Review paper

SELFIES, PERFORMATIVITY, AND INDIVIDUALISM

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Abstract. *The paper analyses the influence of selfies on public performance. Contemporary media public is called by some theorists (Rojek, 2015) the "egocentric public", primarily the users of social networks. Hedonism, consumption and egoism are only some of the characteristics of the modern society, which also points to the characteristics of visual culture. From a philosophical viewpoint as one of the phenomena of visual culture to which special attention is given starting with psychologists, art theorists and communication agents, and all the way to philosophers, the selfie supports the hypothesis that individualism is characteristic to contemporary culture.*

The paper examines the performance strength of the selfie (Senft, Baym, 2015) as well as the characteristics of the modern media public. The methods include the analytical and descriptive methods. The conclusion is that the selfie confirms that contemporary culture is dominated by individualism and that, from a pragmatic point of view, the contemporary media public belongs to the "culture of selfies" in which the subject simultaneously becomes an object emphasizing narcissism and the illusionary focus on the other.

Key words: *visual culture, selfie, media public, performativity, philosophy of individualism, illusion.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Modern society is surrounded by visual culture. Human beings were communicating through images even before the appearance of scripts, and that is exemplified by the cave drawings, hence the impression that visual literacy is in our genes. The shift from script to image is a phenomenon which is present due to the development of the mass media, primarily the visual media. Printing, television, the Internet, and the commercials make our everyday life visual and humans put their trust in what they can see. The development of painting, photography and its widespread use provided the opportunity for humans to present, first of all, himself/herself and his/her life and then the places he/she visits. Let

us not forget that the first photos were the portraits (Fizi, 1982), whose aim was not to present the exterior, that is, the appearance but the character of a photographed individual. The development of smartphones from a pragmatic aspect as we know them today, selfies are made by business people, celebrities, elder people, young, children, or, to make a long story short, selfies have become a part of our visual culture. The development of social networks enables connections among a large number of people, as well as the perception of their selfies. The paper refers to Rojek's hypothesis (Rojek, 2015) about the egocentric public[1], and then, in accordance with this hypothesis, it examines to what an extent the role and the effects of selfies confirm this hypothesis. The effects of selfies, like nature itself, tell us about the performative nature[2] of the selfie; therefore, we examine which elements of genuine performance can be found in selfies. In the end, we put selfie into the context of individualistic philosophy with its negative meaning, just as characteristic modern individuality.

2. SELFIE

The selfie represents social, cultural and media phenomenon (Frosch, 2015). "The selfie has been understood in relation to rapid 'documenting' of the self as a 'socio-cultural revolution' about 'identity affirmation', a 'condition of social media', a political convergence of the object and subject of photographic practice, and as a neoliberal, even narcissistic but increasingly normative mode of 'self-branding' "(Gomez Cruz, Thornham 2015, 2). The selfie is contextually determined, and it also resonates to social, political and visual practice, as Gomez Cruz and Thornham explain (2015).

Theorists of the history of art think that the selfie is not a new phenomenon. The forerunner of the selfie is a portrait. Samardžić (2015) believes that it is possible that a selfie could be a phenomenon of art in the future. The self-portrait as a self-sufficient part of photography emerged in the 15th century and later in the 19th. The first selfies appeared in 1839, and were made by Robert Cornelius in Philadelphia. Yet some theorists think that the first selfie appeared in New York in 1920 (Stojanović Prelević, 2020). What are the similarities and differences between a self-portrait and a selfie? Both of these are not superficial, and they represent the psychology of the person that is presented. At the same time both of them are not always serious and they can also present an egoistic side or vanity. Samardžić highlights self-portraits as self-representations of artists, yet they are also status symbols, and represent the egos of the presented persons. It took a lot of time to make self-portraits. To make a selfie we just need one click. Technology enables mass reproduction of selfies, which was impossible before. Samardžić concludes that there are two points which divide these phenomena – context and functions (Samardžić, 2015).

There are different functions of selfies. Psychologists and others connected selfies to harmful mental states such as narcissism (Nauert, 2015), body dysmorphia (McKay, 2014), or even psychosis (Gregoire, 2015). Others say that narcissism is not a diagnosis but an accusation (Burns, 2014). This is because narcissism connotes vanity.

