship, incidentally, which she completely fails to explore for its potential as a means of political subversion and resistance, an area in which Stuart Hall and the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies have been working for at least half a century.

Instead, Pyy appeals to a kind of internalised metalinguistic semiotic interpretation, arguing that central to modern readings of Augustus is that 'political power is represented as a metaphor for the semiotic power over meaning and significance', a power which she considers 'the basest form of tyranny', but which is doomed to fail, since 'power over meaning and definition always slips through one's fingers' (pp. 178-179). This deconstructionist conclusion is of course irrefutable, but it leaves at least this reader wondering why, if such is the case, one should bother to analyse anything in the first place.

The book would have benefitted from better copy editing and from correction by a native English speaker, though the occasionally awkward language is not an obstacle to understanding. Whether or not one agrees with the perspective the author takes, she offers the reader interesting insights on a fascinating and timely subject.

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Identity: Towards a synthesis of perspectives

Marianthi Makri-Tsilipakou

McEntee-Atalianis, Lisa 2018. *Identity in Applied Linguistics Research*. London: Bloomsbury, Academic 328 pp. £22.49, (pbk, ISBN 9781623564667), £67.50 (hbk ISBN 9781623564728)

The perennial issue of shedding light on human identity has been a concern since the time of Plato and Aristotle. In the age of *Liquid Modernity*, 'the search for identity is the ongoing struggle to arrest or slow down the flow, to solidify the fluid, to give form to the formless' (Bauman 2012 [2000]: 83). This quest has generated a considerable amount of research across different fields and theoretical frameworks. To the extent that language is considered central to the production/interpretation of identity, its study has constituted a major trend in (non-Chomskyan) Linguistics. *Applied Linguistics*, defined as 'the theoretical and empirical investigation of real-world problems in which language is a central issue' (Brumfit 1995: 27), takes a particular interest in identity as it is implicated in a variety of such problems. Lisa McEntee-Atalianis' book is yet another addition to the burgeoning literature on identity, as it remains salient – despite arguments against its use as a category of analysis (Brubaker and Cooper 2000).

In view of the fact that this book places itself within the field of *Applied Linguistics*, it would be useful to see how it fits into the scope of this discipline. The field originated in second and foreign-language teaching before expanding into many different subfields. Interest in identity, in particular, was fueled by a shift from a psycholinguist approach to SLA to 'a greater focus on sociological and anthropological dimensions of language learning, particularly with reference to sociocultural, post-structural, and critical theory' (Norton 2011: 318). Over the years, a wide range of issues/topics has been identified as relevant to its study.

In a volume featuring identity as its theme, the *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* (Mackey 2015) – one of the field's flagship journals – focuses on topics such as social class, translanguaging, investment, transnationalism and multilingualism, academic discourse, heritage language education, assessment of proficiency, written discourse, language policy, voice quality, technologies and expressive activity, forensic profiling, ethnic identity and second language learning, ethnic and (supra)national identities (migration policies and the linguistic integration

of migrants). A seminal book on discourse and identity (Benwell and Stokoe 2006) as well as one of the latest handbooks on language and identity (Preece 2016) list additional dimensions/perspectives: conversational, institutional, narrative, commodified, spatial and virtual identities; conversation analysis, corpus linguistics, critical discourse analysis, deaf linguistics, discourse analysis and pragmatics, language for specific purposes, lexicography, literacies, multimodal communication, translation.

McEntee-Atalianis' book covers most of these areas, with an emphasis on contemporary topics/issues. The book is organized in twelve chapters, each containing several sections and some subsections. Chapters start with an introduction and are rounded off with a conclusion that guide readers through the points (to be) made.

The first Chapter aptly begins by offering the customary historical and theoretical overview that traces the development of identity through the ages and across different paradigms. The main part is taken up by presenting the split between essentialist and non-essentialist/constructionist perspectives, followed by a comparison of two contemporary accounts of identity that subscribe to these contrastive approaches, namely *Social Identity Theory* and Bucholtz and Hall's framework (2005).

Chapter 2 explores linguistic idiosyncrasy as instantiated in the evolution of identity research in the area of *Sociolinguistics*, within which quantitative studies were eventually replaced by qualitative research that emphasizes individual agency, realized as style, stance, crossing, ideology, indexicality, etc., under the influence of *Ethnography* and *Stylistic Practice* studies.

Chapter 3 presents some clinical research in aphasia and memory degeneration as affecting perception of self and necessitating renegotiation of identity, stressing the importance of narratives in dealing with these conditions both in and outside clinical contexts.

Forensic linguistic research is covered in Chapter 4. Specifically, authorship identification in both spoken and written texts – with the help of some examples that illustrate the importance of voice and stylistic analysis – as well as the whole spectrum of possible courtroom identities (judges, lawyers, witnesses, defendants, victims) are discussed.

In Chapter 5, the writer explores youth studies conducted within the theoretical framework of *Communities of Practice*. Studies from USA, Canada, UK as well Belgium, France, Germany and Spain show young people employing practices of bricolage and glocalization 'in order to "style" themselves into being and position themselves ideologically within a local and global frame of reference' (p. 95).

