Self representation and the disaster event
Self-imaging, morality and immortality

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Abstract,

There's growing interest in the notion of the 'selfie' in the digital age. Much of the interest has been making sense of this digital genre pervasive in its manifestation while implicating the individual and hinging on public gaze in digital platforms. As a form of self-representation, the selfie reveals the complex interplay of identity politics and self curation where the self is amenable to multiple iterations of public gaze. This article drawing on this complex interplay inspects a specific phenomenon in this selfie culture where there is a tendency to picture oneself against the scene of trauma or tragedy. The 'disaster selfie' or 'disaster porn' as a particular genre invokes questions of the moral limit in the objectification and aestheticisation of self. The article explores the moral politics of disaster selfies, role of the abject and our quest for immortality where these invoke a wider crisis for visuality and image ethics online.

Introduction

Self-representation has taken a myriad forms over time and space. Our quest for immortality has meant leaving traces of ourselves in this mortal world. From paintings, sculptures, journals, photographs, to tombstones, we turn to cultural artefacts to imprint our mortal existence and to elongate it after death. This article specifically locates the selfie through the digital culture of the internet. It argues that self-representation is pegged to a wider complex phenomenon of what Zygmunt Bauman terms as 'strategies for immortality' where the visuality online lends to both authentication and validation of self through communal consumption in public platforms while enabling a longevity through a digital architecture which relentlessly 'remembers', captures, stores and circulates data.

There has been a proliferation of papers on the selfie in the recent years and the selfie has been discussed from many angles whether it be from digital activism, as part of a wider

public relations of an organisation or nation (Kuntsman and Stein 2015) or in highlighting the narcissistic and self-obectification tendencies it connotes (Ibrahim 2009: Grabmeier 2015; Fox & Rooney 2015). In November 2013, the *Oxford Dictionaries* announced the word "selfie" as their international word of the year 2013. (Tayor 2014). *Time* Magazine designated it as one of the most used buzz words of 2012 (cf. Fausing 2013). Selfie denotes imaging oneself through a mobile gadget usually a smartphone. Both the author and subject converge creating a highly intimate composition denoting personal ownership, aesthetificization, curation and representation and equally self-commodification for social exchange and interaction. Here the self is both the subject and object. The spectator and spectacle become fused. A 2014 Pew study reveals that millennials (aged 18 to 33) have posted selfies more than any other generation and in tandem used the internet, cell phone and social media sites more than any other generation. The research found that 55% of millenials had posted a selfie on a social media site (Taylor 2014).

The selfie without doubt has social and political resonance and multiple iterations as a cultural and social artefact. It more importantly it hinges on degrees of social visibility and degrees of 'publicness' where the authentication and validation of the selfie is pegged to a wider communal gaze. This brings into focus the role of the public gaze. The public gaze as a form of communal looking and consumption is not unilateral for various elements coalesce in the act of communal watching but in this instance the selfie seeks validation to authenticate one's private experiences, as part of the identity politics online and as a form of gift giving economy online. In implicating the gaze of a wider audience in the act of self-objectification and aestheticisation, the presentation of self(ie) in a public platform can be associated with risk, governance, surveillance and voyeurism (Ibrahim 2008). The selfie through the act of sharing and exchange imbues a sociality, and equally social capital. The invitation to gaze and rituals around 'selfie' consumption such as 'likes' or retweeting affirms that the selfie survives within this validation and consumption economy.