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[1] *Egocentric public* is the emergence of socially networked public, which is new form of communications and presents media biased environment.
[2] Performatives are speech acts which change the social reality. When we talk about "performative nature" we think about possibility of performing some action by utterance – to present something, to inform, to advice, to promote etc. In visual culture, we could talk about selfies as performative acts.

Another function is self-promotion. Politicians, organizations or public figures use selfies with the purpose of promoting themselves.

"These days, most theorists (Mulvey herself) concede that a purely voyeuristic model of image spectatorship needs updating: certainly, sexuality, race, class, education, ability, and nationality may all alter spectators identifications with the look of the camera, making it is impossible to say what a viewing experience 'means' for every viewer. When considering images that circulate online, this multiplicity of perspectives tends to be even more obvious" (Senft, Baym 2015, 1595).

3. Individualism and Egoism

The term 'individual' can be attributed to every single specimen (every living being who belongs to the human population). Only a specimen with special qualities which becomes unique and authentic can be referred to as a person (Jovanović 2012, 65). However, the notion of individualism has a broad range of meaning in the social sciences – methodological, political, cultural, etc. Considering that the selfie has originated in the neoliberal society, it would be good to analyze it within the context of the individualism of this age. Individualism has been differently characterized throughout history and, therefore, has a positive meaning, such as individualism in the 18th century, for example. Today it has a negative meaning. The roots of individualism are found in epicureanism, and then in nominalism and Protestantism, which created the base for not only capitalism, but also liberalism, by propagating individual responsibility and conscientious action. Individualism can also be observed as an aspect opposite to collectivism. While individualistic cultures single out an individual as an important and independent subject who is able to make rational decisions, collectivism puts an individual within the context of a group member (Bošković 2017, 4).

According to the concept of individualism, as a theory of society (Hayek, 2002), an individual takes care of society's interests and individualism represents an attempt to understand the strengths which determine the social life of humans. Nowadays, an individual is someone who follows their own interests and not the interests of society. In this sense, we can say that the basis of the behavior of a modern individual is egoistic. In the context of analyzing egoism, the philosophy of Hobbes and his interpretation of egoism are undoubtedly very significant. According to Hobbes, society is composed of simple elements, and it represents the collection of "atoms" therefore "individuals" from which everyone is a unique composition whose aim is self-preservation and who is guided by his/her own selfish purposes (Koplston, 1996, 21). In the context of the conception of the state of nature, egoism could be understood as a thorough expression of naturalism, and not as a morally connoted behavior which deserves to be condemned, as explained by Sadžakov (Sadžakov 2012, 66). The issue here is psychological egoism. With Hobbes, the reason is understood as an expression of calculation, as a medium which measures, calculates. Hobbes introduces the position of "rational egoism" according to which the correct reasoning calculation leads to the realization of our tendencies, and to the avoidance of what we believe is bad. If this calculation is applied onto the modern phenomenon of the creation and the posting of selfies, the individual who selects the selfie that he/she will make public, can be labeled as a rational egoist. A selfie should represent an individual in their best light. This is, however, the question of one's focus on the self. However, if we would like to inform someone else about something which would

be useful for him/her, by using selfies, we, according to Hobbs, demonstrate our power and thus, above all, we indulge ourselves. In the situations when we feel sorry or we empathize with others, we, in fact, feel sorry for ourselves by imagining some future misfortune which could happen to us as well. Our actions always come from personal passion, ambition, lust and interest (Hobbes, 2006).

3.1. Individualisation and Iillusion

Due to the growing trend of post-industrial society, there is a loss of the "humanistic dimension" of culture which is supposed to be the space of the formation of identity and the process of individualization (Vukadinović 2013, 54). Profit becomes the guiding principle, creativity is reduced, there is less and less investing into culture. Culture becomes equal to sensationalism, while instead of artists, media stars become dominant, the so-called celetoids (Rojek, 2001). The modern individualization becomes limited in multiple ways (Vukadinović 2013, 158). This refers to post-socialist countries, in particular, which is why we speak of the extorted and pseudo individualization. The reduction of the possibility to achieve aspirations leads to the reduction in aspirations. The consequences of the "pseudo individualization" on a general social plan reflect in passivism, infantilism, easy acceptance of different ideological and value concepts; and frustrations of different types are most often resolved in a kind of escapism, which is provided by the consumer culture in the transition period with its "promises", the media and mass entertainment with offered "reminiscences" (Vukadinović 2013, 159).