Workplace and professional identities – novice, mentor, expert and (second) language learner – in (trans)national contexts are examined in Chapter 6, with a focus on their discursive enactment as developing a recognizable and convincing professional/institutional identity involves 'the appropriation and use of culturally relevant content and form' (p. 101), besides professional knowledge and favourable socio-economic circumstances.

In Chapter 7, the writer explores identity in social media, focusing on the second wave of computer-mediated communication research/studies. The issues of authenticity, hybridity and intersectionality are examined in light of the various technical affordances/constraints and 'context collapse'. Websites allow for constant identity negotiation and different positionings but, also, for the online reproduction of offline norms.

Chapter 8 reviews developments in the study of ethnic identity as intersecting with religious identity. The traditional framework of *Ethnolinguistic Vitality* is criticized for adopting *Social Identity Theory* and for prioritizing status, demography and institutional support over other variables as well as for relying on subjective evaluations collected from questionnaires. The concept of *ethnolinguistic repertoire* is investigated next as it allows for greater agency over sociolinguistic variation. The chapter concludes with a look at macro- and micro-level discursive approaches to identity (*Narratives, Positioning Theory, Discursive Psychology, Interactional Sociolinguistics*).

Gender and sexual identities are investigated in Chapter 9, starting with an overview of language and gender research that follows the evolvment of gender theory from a dominance vs difference binary conception of gender – correlating with specific language features and interactional patterns (genderlect) – into gender as a continuum, a spectrum of gender(s), 'enacted locally in diverse ways, through particular roles, stances, styles and activities' (p. 176), and intersecting with sexual identity as well as with other social categories. The writer credits Butler's *performativity* with the paradigm shift that breaks the link between sex and gender as well as compulsive heterosexuality attached to it. The influence of *queer theory*, which challenges heteronormativity and hegemonic masculinity, is detected in the study of gay/lesbian identity.

Chapter 10 offers a view of D/deaf identities, with an emphasis on the experiences of the Deaf community. The writer points out that various constructions of 'Deafhood' represent different historical moments in the way 'subaltern' deaf people are positioned by hegemonic discourse. Manifestations of Deaf community and identity, such as sign language and signed stories are presented next. The ambivalent relationship between D/deafness and technological advancement is also discussed. The chapter concludes with a call for identity research to incorporate Deaf epistemologies as they offer a unique visual perspective and embodied experience of self and others.

Chapter 11 addresses the relationship between language, space/place and identity, i.e. construction of 'spatial' identity, adopting a micro-to-macro 'scalar' approach that starts with local studies of socio-phonetic variation and continues with supralocal dialect levelling – which can result in a realignment of linguistic features and social meaning –, before moving onto identity construction and negotiation in (supra)national borderland regions. The relationship between national identity and language is re-examined in light of globalization and mobility, which are likely to lead to commodification of language and identities, as in the case

of tourism. Transnational identities 'bypass national identification [...] supporting a fragmented and deterritorialized perspective of identity' (p. 230), thus turning 'place' into a social practice rather than a fixed locality. The overall argument is that people and place/space are mutually constitutive of each other.

The closing chapter summarizes preceding chapters in terms of themes explored and conclusions reached and identifies the still unresolved issues of i) accounting for the complexity and multiplicity of identities, their possible hierarchical prioritization at the moment of production/comprehension as well as their intersectional/conflictual relationships; and ii) incorporating psycholinguistic and cognitive aspects of identity production and maintenance which have been neglected due to the current dominance of the 'discursive turn'. As a remedy for these theoretical pitfalls, the writer goes on to propose her own *Dynamic Integrated Systems Model*, consisting of three spheres that interact both synchronically and diachronically: individual (psychological/cognitive mechanisms and personal characteristics); socio/relational (macro-, meso-, micro-levels); and linguistic processes of (inter)-subjectivity. She argues in favour of her model by referring back to the themes discussed in various chapters of the book. The chapter is rounded off with a(n unanticipated) word of caution against automatically assuming that identity is central in the analysis of linguistic data and with a call for greater conscious reflexivity among practitioners.

McEntee-Atalianis sets the tone for her book right from the beginning, by citing Margaret Thatcher's life and legacy kaleidoscopic representation by the media as an example of identity as 'inconsistent, neither predetermined nor self-determined, mutable and immutable, ever ubiquitous, open to revision and apparently never clear-cut or final' (pp. 1-2). She thus makes a strong case for the currently dominant, non-essentialist, social constructionist view of identity, and she consistently follows this thread throughout the chapters by repeatedly referring to identity as being 'discursively' produced. Nevertheless, she tries to strike a balance between the contrasting approaches by making room, for instance, for *strategic essentialism*, by (critically) reviewing *Social Identity Theory*, and by pointing out that 'even social constructionist accounts of identity draw on essentialized or "fixed" category labels' (p. 11) apropos Tracy's framework (2002).

As regards the much-debated 'structure–agency' and 'micro-macro' binaries, the writer takes a middle position by (favourably) presenting *Discursive Psychology, Positioning Theory* and *Narrative Analysis* studies, which combine both macro and micro levels (plus an occasionally intervening meso-level), and by adopting criticisms of *Critical Discourse Analysis* for granting individuals limited agency (p. 14), and of *Conversation Analysis* for not attending to broader cultural/social/political issues (p. 15). She also calls for intersectionality – which interconnects '*biological and social categories, variables and attributes*' (p. 238) – as well as for interdisciplinarity, which involves thinking across boundaries.

