

# Self-media. The self, the face, the media and the selfies<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** The self and identity are not only topics related to the selfies. They are connected to the development of media since the renaissance, the self-media. This is the thesis of the following. The subject, the self, is most clearly exposed in the face, and face and identity becomes important in the media since the renaissance. The selfies is just the newest development in this tradition, which began with the invention of the mirror, the book (printing), and the small painting. They all put the subject as both maker and receiver in the center. It was the beginning of the modern subject. The development continued throughout the coming centuries. The selfies is the newest creation to discover, explore, visualize and find the self of the subject. The following will thus emphasize the self, the face, where the self is most noticeably expressed and seen, and the self-media, where the individual can face him- or herself.

**Keywords:** Self-media. Self. Subject. Face. Mirror. Media. Selfies.

## 1 An opening...

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This was originally a keynote speech given at the International Conference on *Sensoric Image Science*, Sassari July 24, 2014. I have changed and added new material and ideas to the keynote speech in this article. Many heartfelt thanks and thoughts to the researchers, students and other people, who attended the conference in Sassari, and who participated in the discussions. Your presence was highly appreciated and very stimulating.



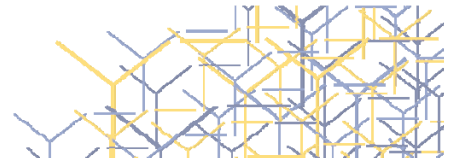
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I first coined the term, Self-Media, in my article “Selfies shape the world. Selfies, healthies, usies, felfies” (FAUSING, 2014, p. 108). I had no opportunity at that point to go deeply into the term and its implications. I will try to do that subsequently. The self and identity are not only issues connected to the selfies. They are connected to the expansion of media since the renaissance; this is the thesis of the following. The subject, the self, is most visibly exposed in the face, and face and identity becomes important in the media since the renaissance. The selfies is just the newest development in this tradition, which began with the invention of the mirror, the book (printing), and the miniature painting. They all put the subject as both maker and recipient in the center. This was the birth of the modern subject. The development continued throughout the coming times. The selfies is the latest invention to discover, explore, visualize and find the self of the subject. The following will therefore naturally focus on the self, the face where the self is most obviously expressed and seen, and the self-media, where the subject can face him- or herself.

## **2 The Self**

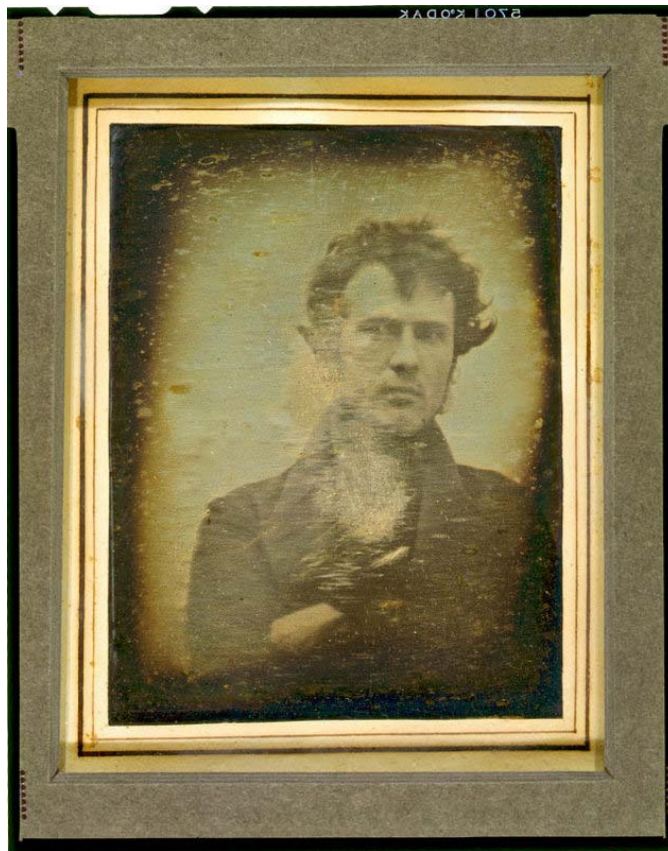
### **2.1 Self-reflection**

We are experts about things that concern ourselves one would think. No one else knows our thoughts, longings, doubts, recollections, and stories like we do. Yet, other people have the upper hand in one decisive respect.



