

Selfie. Or on the fetishism of self-timer.

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I offer a useless, sometimes even desperate, resistance to the daily abuse of communication that is carried out through social networks. I try not to share opinions, witty mottoes, appreciated films or music tracks, kittens or pussy cats, least of all pictures of myself. It's not that I insist on the anachronistic and impracticable idea of protecting my own privacy. It is rather a matter of insecurity. It is a wimp fear that any shared contents will end up showing my profile as inconsistent, incomplete, misleading, and hardly verifiable.

As of late, I have frequently run in the English neologism *selfie*, which has been imposing itself to my attention with a rather growing and insidious recurrence. At first I did not understand its meaning, and was paying very little attention to the explanatory pictures accompanying the numerous headlines about it, or to newspapers' side-columns reporting its existence. These images were so bewilderingly up-to-date and out-of-context, as they would show shamelessly inviting and stereotyped poses, blurry pictures, and filters from ancient photographic films, real or fake contingencies. Then I started having doubts when I read the topic that the magazine *Edel | Semestrare di Pratica Cristallina* was proposing me to investigate: "*who communicate what to whom*". What if the selfie is the zero grade of today's communication? As I have always been fascinated by the zero grades of anything that can be expressed in grades, I chose to make it a subject for reflection.

Selfie. I am no linguist, but I suppose that it comes from *self*, which can be explained as connected with one's own identity, in other words with anything that pertains to "I". As we know, it is used in expressions such as *self-made man*, i.e. a person that has made him/herself. Of course, it also has noble origins, as it can be linked to the idea of self-portrait, or to something that is coded, if you wish, in stereotypical forms. However, the same concept is now being emptied and amplified by social networks, and it distopically appears as "I communicate myself to myself", though whoever chooses to portrait him/herself desperately tries to signify it as "I communicate myself to the world", with the result of engendering a hollow, clumsy and overestimated communication, on the road to an overcrowded channel. And, of course, the noble father has always played a self-referring role, one that would imply a raising awareness from the same artist, of the artist towards him or herself. Head and shoulders, three quarter, sometimes portrayed while holding his working tools, with his eyes openly staring at the observer, with an intense expression achieved after having spent hours looking at him/herself in a mirror. Today the head and shoulders position may also become a full-figured image, sometimes erotic and, more rarely, an ironic one; it is a shot taken in the bathroom [because there, there is a long mirror that we can still make use of, yet one uses it in order to look at oneself as (one would hope) others (also engaged in self-portraying) will eventually look at us to depict themselves, rather than to probe every single part of one's self/oneself], while in one hand we are holding the device – this one, on the other hand, carefully studied in order not to take a faulty snapshot – that same device that instantly creates and broadcasts our message.

It is not by chance that, during the Middle Ages, self-portraits were rare, and did not constitute a genre on its own right; the artist depicts him/herself when he/she is able to think he/she is an artist. But when does the average social network user start portraying him/herself? Is it perhaps when he or she becomes aware that he or she is, actually, an average user of a social network?