The writer's concern with reconciling all relevant aspects of identity research is evidenced in the proposed *Dynamic Integrated Systems Model*, which is related to the 'dynamic turn' (de

Bot 2015: 87ff) in *Applied Linguistics*, brought about by the application of *Dynamic Systems Theory* – ‘a set of concepts that describe behavior as the emergent product of a self-organizing, multicomponent system evolving over time’ (Perone and Simmering 2017: 44) –, which originated in physical sciences and mathematics. This view of language as ‘dynamic, complex, nonlinear, chaotic, unpredictable, sensitive to initial conditions, open, self-organizing, feedback sensitive, and adaptive’ (Larsen-Freeman 1997: 142) has met with mixed reactions: heralded as ‘the new paradigm that fills the gap left by formal linguistic models, the disembodied psycholinguistic approach and various theories that either look exclusively at the psycholinguistic side or at the sociolinguistic and sociocultural side only’ (de Bot 2015: 87), but also greeted with skepticism (Swan 2004; Gregg 2010). McEntee-Atalianis distances her model from other similar ones (Thelen¹ 2005; de Bot et al. 2007) by adding a footnote, but she only admits to similarities and does not elaborate any further. She also rejects previous attempts to overcome the differences between social-psychological and post-structuralist accounts and to integrate structure-agency, i.e. Bourdieu’s ‘habitus’ and Giddens’ ‘structuration’, as ‘they are rooted in sociological thinking and cannot offer a balanced or detailed account of the dynamic psychosocial interface’ (p. 245). In the same way, Tracy’s (2002) sociocultural/rhetorical model and *Discursive Psychology* studies, which emphasize the social and discursive aspects, are criticized for neglecting ‘the more enduring but also dynamic psycholinguistic and cognitive structures and operations’ (p. 240). Commendable as the writer’s attempt at theoretical synthesis is, it remains to be seen if this is indeed a viable way of superseding separate disciplines or it is still ‘largely an illusion. For it is simply not possible to see things from two different perspectives at the same time’ (Widdowson 2005: 19). In any case, it would have been extremely helpful if she had presented an actual application of her model.

Overall, this is a well-researched book, reflecting the writer’s interests and work in the particular areas. The collection and analysis of studies that support the points made is impressive, showing thorough knowledge and deep understanding of the subject matter. As a result, we are given a complex, nuanced view of identity. However, certain areas are inevitably showcased (e.g. deaf studies, ethnolinguistic vitality), while others are under-represented (e.g. translanguaging) or completely missing.

Among the noticeable absences is that of social class² (Block 2014) and neoliberalism, especially in view of the emergence of the ‘precariat’, the new global class (Standing 2011) that results from this dominant ideology. Neoliberalism impacts the workplace, imposing flexible labour policies and occupational identities that are ‘geared to competitiveness’ (Standing 2011: 159). Also, it commodifies³ education, with students being ‘semantically reframed as “customers”’ (Chun 2016: 560) and teachers succumbing to assessment/accountability re-

1 Misspelled as Thelan (p. 266, 303)

2 Occasional reference to class as intersecting with other variables.

3 Mention of commodification in relation to tourism (Ch. 11).

gimes striving for 'excellence', a 'normative technology of neoliberal ideology' (Saunders and Blanco Ramirez 2017: 3). Overall, it promotes a 'corporate form of agency [...]. Other forms of agency are getting pushed aside' (Gershon 2011: 539). As Block et al. (2012: 11) observe, 'in framing identity exclusively in terms of inscriptions such as gender, race, ethnicity, nationality and sexuality at the expense of class, many applied linguists have occupied an ideological space which neoliberalism has found easy to accommodate'.

As regards research paradigms, missing is a full-fledged presentation of ethnomethodological *Conversation Analysis* and *Membership Categorization Analysis* studies, especially when other theoretical frameworks such as *Discursive Psychology*, which lack the relevant micro-level gear, employ their analytic tools. Incidentally, DP and CA 'tend to have a different theoretical outlook on the status of cognition in interaction. [...] (as) discursive psychologists systematically analyze 'cognition' as part of participants' interactional apparatus' (Te Molder 2015: 5). Additionally, the micro/macro dichotomy does not arise for CA, as both levels are generated simultaneously by members' ethnomethods (Hilbert 1990). And, in any case, analysts can always invoke 'external' contexts, provided that they are shown to be oriented to by the participants themselves (Schegloff 1992: 215). Finally, *Ethnomethodology* has also made a significant contribution to the exploration of gender as an ongoing accomplishment in the seminal study of 'inter-sexed' Agnes by Garfinkel (1967), long before Butler's performativity, which usually gets the credit (e.g. Kessler and McKenna 1978; West and Zimmerman 1987).