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**Image 01:** First photographic selfie, taken by Robert Cornelius 1839.



Source: From internet, Library of Congress/Google Pictures.

They can see our faces. In order to have at least some of the knowledge others have about us, we can use a mirror to see our faces. Alternatively, we can take a selfie. Let us be reflected in the mirror or in a picture of ourselves and, through that, reflect upon ourselves. We are distinguished from the animals through our self-consciousness. If we hold a mirror up in front of an animal, it thinks it sees another of its own species. Apart from certain chimpanzees, animals do not identify themselves as themselves. To look at yourself in a



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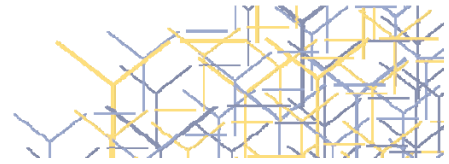
mirror or to depict yourself in a self-portrait, a selfie, is a form of reflection that not only separates us from the animals but also from other human beings because, through self-reflection, we step into character and become individuals. In addition, it is also an action by which we become something ‘in ourselves.’ We literally become unique.

Our ability to see ourselves when we look at ourselves is something uniquely human. By being reflected in the mirror and in a picture, the selfie, we become different from all other individuals despite the many common features in our faces. It is not for nothing that reflection means to bend back, to mirror, and to think. In their mirror images, individuals bend back toward themselves in order to observe themselves and their possible interaction with others. Through the sight of ourselves, we also get an opportunity to assess ourselves and think about ourselves. In the mirror image and the image of our self, our external face meets our internal consciousness. When we look in the mirror or at a selfie, the face comes to possess us because it shows the appearance to which we are bound or have a wish to mask. We acquire self-consciousness and, in a broader sense, self-reflection. How do I look to others? Will they accept me?

The mirror stage (LACAN, 2001) is the phase in which children become self-conscious of their adequacy or inadequacy in their mirror image and by comparing themselves with others as mirrors. In the selfie, it is instead an adult or near-adult who is testing and seeking acceptance and recognition from the outside world through a mirror image. The difference between the mirror stage and selfies consists primarily in the fact that it is mostly adults, who are seeking acceptance through the selfies.

## **2.2 Visualize oneself into being**

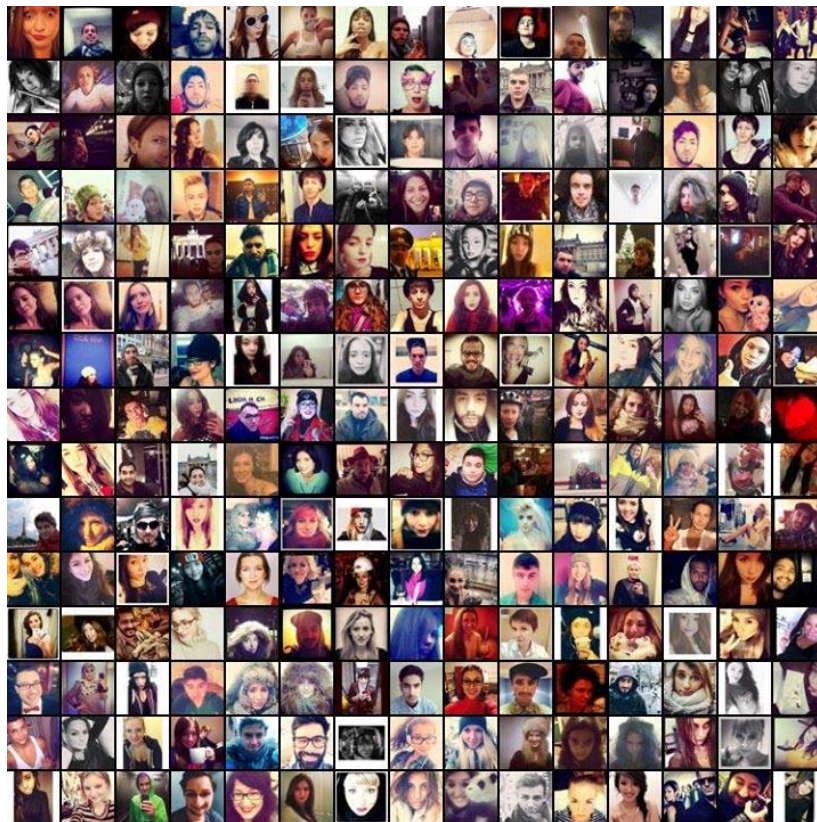
In 2007, in an article called “Why Youth (Heart) Social Network Sites” the anthropologist Danah Boyd explained that one “writes oneself into being” in social media. That statement is no longer true. Now, with the changes on Facebook with Timeline, the