The selfie is invariably a product of technological convergence where handheld devices like the mobile phone enable the capture of images with the ease of dissemination and storage online. As mobile technologies become a form of prosthetic memory extending cognitive and visual functions through technical capacities, the fusing of the bodily functions with technical capacities present new ethical and moral challenges for humanity and society. The ubiquity of the mobile phone and convergence of technologies, particularly imaging and recording features not only extends memory but also the eye. This technological convergence and the co-location of recording and memory devices on the smartphone fast forwards domestic amateur photography into a new intensity of capture and upload and in tandem consumption, archival and retrieval online. The smartphone embedded on the body provides a means to record and narrate the everyday (Ibrahim 2008b; 2015). Here the self becomes a subject of imagination, representation, curation equally self-objectification inscribing both a subject and object position into the process of capturing one's image through digital photography. Unlike film-based photography which had associated costs with film processing, digital photography has an ease of exchange and storage. The reduction in processing costs and the convergence of multiple features in smartphones and mobile technology has facilitated the exhibition of

everyday life. The banal imagery of life routines can be commodified as images and offered for consumption and exchange on social networking platforms (Ibrahim 2015). The self becomes objectified as part of this ubiquitous and insatiable appetite for capturing the everyday life.

The selfie while on the one hand can be seen within the trajectory of advancements in photographic technology, the digitisation of images nevertheless conjoins many elements beyond the ease of capture and ubiquity presented by the convergence of technologies (Ibrahim 2011; 2012). The co-location of mobile technologies as part of the body then extends visuality, communication and memory inserting selfie into a social economy where it is recognised as a distinct cultural genre in the digital age. The commodification of the self(ie) and its exchange and consumption online imbues this process with multiple meanings. As Baudrillard argues, in postmodernity meaning is produced by endless symbolic exchanges within a dominant code whose rhetoric is self-referential (See Porter 1993: 21). In the arena of 'consumption objects become a vast paradigm designating another language through which something else speaks'(cf. Porter 1993: 21). The selfie as a form of symbolic exhange as such is not simply collapsible within one specific frame for it speaks to wider possibilities of meaning making from authentication of an event, voyeurism, diarisation, self representation to constructing notions of reality. The selfie allows for the self to be narrated, imagined and consumed through visual imagery. Today the selfie has been accepted as an intrinsic element of digital culture fusing it intimately with everyday life.

Like every new medium before it, the Internet has re-invigorated popular fantasies of a life extended in the machine; of living on in cyberspace. Our bodies may decompose, but our minds may somehow survive (Brillenburg-Wurth and van de Ven 2012:52).The selfie also needs to be located within the visuality of the internet. The internet lends towards a circulatory memory where images can be stripped from its context and meaning; a regulatory and technical architecture in which one has to request to be 'forgotten' or erased from its global repository. Its tendency to replicate matter and to retain data and image in its deep dark recesses speaks to both human empowerment and vulnerabilities. The internet as a data and image repertory holds the possibilities of extending memory beyond the cognitive mind or the physical archive. Digital memory as a storage capacity interplays with its retentive function to hold content whether legal or illicit, sacred or puerile without distinction filtered only through semantic searches. The virtual world in parallel contrast to the physical world is manifest through an immateriality. Not quite afterlife, the virtual world celebrating disembodiment (from the physical and material) captures and retains our interactions whether these be, text or images (whether static or moving) conjoining public and private consumptions with a digital memory and architecture were image and text can circulate stripped from socio-temporal frames.

The online platforms are increasingly shaped by the flows of capital and amenable to commercial agenda but it would be reductive to see the selfie as a cultural artefact solely in capitalist modes for it equally coexists with human creativity and agency enacting cultural and symbolic exchanges (Baudrillard; Kellner 1999; 2006). This rise in general aestheticisation

and spectacularisation of the world denotes its transformation into images or signs and symbols (Baudrillard 1993a). The selfie as a part of the profile creation which emerged with social networking sites integrates both the commercial enterprise behind these networking sites as well as a complex economy of creativity, self-expression, individual agency and cultural exchange. Best and Kellner (1999: 142) point out that Guy Debord in writing about the *Society of Spectacle* 'champions active creative practices in which individuals create their own situations, their own passionate existential events, fully participating in the production of everyday life, their own individuality and ultimately a new society' (Best and Kellner 1999: 142). Debord's spectacularisation of society entails one in which people live in an abstract world of images where everything has veered away from lived experiences into representation converting direct experiences into a spectacle where a commodity 'self' emerges through consumption and image (Best and Kellner 1999: 142 -144). Self-objectification may appear as the limit of capitalism where the self has been transformed into a commodity for exchange through the process of complicit self-objectification. On the other hand, the capitalist frames deny symbolic and cultural creativity of the selfie or its individual agency. Hence the selfie needs to be located both within this creative milieu as well as the broader context of a concerted capital enterprise to turn the world into signs and symbols. The dialectical nature of the internet as a social, cultural and economic platform then presents new ethical and moral challenges for society and humanity.