On the practical side, the book would have benefited from a less sparse contents table, as chapter sections/subsections – which would have made it more reader-friendly – are not included. As chapter structure cannot be easily predicted, readers have to find out by skimming through the book. An author index is also missing and the compilation of the existing (subject) index is somewhat erratic as, for instance, 'structure' – one of the recurring themes – does not get an entry but 'stylometry' does, although it only appears in a footnote (fn. 8, p. 253).

In summary, despite some questions of selection and balance, McEntee-Atalianis has generally succeeded in her task of producing a comprehensive account of the current investigation of identity in *Applied Linguistics*. The book brings together most of the key topics, adopting multiple perspectives and focusing on the latest research developments, including some welcome additions such as D/deaf and spatial identities. Undoubtedly, this book is an invaluable resource for both linguists and advanced students.

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Approaching Education through Edusemiotics

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Inna Semetsky (ed), *Edusemiotics-A Handbook*. Singapore: Routledge, 2017, 312 pp., \$149.00 (pbk). ISBN: 978-10-1493-2

'Everything is a sign and still nothing is a sign unless it is interpreted' (Semetsky 2017:8), is the stance taken by the editor of the book, in the first chapter of this book. I have always been fascinated by signs and their interpretation, by how signs transform or transmute into other signs and evolve – through time – into other signs or sign systems, or even revolve around an already existing sign system which is reproducing itself.

A bird's eye view may direct an interested party to no correlation between education and semiotics, yet signs exist in textbooks, in pictorial presentations of objects and even in language itself as symbols, icons, etc., are all aids to learning, in the case of a foreign language, the learning of new words (see also Nöth 2014). A student may not remember a word, in the foreign language, if asked by the teacher, but given a picture, an icon, the student may be able to produce the word both phonemically and graphemically. But as the human race evolves so do signs. Nevertheless, it seems that we are 'born' with a predisposition to 'know', 'interpret' and 'use' signs as it comes natural for a student, from as early as primary school, to see a picture of a child with earphones, in his or her textbook and to realize that s/he will probably be doing a listening exercise within the next few minutes. Thus, it seems that we not only use signs, but as Semetsky (2017) puts it we, as humans, are signs too.

The gap between semiotics and education was first bridged in 2008, at the University of Oulu, in Finland, by officially giving a 'name' to two different disciplines, namely education and semiotics and thus coining the term edusemiotics as an autonomous transdisciplinary field. Semetsky and Cambell (2018) place this date a little later, in 2014 in the IASS congress in Sofia, Bulgaria, and more specifically in the New Bulgarian University in which 'theoretical semiotics' first appeared. This book, which consists of twenty chapters, focuses upon semiotics, educational theory and practice as well as educational philosophy.

The second chapter which, in fact, follows the first, namely the introduction section previously discussed, probes into the academic culture, after the 17th century, and the science of signs, and supports that human experience is filtered through a 'dynamic interaction', as

Pierce called it, between the physical universe and the 'construction' of semiosis by the human race which is also part of the semiosis in nature (see also Deely 2017). Mankind, and his or her experience, is mediated and perpetuated by a sign system. A sign may mean nothing but connected to an object it acquires an irreducible bond which may last for life. Our minds have an almost magical predisposition to form mental representations out of objects which trigger the interest of our apprehension and stimulate our imagination and cognitive capacities. Thus, without wanting to sound hyperbolic, I do support the stance taken by the author that human beings are 'semiotic animals' and as such it may be considered natural that all animal awareness starts with sensations, not with the ideas of sensations (see also Deely 2017), and that if humankind is a 'semiotic animal' then the interpretation of semiosis in nature can only exist because the ideas of the specific subject, under scrutiny, function as a sign, and has the universe - itself - as the object of 'semiotic inquiry' as Deely (2017) so rightfully puts it. And, so, very simply but at the same time so very blatantly, semiotics becomes the only discipline which can lead us to the core of the problem of knowledge, which is that signs may be able to guide us everywhere in nature, as Deely (2017) names it, and to teach us, if I may add.

The third chapter addresses the subject of teaching, knowledge and semiotics. Vygotsky, a scholar of grit, is indirectly placed in the forefront by the author (Legg 2017), in the sense that it was he who first introduced the concept of the 'Zone of Proximal Development' (ZPD), followed by Bruner (1957, 1960, 1961), who introduced a more sophisticated revision of Vygotsky's stance, namely the interactionist or social interactionist theory. Legg (2017) takes all this one step further in the sense that she talks about 'scaffolding education iconically', and attempts to go beyond the written information given in a text. The main aim of teaching is to convey meaning, which may not be conveyed solely through words but also through pictures, mathematical diagrams, etc. Teaching, which is a human construct, thus acquires a new dimension, which is that of eliciting meaning through signs, just like Socrates with his 'Socratic questioning' or 'maieutic method', who elicited information through reason and logic. Iconic signs, if wisely and diligently applied, play a useful role in active – heuristic learning and teaching, as they exercise our imagination, by demanding an answer to questions put forth, and thus rationalizing our thought and conduct as Pierce (in Legg, 2017) puts it, and connecting us with the 'real-world situations' with which they intermeditate (also see Legg, 2017). Nevertheless, everything we do should be done sparingly because by rendering our teaching and pedagogy 'more iconic' we may risk transforming it into something of a 'passing show' as Legg, (2017) very humorously puts it.