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emergence of Pinterest, Tumblr and Instagram, and the changes in the old picture platform Flickr, the statement should more properly be: one visualizes oneself into being. Four parallel trends have arisen in social media in recent years. The first is that online sharing has required less and less time. The other is that social media have become more visually oriented. The third is that topic-centered networks are replacing group-centered sites.

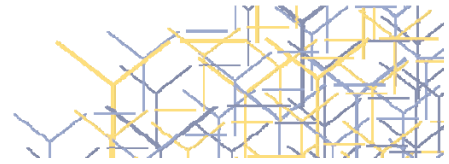
**Image 02:** Faces and selfies.



Source: Google Pictures, July 15, 2014.

The fourth is that there is shift from making written and substantial comments to indicating one's presence by short statements a la „wow“ or the use of visual signs for example, a heart. Pinterest and Instagram represent the culmination of all four trends. In





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addition, the selfie is an important means of expression about the self in this development in the social media and the most important factor in the development of these changes. The camera is (used as) a mirror in the selfie; often, there is an actual mirror in the picture, so there is a reflection in a mirror, since the picture shows it all. The mirror stage is the stage in which children become conscious of their competence or incompetence in their mirror image or by relating themselves with others as mirrors. The eyes of others form especially important mirrors for self-development. The mirror image functions in a similar way in the selfie, albeit with the addition that it is no longer about a small child. Instead, it is an adult or near-adult who tests and seeks acceptance and approval from the outside world through the mirror image in the selfie. The image of oneself is important and not necessarily a narcissistic tendency. It

**Image 03:** Philosopher Theodor W. Adorno getting ready for his mirror-image taken with the self-timer.



Source: Tumblr/Google Pictures February 20, 2015.



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Is necessary for the constitution and existence of an ego that it receive recognition. The social-philosopher Axel Honneth sees an anthropological need necessary for existence in recognition, which is founded early between mother and child and which becomes a matrix on which all later acceptance and recognition is created.

### 3 The Face

#### 3.1 The importance of the faces

We meet the world with our face. We are face to face with the surroundings. We are recognized first of all by our face. It is not a coincidence that social media is called Facebook and not Footbook. It is also in the face all our senses are situated. The face to face between mother or parent and infant are of crucial importance for the development of the child's later interactions and ability to build up relations and maintain interaction (WINNICOTT, 1999; STERN, 2000; TURKLE, 2011). However, we also learn how to manipulate with face, to put on literarily or metaphorically a mask. The avatars appearance will tell a lot about our wishes and fears, dreams and desires, hopes and anxieties.

**Image 04:** Another mirror-image. The camera is (used as) a mirror in the selfie; often, there is an actual mirror in the picture, so there is a reflection in a mirror, since the picture shows it all. She is taking a selfie with mirror, in mirror, in a mirror.