Self(ie) images of self shame

This article reviews the selfie within the specific context of imaging onself against trauma and inserting the self into a tragic or disaster 'event'. Dubbed the 'disaster selfie' or 'disaster porn' it profiles a disconcerting element of self-voyeurism in the post disaster space. Numerous instances of censure and public backlash of the selfie have been reported in media in the last few years. In June 2015, a man was criticised for taking a selfie in the massacre site of Tunisia where Thirty-eight people including many Britons were killed by a gunman with links to the Islamic State at the Tunisian beach resort (Harrold 2015). During the recent Nepal earthquake in May 2015, people were reported to be busy taking selfies in the disaster sites (Kanwal 2015) making the half disembowelled Dharahara Tower a popular site for selfie production. Similar phenomenon was noticed at the East Village gas explosion site in New York in March 2015 where people stopped to take selfies at the trauma site (Fasick et al. 2015). This selfie phenomenon was also reported at the Sydney Siege in 2014 when a café was besieged by a lone terrorist which resulted in two deaths. Reports of an 'Auschwitz selfie' where an Alabama teenager took a smiling selfie during a tour of Auschwitz concentration camp (Daily Mail 2014) invited a public backlash and death threats for posting her selfie on a social media site.

The selfie in funeral and death events has been an equally contentious issue (Gibbs et al. 2014) even though there has been a long history of photographing the dead in terms of memorial photography (See Meinwald 1990; Fernandez 2011), death remains a taboo in modernity. In a modern society, death becomes abstracted from its embodied reality to focus

on secondary but less liminal subject matter such as the gathering of mourners, floral arrangements and tombstones (Fernandez 2011: 348). In the digital age, the body embedded with recording facilities disrupts these sterile and hidden depictions of death and disaster by reconfiguring social norms and taboos. As we increasingly visualise and exhibit every iota of our lives, the boundaries of what is socially and morally acceptable or what should be reproduced, published and endlessly circulated online becomes questionable invoking the issues of taste, decency, and invariable ethics and morality around imaging. The disaster selfie as a genre has emerged as the limit figure in the politics of visuality online, invoking the moral censure of the public but importantly the social norms about sacredness of life and death. What then are the moral and social boundaries of this cultural genre and this attention economy where the self is constantly produced and exhibited?

In an increasingly mediated-world tragic events are witnessed and understood through the media. The notion of the 'media event' premises the vantage point of the screen where complex events could be represented as seamless narratives with cinematic techniques interwoven and enmeshed by decoupling time and space to seek human empathy with the familiar or distant humanity. The 'media event' as an unstable technical production presented through the screen is a familiar genre in news production; one which much of the global audiences are socialised into. With mobile technologies and the camera phone, the media event has been extended to incorporate witnessing through mobile technologies. The co-opting of the citizen to witness and contribute to event construction has widened the media event in recent years to include amateur photography captured through the smart phone (Ibrahim 2007). The image testimony shot through the camera phones and mobile technologies democratises the media event, elongating its narration beyond the vantage point of media organisations to include amateur images of lay people. The media events equally produces 'place memory' (See Casey 1997, 186) by constantly beaming sites of disaster and trauma where these sites become re-appropriated as spaces of resonance with a global audience and individual meaning making. The media event adds to the construction of place memory through a disaster event.