The fourth chapter outlines, on the one hand, the interconnection between mathematics and geometry, which is highly involved in 'the dialectic of sense and idea' and, on the other hand, edusemiotics which wisely takes this particular characteristic of 'conceptual knowledge and learning' under consideration (Gange, 2017). Rotman (2009), a mathematician by profession and an established philosopher today, depicts mathematics as a science which is

cognitively difficult, technical and abstract, adding that one can understand mathematics only if s/he is actively and conceptually involved in the discipline and understands the quirks of the particular science. Nevertheless, mathematics, just like any other code of communication, gives its readers/learners a chance to 'see' reality under a different perspective, what Plato, a Greek mathematician and philosopher, coined as a way of understanding more about reality, as mathematics, is in fact, 'a timeless and unchanging realm of pure ideas' Ernest (2008:3). In teaching mathematics, we are in fact teaching semiotics, the semiotics of mathematics, according to Grange (2017), as both mathematics and geometry are in essence semiotic. We are trained from early childhood to play with balls which are circular, thus we become acquainted with the concept of a circle, or to play with cubes thus becoming acquainted with the shape of a square, and by the time we reach primary school we are well aware of geometrical shapes and what they depict before we are formally introduced to the concept of teaching and learning geometry. But 'knowing' geometry does not, simply or only, mean that one has a sound knowledge of the contents of the discipline but that he or she is given the key to unlock the secrets of the universe, as Plato supported.

Chapters five and six reflect upon matters of education, more specifically, metaphors, models and diagrams, as well as education and reasoning through a Peircean perspective. Education is seen through the prism of reasoning and experience by Pierce in chapter six (see Quay 2017), because according to him 'experience is our only teacher', much like Dewey (1910, 1915) who supported that students learn by doing something, in other words they learn from their experience of doing something which is interpreted into logical reasoning and action ('learning by doing' was how Dewey put it). In chapter five there is an attempt to correlate metaphor and educational theories and how the aforementioned can be applied in the teaching of language and mathematics. Metaphors and diagrams are inferences which translate metaphorical guesses into visual stimuli, and their applications have been highly neglected in the field of education, nevertheless, both seem to be very valuable in the teaching of mathematics and the learning of a foreign language, as the seminal article of Lakoff and Nunez (2000 in Danesi 2017), has shown. Two very contrasting theories in learning have attracted the attention of 20th century teachers and researchers in the field of teaching and learning, more specifically the behaviourist and the cognitivist theories. The question here is how do these theories connect to the concept of metaphor? The author supports that the 'mental training process' of a person is very much like the training of the human body to conduct a specific action, this is closely associated to behaviourism, whereas the 'computational or algorithmic systems' have strong similarities to the 'mental organization process' and are closely associated to cognitivism. Metaphor, thus, seems to be interweaved in both the theory and practice of teaching and learning and has two parallel, but at times converging, aspects to it, namely the Metaphor-as-Theory Hypothesis through which the professional educational cultures verify their models with experiments which are based on an initial image of a metaphor, and the

Metaphor-as-Practice Hypothesis, which allows for the application of the metaphor directly into the educational practice. Metaphor seems to be, not only a figure of speech, but a driving force which activates both our imagination and our cognitive processes in learning mathematics and language. It is the way we decode what we see around us and how we delineate this information into our cognitive model of the world within which we live.

Chapters seven and eight broach the subject of pedagogical values through edusemiotics as well as semiotics and meaning in the Greek educational system respectively. More specifically, the stance taken by the author of the article in chapter seven is in line with the philosophical stance in ancient Greece, in which pedagogy was directed to the whole person. More specifically, the author supports the views of different scholars (including the view taken by the discipline of neuroscience today), who strongly believe that the mind and body of a person should be exposed to different stimuli thus catering for their needs as a whole. Lovat (2017) connects educational values and 'good practice pedagogy' and tries to answer the question of what constitutes knowledge and truth and how they are all connected to edusemiotics, bringing forth scholars and philosophers such as Dewey, a firm believer and supporter of 'moral education', which is at the core of all education (and is considered authentic education). Dewey talked about the necessity of an installation of 'inquiry and moral capacity' in all students who are considered the successors of human kind. Habermas, the second philosopher Lovat (2017) focuses upon, is a prominent German philosopher who is renowned for his firm beliefs on epistemology which revolves around 'a way of knowing', of theory which is both complex and holistic and which can be described as a 'complexity science' or a 'complex system'. There is a strong rapport, according to Lovat (2017), between edusemiotics and this complex system, as both present themselves in their entirety, not their individual parts, the minimal unit of analysis.