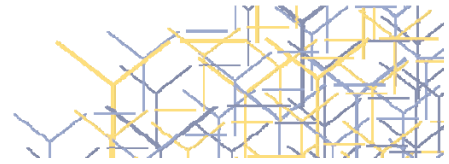
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Source: Tumblr/Google Pictures October 5, 2014.

The word *façade*, to put on a *façade*, come from face. You put on another and maybe fake face. The images reveal facades in different environments. All the expressions a face can master. Some invites up close, some opens up, and some closes all beginnings. Here lies another thesis in my approach: that we perceive a face no matter what we see. The fundamental matrices from the early stage between mother and infant follow us as a source of finding ‘faces’ that we like or dislike, openings we would enjoy to relate to or not, transgress or stay away from. Children very often draw a car or a house like face, a several cartoons and tv-commercials have taught them this anthropomorphisation. The singing bagel is – still - my own favorite among the many examples.





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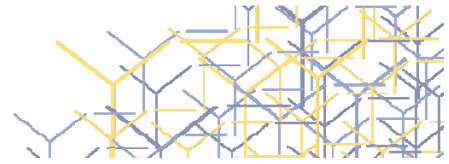
#### **4 The face mask**

There are situations where we only seem to seek one expression of face, not the ambiguity of the faces many looks and rapid changes of expressions. Yet we have to realize the facial ambiguity is also significant in this case. It applies to the mask. By the mask, we can be all those we want to be. The mask is a visual nickname that does not seem to reveal the real identity. We may show negative and positive sides like aggression and desires without expressing who we really are. We are apparently not personally responsible for our actions with the mask on. The mask is in a time of surveillance, computer technology and television an essential tool for any bank robber, thief and terrorist.

The criminal or quasi-criminals, those that exceed the law or take it into their own hands, as the banned terrorist organization, the Ku-Klux-Klan, and their mask, select the masks. The mask allows for violating the law and preserve anonymity. Photographer Andres Serrano took a famous picture of a Ku-Klux-Klan member, he did in this context reveal the difference between the terrifying impression they did with the mask and cowl, and so the poor and oppressed appearance in people's faces, which appeared without disguise.

#### **5 Conceal and reveal**

Within the actor-jargon is the phrase 'putting a mask', i.e. putting makeup and wig. The person who makes it is a 'masker'. We also have a range of everyday phrases, where mask is included. We can try and 'keeping up appearances'. It can be 'tight in the mask', so watch out gruff and take one particular expression of him- or herself, like a mask. Alternatively, a synonymous word we can use in one such case, 'facade'. We can try to 'keep up appearances' and not betray our real aim and preference. We can only try, because the body as such and the face especially with its high concentration of uncontrollable muscles includes pre-conscious



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and unconscious signals that can be difficult to regulate. Even poker players reveal itself precisely through its controlled control.

The right mask you put on and this bodily ego is formed masks toys. Masks are faces that have been acquired, immediate personalities. The mask is the most immediate and widespread form of disguise of the face of the self - and thus the transformation of the whole person - that exists. The mask is the imagination's face, because with a mask, we can be anyone, we want to be. However, the masks we choose also expose us. The mask conceals and reveals.

In other words, actor playing is the main report about the person. The mask may then unmask the figure behind . The 'impression management' (GOFFMAN, 2010, p. 132) may therefore, which Goffman ignores, reveal the dreams and longings of the personae trying to stage her- or himself. Photographer and essayist Richard Avedon (1989) talks about the acting or with his own terminology, the performance; but this is not something that should put down the image, on the contrary. The mask reveals the surface and contains synthesis. The surface is all we have. It tells about our wishes, desires, longings and thus hidden dreams.

A similar argument lies with psychologist Silvan Tomkins, who does not see the affect as something hidden, a deeper truth, which is concealed, rather as something very directly and clearly manifested in facial skin. Along this line, Avedon explains about the openness of the mask: "The point is that you can't get at the thing itself, (...) by stripping away the surface. The surface is all you've got. You can only get beyond the surface by working with the surface." (AVEDON apud SONNENBERG, 1989, p. 117). Now we arrive at something essential, because on the one hand, a mask can hide. It is on the other hand, an ambivalent and ambiguous cover, which may say more about the real person than the bare face. While there may be discrepancies between the actual person's being and the facial features that belong to it, and then the mask face.