The 'disaster selfie' capitalises on the media event as a form of post-production phenomenon where the selfie is inserted into this place memory. As the media event publicises places and events, the disaster selfie exploits this projection; not to extend the project of empathy or solidarity with the fallen or the incapacitated but to capitalise on the media memory and the residual quality or aura of the place memory. The disaster selfie draws on the inter-textual elements of the tragedy site through the media event proclaiming a statement of survival against a backdrop of disaster or carnage. The sacredness of life and taboo of death are constantly invoked and transgressed in the genre of this disaster porn. The juxtaposing of the living self against a site of death becomes a deliberate device to impress one's mortal presence and to equally capitalise on the residue of the media memory. This curation of the self into the media event and the production of the selfie as an aestheticised commodity of exchange raise further scrutiny into the ethics of visuality online.

This self-curation and online visuality need to be understood within the production modes of the disaster selfie. These production modes tap into two salient elements in the internet architecture; social networks and the search economy. The selfie circulated through social media networks is intertextually bound with the search economy where the 'popular and the current' particularly the media event can provide the selfie a degree of social capital in using the disaster site as a prop. The disaster selfie drives on the media event and place memory and in the process destabilises and decontextualizes the disaster event invoking it for self curation and aestheticisation while linking it to a wider architecture of the internet which can conjoin disparate data (including image) without a resonant meaning. Search engines produce an attention economy where hidden algorithms, searches, retrieval and what may be trending or popular enable a politics of communal gaze. The media event is extrapolated from the 'search and trending economy' and the disaster selfie rides on this attention and resonance in seeking a communal validation.

Beyond the media event, the production codes of a selfie also drive on voyeurism where the selfie may not recognise any boundaries – it does seek to contextualise against the political events or contexts, rather it seeks to draw on the residual energy, narratives and attention the media event has already created. The self(ie) as part of its flaneur-like attributes exploits voyeuristic tendencies where backdrops of disaster or death enhance its ability to transcend the banal everyday into the unusual. The attention is to the self and the context or backdrop is used to narrate the self not what the tragic site holds. Human pull towards the abject (i.e. death, bloodshed, horror of disaster) is a distinct aspect of the disaster selfie. The transgression and renewed disruption of the moral boundary is intrinsic to this project where the self composed against the abject (i.e. the disaster site) adds to the curation of the self in different settings. The test here is not the moral response of the self(ie) but to utilise the context of the tragedy and the aura of human trauma within retained in the place memory to compose the 'self' for public consumption.

The selfie becomes a virtual flaneur absorbing the aura of the place to project it in sharp contrast to the mortal loss or carnage in the backdrop. Here the selfie appropriates the trauma and abject as performance without embedding itself in the tragic event. Reality and representation cross boundaries in our media-saturated world and the media event provides a fiction to insert the self(ie). The tragedy is intertextually referenced in the image but the self remains detached from it. Baudrillard (1983) 'asserts in a media-saturated consumer society, people are bound up 'in the the play of images, spectacles, and simulacra that have less and less relationship to an outside, to an external "reality," to such an extent that the very concepts of the social, political, or even "reality" no longer seem to have any meaning' as the masses seek spectacle' (See Kellner 2006). The disaster self not only evokes the moral limit of self-representation but equally our intimacy with social reality when we transform the world and its events into images for relentless consumption.