The eighth chapter, which follows, may not 'refer to one relationship between the three texts' under discussion (as the authors mention) but it does connect the concepts of paideia, education and values in the two legal texts and the UNESCO report, all of which are under scrutiny. The choice of these three texts does not seem to be at random as the authors' delineated two very important constitutional texts, article 16 (2) which deals with paideia in Greece and Act 1566/1985 which deals with primary and secondary education in the aforementioned country. The third text, has a global nuance, and is the Delors Report which was drafted in 1996 by the Delors Commission and envisaged the kind of society within which we would all like to live, thus giving a more humanistic tinge to its contents rather than a market-driven approach to education. Delors Report could be considered a lament in the form of a report to a distorted modernity and to the continuous local and global tensions of our time. The messages extracted from all three texts, nevertheless, need a sound knowledge of more than one disciplines (including law) and an able and well-trained mind to decode, process and classify the new information to the already existing mental depository,

thus producing a three-dimensional relationship between the texts which intertwine but which are, at the same time, independent of each other because of the different perspectives which each of the three texts depict.

Chapter nine delves into the concepts of edusemiotics, existential semiotics and existential pedagogy. In lieu of Pierce's philosophical stance on man being a living sign, Thomson (in Kukkola and Pikkarainen 2017:123), proposes Heidegger's standpoint (a much-debated philosopher and existentialist because of his loyalty to Hitler), 'become what you are', meaning an endless process of becoming or change, or 'we can become what we are only because we are what we become', as an antithesis. Heidegger (who supported pragmatic and existential learning), pre-empts his perfectionist education to existential learning, attempting, in this way, to bridge the gap between genuine learning or 'aletheia' (the unveiling of the truth), as he purports, and tradition in education, which is ever-changing. By nudging aside John Locke's well-worn ideology on how a person comes into this world as a 'tabula rasa' (blank slate), Heidegger questions the stance taken by many philosophers of the 16th century, that we come into this world with no knowledge only to have knowledge 'poured' into our soul by a divine 'other' or a 'knowledge carrier'. Bollnow, a teacher and a much-debated philosopher, himself, because of his loyalty to Adolph Hitler and the National Socialist State, broaches the subject of education humanistically and hermeneutically. One cannot acquire knowledge and thus form and develop his or her personality without pedagogical intervention. Though from a different sociopolitical stand point, Bollnow's pedagogical ideas – surprisingly - converge, to a large extent, with the pedagogical ideas of Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky, the founder of the unfinished Marxist theory of human, cultural and bio-social development. Man learns, socially, aided by the environment in which s/he lives, such as the school environment, his or her parents, older brothers or sisters and peers (Vygotsky) or with the aid of pedagogical intervention (Bollnow).

What changes does education bring about to the human mind? Semetsky (2017) attempts to answer the afore set question in chapter ten of this multiauthor volume. A person learns through actively constructing knowledge or through 'doing' and mediation according to Dewey (1910). Bruner (1960/1961), on the other hand, coined the term 'scaffolding' which describes the way children build new knowledge on the already existing information which they have mastered "the old and the new" as Dewey calls it (Dewey in Semetsky (2017: 144). When the 'new' breaks away from the 'old' according to Dewey, in the unconscious mind of a person, 'issuing a command to one's future self' as Pierce (in Semetsky 2017: 148) formulates, then we begin to learn. Bruner's stance, on learning and education, had many similarities to the stance taken by both Pierce and Dewey. Bruner brought forth three different modes of representation, which were in line with what both Dewey and Pierce supported, namely, enactive representation which is action-based ('learning by doing' according to Dewey), iconic representation which is image-based (according to Pierce), and symbolic representation which is language-based (often symbolized by words according to Pierce). Intelligence, and more spe-

cifically human intelligence, develops and flourishes through actively constructing knowledge, through 'doing' (and 'doing' here may be used in the sense of doing an activity or 'doing' in the sense of constructing something physically), and through mediation with the environment within which the person lives, thus constructing metaknowledge, the construction of the 'new' from the 'old'. A never-ending process of learning and development.

Chapters eleven and twelve focus on the academic pathologies, or of the academic self with a focus on the anxieties of knowledge and the complexity of interpreting ourselves, through a process of writing for self-examination, self-therapy and perhaps even confession. A slow, painful and often lonely path most writers hobble through to reach a self-cleansing point which is the point of the completion of their text. It is the uneasiness of exposing oneself through writing and the frustration of having to produce a piece of writing accepted by the 'know all' public, the point of culmination, the final point, the point of freedom, the completion of the text. And once finished, perhaps because of the 'polysemic nature of language' (see Farquhar and Fitzsimons, in Semetsky 2017: 168), the burdening questions arise: Was I true to my word(s)? Or even: Was I true to my context? Was that in fact what I was trying to say all along or am I still hiding behind a façade of untrue words just to please? Is my interpretation of the 'self' and the 'universe' objective? So, the pain is still there to remind us of the feeling of discontent and unaccomplishment, the feeling of the unfinished, of entrapment, allurements and captivation within a maze that has no end and no beginning, the deep mental and psychological suffering of the author or the 'fear of the author' as Peters (in Semetsky 2017: 155), puts it. This fear is tightly interwoven with the exposure of the 'self' through one's writings, our 'narrative identity', as Farquhar and Fitzsimons (in Semetsky, 2017: 165) so rightfully put it. The 'self' metaphorically becomes 'a form of a text, to be variously interpreted and then re-inscribed' (Farquhar and Fitzsimons, in Semetsky 2017: 166), an amalgamation of the self and the text, or 'life as [a] continuous textuality' (Farquhar and Fitzsimons, in Semetsky 2017: 165), from which we are unable to 'step outside' (Farquhar and Fitzsimons, in Semetsky 2017: 170), in our attempt to reinterpret ourselves.