Transformation or transfiguration or to hide that is the task of the mask. It is also the mask that we may reveal our deepest dreams and desires. The transformation, of the person by changing the facial expression through the mask helps us to go from being what we are, to be



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what we want to be. With the latter in mind, it is therefore not unnatural or difficult to understand why the mask perceived simply as a face come to symbolize "the solar and energetic aspects of the life-process." (CIRLOT, 1990, p. 206). This transformation is not a secret, but something that expresses - clipped - potentials and action. Another step to be suggested in relation to the media that has been discussed above. Sherry Turkle is talking about the 'role play' (1995, p. 188) such as in therapy groups and theater workshops, face to face, versus the parallel lives lived on the Internet's virtual chat groups – and now social media network - alongside the physical being in real life.

In the traditional face-to-face role-play, we step in and out of the mask, so to speak. When the meeting or the weekend is over, so you step out of character. Chat groups and social media offer rather an expression, a mask if you will, which is a parallel identity to the real identity and boundaries are more fluid, even after you have logged on. However, it is also an expression of opportunity and strength. We carry the potentials and empowerment in us and both can make themselves known in the concrete and virtual face masks.

We never lose face; we see them everywhere around us.

**Image 05:** Ukrainian mirror protest, January 2014. 'Take a look at yourself', you, the police and military, who protect V. Yanukovich's dictatorship of, are one of us. See for yourself in the mirror. Do not destroy or shoot yourself. The images and mirror around us reflect human beings and might help them to a consciousness of themselves.



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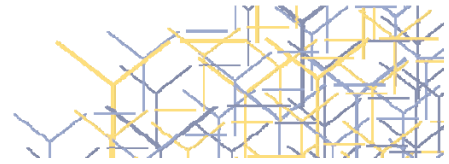
Source: Internet, from net.ua 12.1.2014/Huffington Post 14.1.2014.

## 6 The Self-Media

### 6.1 The development of the self-medias

Wherever they may be, people look at mirror images of themselves every day. In front of the mirror in the morning, during the course of the day in the bathroom, and in images mirrored in windowpanes and shiny surfaces around town. Mirror images permeate our private and public spaces. Every human being is familiar with his or her entire bodily appearance including facial expressions, gestures, and body language. Our creation of and experience with this appearance is embedded as an essential component of our conscious and unconscious knowledge.

It is hardly possible to imagine a world without mirrors and the loss of familiarity with the self that such a world would mean. We know that vagrants and homeless people can lose the internal image of their own appearance, so they can no longer immediately recognize themselves in a mirror.



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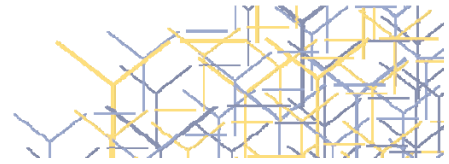
The chemist, theorist and writer Primo Levi (1992) recounts the human features of the mirror in more than one sense in surroundings in which humanity itself has disappeared: "A young prisoner at Auschwitz sees two women looking at themselves in a mud puddle. There are no mirrors in the camp – in order to prevent suicide attempts [!]. They turn their backs to him, they have a scarf around their heads, and their clothes are hanging in tatters. He looks carefully at the muddy water and recognizes some features. They are his cousins, bringing him news from the family." (*Ist das ein Mensch? München*, 1992, p. 8). Can there be any hope in seeing a mirror image of yourself when you have ended up in an inferno like a Nazi concentration camp? Through the mirror and the mirror image, you can see in your face the humanity lacking elsewhere in the camp. Even the elemental conditions for consciousness that are in seeing and, observing oneself and then, perhaps, achieving clarity are essential to stress in conjunction with the sense of vision, mirrors and visual media.