Modern society is characterized by an increased tendency towards the values of affective autonomy – exciting life, enjoyment in life, comfort, quick acquisition of power and material success (Schramm, 2004). Fame is perceived as a ticket to continuous enjoyment and as something that can bring numerous benefits. A tendency towards hedonism is also reflected in the contents of one's free time. In this sense, a selfie represents one of the ways of entertainment of the young and "the famous". One's appearance, new styling, a recent journey or fun event can be shared with friends through social networks. The creation of selfies is enabled by smartphones. Previously, important events were recorded by cameras and there were photos, and now all this goes more quickly and in favor of egocentric public and hedonistic culture. Usually, the public individual chooses which selfies to share with friends and, in that way, selects selfies and shapes reality, that is, the illusion. If a digital film represents illusion because it does not occur in real time and space, we can say the same for a selfie. On the other hand, in the same way a film can express the author's experience and perception, a selfie can tell us something about the person who presents himself/ herself. Lipovecki (2013) names a modern individual a hypermodern individual. His/her self-portrait is constructed in extensive introspection, as a mode of life which is made more and more banal, as compulsive communication and self-promotion in which everyone tends to highlight his/her own "profile" through the search for new friends by using personal affinities, photos, journeys, etc. (Lipovecki 2013, 18).

Human beings trust their eyesight and, therefore, place trust in images. Doubting the credibility of what is seen can jeopardize one's psychological state (Jovanović, 2015). However, as explained by Jovanović, visibility is risky and dangerous, precisely because it is open. Even though they are aware of this delusion, people accept the risk to make what is seen equal to the illusion. In this way, it becomes both mystical and it requires to be completed by imagination, and images, associations, and suggested photos (Jovanović

2015, 299). Paul Milgram (1994) explained the relationship between AR (artificial reality) and VR (virtual reality). The reality – virtual reality continuum encompasses all possible variations and compositions of real and virtual objects. The area between the two extremes, in which both the real and the virtual are mixed, is called mixed reality. There the virtual augments reality, and the real augments the virtual. Namely, the illusion is ascribed to artificial reality, which is defined as a subcategory of virtual reality. The syntagm of the extended reality introduces confusion into the standard discourse on the subject-object relation, because the extension can be observed from the viewpoints of both the subject and the object (Vuksanović 2017, 148). Technology breaks the distance between the subject and the object, because the subject simultaneously becomes the object. The selfie can serve as a good example of this cessation.

4. PERFORMATIVE FORCE OF SELFIE

"First and foremost, a selfie is a photographic object that initiates the transmission of human feeling in the form of a relationship (between photographer and photographed, between image and filtering software, between viewer and viewed, between individuals circulating images, between users and social software architectures, etc.)" (Senft, Baym 2015, 1590). These interactions show pragmatic dimension of selfies and an open possibility to talk about the performative force of selfies. The term "performative force" comes from Austin's theory of performative. It means that utterances have meanings which are actions or could produce some kind of actions – for example – promising, ordering and so on. We could translate that function to selfies, which was done by Rojek and Martensen (2015). They analyzed celebrity selfies in the context of celebrification or the "culture of universal promotion" (Wernick, 1992). "By producing and distributing selfies, celebrities not only erase the borderlines between themselves and fans by publishing on social network sites and showing scenes from the private spheres" (Rojek, Martensen 2015, 7). The main common characteristic of performative and selfie is that, like performative, "selfies invariably allude to their own production" (Rojek, Martensen 2015, 11). Austin said that performative acts are done as soon as they are spoken (1962). When you utter: "I promise to come to you tomorrow", it is a promise just by saying it. The performative theory is a part of the pragmatic theory whose focus is on the relation between work and public (utterance and hearer). In that sense, theorists analyzed the context of utterance (or work, for example, selfie) and intentions. Referring to the art historian Von Hantelman, Rojek and Martensen argue that: "... performativity transfers attention from the work and the user, which is a useful point for understanding the particular performativity at play in celebrity selfies. From this perspective, performativity is used here in a strictly Austinan manner in order to point out how the celebrity selfie accomplishes an act in the social world and constitutes a communicative gesture – at once pointing at a drawing the user in closer" (Rojek, Martensen 2015,13).