Chapters thirteen and fourteen address the role of the reader (through Umberto Eco's novels *The name of the rose* and *Foucault's Pendulum*) and reading history respectively (education, semiotics, and edusemiotics). Through the two novels the reader is trained or tutored to decipher the hidden meaning which exists within both texts, a form of semiotic education, Eco's labyrinth of signs, his two mystical worlds, his two novels. Trifonas (2017: 190) claims that both novels are 'labyrinths of inter-textual associations conjuring up images of other books reflected in [them] as well as unrestricting the possibilities for deriving meaning from [then]'. From a passive recipient of information, the reader gradually becomes an active participant in the novel's plot, a student ready to devour new information and to construct new knowledge from the old, a 'detective' ready to unearth and decode hidden clues, signs and messages. The novels, thus, become the means through which the reader constructs mental 'pictures' of a

possible world and of new knowledge, and partakes actively within this imaginary world, be it the world of today or the world of a time long past, the Middle Ages. And both education, the acquisition of new knowledge, and semiotics have their roots in 'the hermeneutics of medieval mystical theory' (Olteanu 2017:193), in other words, in the time long past, in history. The metaphysical is presented through the Bible, in the work of Olteanu (2017), and is connected to education and hermeneutics as a semiotic method. The Bible offers fertile ground to education in the Middle Ages as it offers knowledge accepted by the elite, the ruling class, the church, and is considered seemingly harmless. But to a leery and suspicious mind it offers food for thought and thus the construction of new knowledge through research and experimentation, laying the ground for postmodern education, for the education of today.

The fifteenth- and sixteenth-chapters explore the interpretation of metaphor in heteroglossia and heritage language learning respectively. In interpreting metaphor, we need common ground, in the sense that both the language in which the metaphor is presented and the concept it is trying to convey should be made comprehensible to the interested party. In the case of heteroglossia, according to the author of the article (White 2017), the aforementioned play no role, as the role of the sign becomes the means through which the metaphor is interpreted, evaluated and reinterpreted. In both chapters, the authors focus on the amalgamation of cultures, languages and the 'voice' of the 'other' in language learning and teaching, as well as the teacher's role, especially in the case of heritage language teachers (in chapter sixteen). In the case of a foreign language teacher it is important that the decoding of clues and their interpretation into a verbal or written code of language, become part of their (the teachers') training as well as a part of their pedagogical role. Teachers should not only be able to guide students towards an understanding and interpretation of symbols and signs but should also guide them towards constructing and thus producing symbols and signs themselves (which could be viewed as a positive learning challenge by learners). In the case of the heritage language, which is usually the language spoken at home but not at school or in the society within which a person lives, teachers do not simply transmit knowledge of the heritage language but also of the signs which compose the culture of the specific heritage language and which facilitate the learning of the aforementioned language (see Atoofi 2017). Teaching, especially the teaching of metaphor, may seem an 'easy' venture but this may not always be the case, as we see in both chapters. Bakhtin (in White 2017: 210), sees metaphor, or the teaching of metaphor, if I may add, as a "social event of aesthetic engagement, where meaning is generated out of the moment-not in its analytical aftermath". Bakhtin's stance is very much in line with Saussure's (see Ireland 2003) dyadic relation of signs (in contrast to Pierce's triadic relation (see Danesi and Perron 1999), in which the sign, or the signifier and its meaning, the signified, is in an arbitrary relationship because of the social conventions which influence their very existence, as Saussure maintained. Metaphoricity, literally and figuratively, is not only the means of creating new meaning or simply sending it, but it is also a way of enriching the language

potential of a language learner, be it a mother tongue learner, a foreign language learner, a second language learner or a heritage language learner.

The seventeenth chapter seeks for the theoretical development of semiotics in the works of Julia Kristeva and Emile Benveniste, while at the same time it probes into (the very much in vogue at the time) generative grammar (through the eyes of Chomsky), into linguistics and into the philosophy of language. Both scholars were touched by the 'revolution' in linguistics, most so Benveniste, loyally followed by Kristeva. Both had a very progressive stance linguistically and politically. Both shared a common viewpoint in linguistics and language, in the sense that he (Benveniste) 'reconnect[ed] the morpho-syntactic details to the overarching linguistic and philosophical categories [...] able to signify, to "tell", to investigate in detail, hiding nothing behind any aesthetic screens' (van Mechen 2017: 244). But Benveniste avoided defining language, 'langue', just like Saussure did before him, rationalizing his decision by giving examples, thus showing how things work in practice, and here we see Dewey, and his philosophical stance, once more. Kristeva becomes his (Benveniste's) 'voice', supporting, confirming and strengthening his idea of the 'continuous intervention of psychic process in traslinguistic messages' (van Mechen 2017:236). Another point made by both scholars, especially Kristeva, concerns the history of semiotics, in other words. 'the way semioticians deal with the history of their field and study' (van Mechen 2017:236). Kristeva, once more influenced by Benveniste, supported that there are instabilities in the concept of speech (*parole*) and the language system (*langue*) and these instabilities are welcome as they draw our attention to the psychic of a person, his or her very depths, thus, telling us something about the influence the subject had on the persons utterance (van Mechen 2017: 244). Kristeva flourished (in her conceptualization of *semanalyses*) in the hands of Benveniste and she repaid his support by praising 'his ability to encompass the long tradition of linguistics, philosophy and semiotics', past and present (see van Mechen 2017: 244).