In another concentration camp, prisoners managed to hide a small, old mirror with bad silvering. In the evening, the mirror was secretly passed from prisoner to prisoner like a sacred relic in which everyone could identify their faces and thereby once again try to get one of the most important landmarks for the human being into their consciousness through the mirror. In places where all humanity seems to have disappeared, the mirror returns to prisoners the essential image of humanity, the face.

## 6.2 A self-duplication

We have this knowledge of the body and the face not only as constructed from early childhood through the active exploration of the world and through our use of the body and the senses. We also have a mirror consciousness, understood as a concept of our external self via reflection in mirrors, which is linked to the possibility of self-reflection. We have, so to speak, a view of ourselves from the outside, and yet it is from the inside, because it is ourselves –





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from the perspective of ourselves. A self-duplication: We look at ourselves with our own eyes and not those of others. We are both subject and object in the mirror-image.

Our self and self-consciousness has become more and more prominent since the Renaissance. It is also during the Renaissance that individuality starts to appear in small portraits, through individual tales and readings of books, and through the invention of the mirror. In all these new media characterized by the formation of a discrete screen around the individual's perception, it is the individual, the self, which creates and is created in the encounter with the media. This is the beginning of the screen societies. A single human being in Western culture is not; first and foremost, part of a tribe or a family as is the case, for example, in the Arab world. We are, primarily, ourselves, and the pronoun branding of our time expresses this: MySpace, YouTube, iPhone, iPad, iMac, iCloud..."Welcome to your world" (Time, December 26, 2006):

**Image 06:** The person of the year is You in front of the computer screen. You, the self, is in command via 2.0, your clicks and uploads. You are not only a user, but also from *now* on a creative and individual producer of content and experiences. The authoritative old web has gone, and a new flexible bottom up form has taken shape and put You in the driver's seat. The screen on this cover is like the one on YouTube and with an iMac keyboard. Everything seems so easy and in control for the You, but what does it cost if it is free. It takes the images, affects and tales of the You. However, this process is dynamic and also gives the individuals a chance to bend back toward themselves, mirror themselves, and reflect.



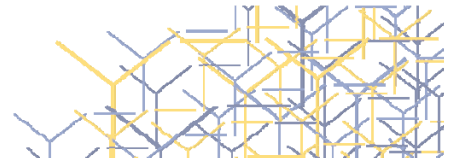
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Source: Time, December 26, 2006.

A round up and recapitulation through this model:

<b>The development of the self-media</b>				
<b>Renaissance, 1600</b>	<b>1839</b>	<b>1929</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2014</b>
Mirror	Photography reproduction	TV	You Tube	Selfies
Book (printing)	Mechanical revolution		2.0, 'You',	
(Miniature) painting	Modernity		Digital revolution	
			Late modernity	
Focus on subject/individuality.....				



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### **6.3 Self-portrait: I see myself**

Of course, this is due to the interaction of many things: work, religion, upbringing, schooling, and much else. It is also supported by our image culture in contrast to the Arab world's mostly ornamental visualizations. The images around us also mirror human beings in their way and help them to a consciousness of themselves. Self-consciousness. The democratization of the mirror is, presumably, the factor that has most extended and confirmed impact for our self and individuality.

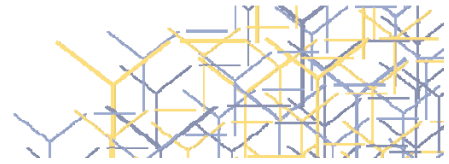
At the same time, with the invention of the mirror, small framed paintings began to take over from large murals. The reduced format and increased liberation and secularization of motifs in relation to earlier divine laws encouraged a different technique in the artist and a different gaze from the observer. Both the technique and the observation became much more intimate and individual. The same thing applies to the self-portrait, which arises at the same time as the mirror. The mirror and the self-portrait accentuate the same new meanings in Western society: to view oneself, to create a reflection of oneself and thereby think about oneself and one's situation.