Selfies are in some hand intimate and invite public to like persons presented in the selfie and to be a part of their private lives. The pragmatic influences are stronger than this, the public could identify itself with celebrities. This is realized by paying attention to the self. The context of selfies determined the force of selfies. For example, when we talk about politicians` selfies, there are office selfies, revolutionary selfies and so on. Office selfies are selfies made in politicians` workspace. Revolutionary selfies are selfies made

at protests. We can identify the use of these selfies with the propaganda technique called the "technique of innocence" (Stojanović Prelević, 2019, 167). The intentions of the author (the subject of the selfie) are mostly directed to the object of the selfie, namely to the author. In some way, we can say that politicians want to create a good image, the same as celebrities, or ordinary people. The author of the selfie says: Hey, I am here, I am good, I am pretty or I'm having fun! The selfie is auto-referential and that is the reason why it represents narcissistic culture.

5. EGOCENTRIC PUBLIC

It has been long since it was proven that the media public was not passive public. Lasswell's theory of the magic bullet (1927) according to which the viewers receive information like "bullets", was refuted soon after its appearance. Paul Lazarsfeld and Katz (1940) have shown that media influence is not direct and there are two channels of influences: opinion leadership and media channel. The roots of the opinion that public can be easily manipulated have been traced all the way back to Ancient Greece. A dialogue was the basis of communication between the speaker and the public, and it was live. It is believed that this was the public that was critical, unlike the modern one which is manipulative. In order for the public to be active, there has to be an option of providing feedback. The written text, according to Plato, opens enough space to manipulation, which is why Plato wrote in the form of a dialogue, in which the reader is given freedom to interpret what was said. This dialogical method enables criticism and the possibility of finding the truth. However, it cannot be denied that public communication, i.e., live communication is also suitable for manipulation. This was well known by the old Romans, sophists and the old Greeks. Rhetoricians and sophists taught the speaker various communication skills, speech styles, the manner of presentation, etc. However, not only speech, but the character and the very appearance of the speaker influenced the public as well. This indicates that what is said and seen mutually influences the receiver. Visual communication through television, printing and the Internet, additionally stimulates the public by influencing their perception and opinion.

With many theorists, the digitalization of the media has influenced the creation of the opinion that modern public is active. The possibility of responding to the news through comments in online media and social networks, followed by the development of the civic journalism and its influence on the mainstream media are only some of the reasons for the occurrence of this "illusion". In the paper, the standpoint that the modern media public is active public is referred to as an illusion, which was shown throughout the text.

Another epithet is attributed to the modern public, and that is that it is egocentric (Royas 2015, Royas et all. 2012. Wojscieszak & Rojas, 2011). Royas and Wojscieszak claim that this egocentric public is not representative at large, but that it is formed by cumulative interactions of individuals as their life experience, affinities or tastes (Rojas 2015). Egocentric public is based on social networks. Rojas believes that this public is egocentric because, from our perspective we are at the centre of the network, which is not same for the network. Our egocentric network is not lonely. We are connected with other egocentric networks (Rojas 2015,94). "We argue that egocentric public may serve as a "filter" for system level information, and at the same time it functions as a "pump" infusing social networks with everyday experience and world outlook" (Rojas 2015, 97). Rojas, Barnidge

and Abrile (2016) ask the following: Do social media contribute to the hostile or friendly environment? They conclude that reliance on social media produces media bias. Also, egocentric public can represent sources of political mobilization, even part of political mobilization. If it is true that people are divided in social networks groups which are ideological and homogenous, then we can state that the world is polarized. People who think like me are my friends and others are not. Then we can talk about friendly and unfriendly media (Galtung, Ruge 1965). Digital media, they argue, contribute to these processes through technologies that enhance cognitive and social filtering of information along lines of ideological and/or social similarity (Sunstein, 2007)". We can say that a digital media enable us to find like-minded people, also they help us to stay in that "safe enviroment", yet these feelings are an illusion.