Chapter eighteen goes back in history to Plato's 'chora', and connects it to 'black holes', as existing realities, and also with the 'other', where the 'other' is the unknown in this case. 'Chora' is immaterial and yet it 'exists', and it cannot become the other as it is a form of 'other' anyway. 'Chora' as a black hole brings an internal imbalance as the uncertainty of the existence of the individual becomes debatable. So, how do we explain the reality of our existence and how do we continue to exist and reproduce if there is nothing? Is what I see simply a figment of my imagination, or is the person seated next to me a reality? Does nothing derive from something? Such philosophical questions seem to arise in chapter eighteen which also talk about the absence as a form of presence. The 'self', as an object, is 'devoured' by, and into, the 'black hole' of the 'chora', which stands for the unknown and which is never empty, as it 'gulps down' everything including the very essence of our existence. Even though we may not have a clear picture of what is included within a 'black hole', we can see what surround these 'black holes'. Hawking supported that there is "another universe inside every black hole and possible

gateways to other universes”, as Crawford (2017: 253) mentions. Plato’s stance on ‘chora’ and procreation is staunchly supported by recent research on the Big Bang Theory’ and the ‘black holes’. Perhaps, then, it is only appropriate to say that ‘black holes’ may be the beginning of a new existence, the ‘beginning of becoming’, as Crawford (2017: 252) so rightfully puts it. The concept of love goes back to Plato and before him, the first signs of the word ‘love’ are found in ancient Egypt, in the form of desire. In the Bible, too, the concept of love and love making is neatly hidden under a façade of ‘acceptable’ language, thus concealing the inappropriacies which love may carry within its broader meaning. But then aren’t we, as a human race, made of flesh and blood and don’t all our organs (heart, brain, etc.) participate in love as a notion and love making, as an act? Aren’t we created in the image of God (**κατ’ εικόνα και καθ’ ομοίωσιν**’- kat eona kai kath omiosin)? And isn’t God, himself, love? So far, this multiauthor book has explored themes which focused mainly upon matters of education, teaching and edusemiotics.

The chapter which follows, chapter nineteen, approaches a very interesting and refreshing concept, that of ‘love’, through the eyes of Seif (2017) and attempts to correlate love with edusemiotics. But how does ‘love’ or ‘eros’ fit into all this? How is love connected to teaching and learning? How do we define ‘love’ or ‘eros’? Seif (2017: 273) supports that we live, we learn and we love and we all have a ‘love for learning and the desire for creation’. The human race has often connected eros or love with sexual desire, but sexual desire may not always be connected to love. Sexual desire is often connected to something trivial, to the desires of the flesh, while love is ‘oriented towards wholeness’ (Seif 2017: 265), the spiritual and sometimes somatic unity of two (often different) entities. Semetsky (in Seif 2017: 265) talks about the interconnection between love and erotica and the exact relation is ‘indeed the province of edusemiotics that acknowledge the creative power of paradox’. Our feelings, even those of love, and our thoughts come to light through the images we produce and these images may be voiced, according to Semetsky (in Seif 2017) in the form of words in edusemiotics. On the other hand, according to the author of the text ‘the origin of knowledge is love’ (Seif 2017: 271) which exists within all spiritual traditions and that ‘only love in its various forms transcends survivably and sustainably and enables thrive-ability and liveliness’ (Seif 2017: 274).

The last chapter of the book, chapter twenty, broaches the subject of pictorial language and the unconscious, through the occult, and more specifically through the interpretation of the Tarot cards. Semetsky (2017) attempts to decode the symbolic nature of the tarot cards according to their position in the ‘spread’, thus bringing the unconscious forth to the conscious, in this way achieving an internal awareness which has not yet been expressed in words. This new awareness tilts our attention towards a new objective, a new goal, a new perspective never before thought of. A new awakening, a rebirth.

To round off, this collective volume is the epitome of edusemiotics. It subtly connects education and semiotics into the new and emerging field of edusemiotics, through the theoretical

research it presents, thus contributing, yet further, to the particular state of the art. It makes informative, educational and enjoyable reading to both novice and more experienced readers in the field. More specifically, for a didactician, such as myself, this book gives insights into the theory and philosophy of education, prompting its readers to think and act beyond the conventional boundaries of education (and teaching for that matter) as we know them. It gives didacticians a second option, a second point-of-view, a new scope upon which to construct new material and to build new methods of teaching. Though it is a book which focuses mainly on theoretical research, it does nevertheless give way to some – though limited – empirical research too, thus paving new roads in edusemiotics through experimentation and experimental research, which, once conducted, will give insights and enlighten scholars, especially didacticians in constructing new methods and approaches in teaching, especially the teaching of a foreign language.

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