## **7As In a Mirror**

### **7.1 Optical media and the mass experience**

With the mirror follows yet another medium that is directly linked to the invention and dissemination of the glass and the mirror, i.e. the camera, which is made possible by optical lenses produced from glass. The camera could create mirror images, portraits, and self-portraits. Masses of them.

In the wake of the emergence of the camera and its optics came other optical media – film, TV, video, web-cam and smartphones – that were particularly well-suited to reproduce the face: the close-up. The photograph and related visual and audio-visual media were part of a



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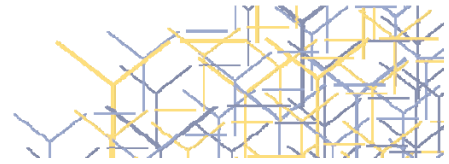
society that turned toward mass production and reproduction as well as mass communication. This new production and communication provided mass experiences and, through this, provided for many people easy and inexpensive access to see themselves and, therefore, attain self-identity, as opposed to exclusive portrait paintings. As in a mirror.

**Image 05:** Life for an image.



Source: Fay Fausing/Bent Fausing, internet University Post/Information April 24, 2014.

This image is from Bangladesh in 2013, where a disaster in a clothing plant buried and killed many people. A man is searching for his wife, child, or relative, with this blurred photo. His rough hand holds it like silk, like an endearment and something precious. The image is life for him; he wants it to reflect life as in a mirror, even though the photo is a fixed moment and in that **way** 'dead'. He wants the life of his dear one in return for his priceless still image. It is a touching and powerful image, even without the narrative connected to the photo; one can feel this is a search, a plea. The relic, which was apparent in use of the mirror in the concentrations camp of Primo Levi, is also obvious here. The photo speaks of both presence and absence, she is there with her face, her identity and uniqueness, yet she is gone. He holds her ghost in his open palm as an offering to the gods, in hope of it bringing her back to life ...The drone in modern warfare kills for an image. Here is the opposite, life for an image. The



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man holding the photo is touching destiny, the gesture expresses a wish for life instead of an image.

**Notes:**

\*Winnicott plays an important role in Sherry Turkle's latest book, *Alone Together: Why we expect more from technology and less from each other* (Cambridge, Mass. 2011). On Facebook she states July 15, 2011 to Jessica Broitman about the importance of Winnicott: "Jessica Broitman: Ahhh you and winnicott. Sherry Turkle: Definitely, I like to think that I am channeling Winnicott for the digital age. One in which we are forgetting the importance of connection (and of solitude!)."

As I explain in the beginning of this article, I first coined so to speak the term *Self-Media* in an article, which was published in Danish in February and in English in April 2014. Here are the two links to the English versions of my articles, where you also will find further references and elaborations about Self-Media:

<[https://www.academia.edu/4418191/Selfies\\_and\\_the\\_Search\\_for\\_Recognition.\\_See\\_for\\_your\\_Selfie](https://www.academia.edu/4418191/Selfies_and_the_Search_for_Recognition._See_for_your_Selfie)>

<[https://www.academia.edu/4418191/Selfies\\_and\\_the\\_Search\\_for\\_Recognition.\\_See\\_for\\_your\\_Selfie](https://www.academia.edu/4418191/Selfies_and_the_Search_for_Recognition._See_for_your_Selfie)> or <<http://www.scribd.com/doc/213679678/Selfies-Shape-the-World-Selfies-Healthiest-Usies-Felfies>>

I would also like to draw attention to this article:

<[https://www.academia.edu/191097/Soulful\\_Technologies.\\_Everyday\\_Aesthetics\\_in\\_New\\_Media](https://www.academia.edu/191097/Soulful_Technologies._Everyday_Aesthetics_in_New_Media)>

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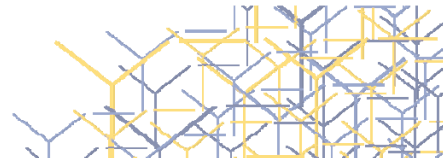




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