Also, in Rojas words: "Following the logic of egocentric publics, increased heterogenity of social contact and exposure to incongruent media and/or social opinion may heighten the salience of disagreeable ideas, which could lead to perceived media bias and contribute to perception of political polarization that may, or may not, be accurate" (Royas, Barnidge, Abril 2016, 28).

The selfie could be said to be a toll of egocentric public. Philosophy of the selfie is to present oneself with the intentions to be presented in an interesting way, as a successful person, to be presented prettier than one is in real life, etc. We can ask if the selfie can help people in real life to be better – as professionals, for example, to be more successful. When we discuss celebrities and their selfies, the focus is on their private life, politicians make such selfies with intentions to present themselves as regular people. Borders between private and public are crossed. Selfies could be used in manipulations with fans, voters and so on. This is the dark side of selfies. The other part of this dark side is the growth of narcissism and living in delusion. Also, the replacement of real life with the virtual one, or real self with mounted selfies is a real problem. We will go back to the question above: Can the selfie help people in real life to be better as professionals, for example, to be more successful? If we accept as right the saying "Our thought determine our lives", maybe we can accept the statement: Your selfies determine yourself! Or it could be just a "myth of the selfie truth" apropos the "myth of photographic truth" (Barthes, 1985).

6. CONCLUSION

John Austin's linguistic-philosophical performative theory could be applied in different areas: visual culture (Rojek, Martensen, 2015), feminism (Butler, 1993), fiction (Searle, 1994, Fish, 1980, Derrida 1988), sociology and anthropology (Ervin Goffman, 1959, McKenzie 2001, Turner 1974) etc. The paper shows that intentions and context could help in the analyses of meaning of selfies. The force of performatives or meaning indicates a kind of selfies and could tell us something about the influence of selfies on the public.

Contemporary public is just illusorily active. Digitalization of media enables participation of the public in the digital sphere, regardless of the nature of social networks. By using algorithms, the movement in the circle of like-minded people creates an illusion of democracy of social networks, but, on the other hand, increases egocentrism and egoism. The selfie is an extended arm of this illusion. It helps the public in self-promotion, informing, hedonism, ego-strengthening, and bigger familiarity about the self. Focusing on someone else is yet again illusion if focusing on someone else is deliberate, therefore it is intended and false.

Contemporary individuality in neoliberalism confirms that an individual is prone to enjoyment, surrounded by culture, thereby his own face – a visually "successful" and "happy" individual whom social media enable to show that. This individual is just illusionary oriented towards others, while in fact he/she is focused on the self, which is confirmed by Hobbes' theory on natural egoism.

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SELFI, PERFORMATIVNOST I INDIVIDUALIZAM

Autor u radu ispituje uticaj selfija na publiku. Savremenu medijsku publiku pojedini teoretičari (Rojek, 2015) nazivaju "egocentric public", prevashodno korisnike društvenih mreža. Hedonizam, potrošnja i egoizam su samo neke od karakteristika savremenog društva što ukazuje i na karakteristike vizuelne kulture. Pojava selfija kao fenomena vizuelne kulture koji istražuju psiholozi, teoretičari umetnosti, komunikolozi, filozofi, potkrepljuje hipotezu da savremenu kulturu karakteriše individualizam kao filozofsko stanovište.

U radu ispitujemo performativnu snagu selfija (Senft, Baym, 2015) kao i karaktersitike savremene medijske publike. Korišćene su analitička i deskriptivna metoda. Zaključak je da pojava selfija potvrđuje hipotezu da savremenom kulturom preovladava individulizam i da savremena medijska publika, sa pragmatičkog aspekta, pripada „kulturi selfija" u kojoj subjekt istovremeno postaje objekt, sa naglaskom na narcisoidnost i prividnu upućenost na drugog.

Ključne reči: *vizuelna kultura, selfi, medijska publika, performativnost, filozofija individualizma, privid.*