Death, Desire and the Abject

The disaster selfie is an assemblage of two temporal frames; events that have preceded it and the instant where the self has been inserted post-event. The past events convey the baggage of the unseen dead and of corpses and what the media event may have also conveyed in our communal imagination of the event. The imagination of the abject is an intrinsic element of the disaster selfie. For Roland Barthes, the image of the mortal body also configures death as a certainty as all mortals will succumb to it. As such he proclaims, 'what is there in every photograph is the return of the dead' (1982: 9). But the dead body can be both an embodiment of testimony and history. In forensic science, 'bones and tissues, including skeletal structure, microbone morphology, disease, pathology, ossification, and biophysics, is used to verify the identity of the deceased, as well as to reconstruct the circumstances of their deaths and recover the history and memory of former life' (Wolfe 2015: 64; Weizman and Keenan). The dead body is political bearing witness and testimony to atrocity and horror. Wolfe (2015) contends such forensic analysis or in particular osteological analysis has become important to the archaeology of genocide and other forms of cultural violence and genocide. The body yields historical data even after death. It remains a site of interest and scrutiny particularly where it has borne witnessed to horror and the unspeakable which live testimonies may not quite capture, presenting a 'lacuna' or gaps between what was articulated and what was witnessed or experienced (See Agamben). The body as a site of morphological and forensic analysis has the possibility to present 'a pure externalised, objective reality of memory and experience of trauma to resolve the 'lacuna' of witness testimony (Wolfe 2015: 65). The body as a site of forensic gaze is a site of retentive data and memory.

Dead bodies, decay and the spectacle are bound in inextricable ways. Julia Kristeva (1982: 4) uses the term 'abjection' to refer to that which does not respect borders, positional rules …and which disturbs identity, system, order'. She contends abjection as a necessary part of human condition. For example, the 19th century Parisian flaneur embodying a mix of curiosity, detachment and mobility was drawn to the abject. In 1864 when the police opened the Paris morgue to the public in the hope that they might aid the identification of dead bodies found in the streets, the morgue became a site of popular attraction driven by curiosity rather than to aid identification (Schwartz 1997; Carney 2010:20-21).In comparison today, there has been a rise of dark tourism in the recent years. Dark tourism relates to visiting scenes 'death, disaster and the seemingly macabre' (Payne 2015; (Stone,& Sharpley 2008). In more specific terms 'dark tourism' relates primarily to 'the presentation and consumption (by visitors) of real and commodified death and disaster sites' (Foley and Lennon 1996:198). Related to this is the notion of the 'ruin porn' where decay invites the possibilities to re-imagine the past and to impose new forms of rationality and morality (See Vergara 1999; Stoler 2008; Puff 2014). Rubble, destruction, ruins invite the spectator to insert the 'self' into a reflective and affective bind. Helmut Puff (2014) contends that the concept of the ruin has a long complex association in the trajectory of historical Western imagination. 'The West has developed an extensive system of aestheticizing destruction as ruins, a visual form in which decay and damage are made to seem pastoral or at the very least non-threatening (Puff 2014: 19). This rapprochement between disaster and ruins inundates ours senses in popular culture from news media, movies to cartoons and digital games. Ruins as a conceptual notion become symbolic indices of a break in temporality and space. Camilo José Vergara (1999) in

imaging slums and decaying urban environments postulates that ruins function as an emblem of a society in a state of flux where there is a reconfiguration of the moral and social boundaries. The ruin like the disaster site 'repositions the present in wider structures of vulnerability' (Stoler 2008: 194) while inviting the aestheticization of decay and abandonment (Puff 2014). Abjection and the spectacle as such are tightly entwined.

Kristeva posits that the definitions of the monstrous as constructed in the modern horror text are grounded in ancient and historical notions of abjection: including decay and death, human sacrifice, murder, the corpse, bodily wastes. Hence that which threatens to cross the border is 'abject'. Abjection has the power of transgression', a capacity to destabilize the cultural order that authorizes and regulates its exclusion. The place of the abject is where meaning collapses (Kristeva 1982: 2). The abjection can also be a site of desire for there is not only pleasure in the perverse but also desire – having taken pleasure in the perverse. The disaster selfie draws on pleasure from the perverse in locating itself in a site of the abject – a site of death, corpses, bloodshed; a site which can be exploited to re-imagine one's presence. Voyeurism accompanies Kristeva's (1982) writings on abjection (Kristeva 1982: 46) and she conceptualises the notion of 'looking' by conjoining voyeuristic impulse with the abject where it is bound up with both perversion and desire. The selfie not only draws on the historicity but more importantly provides a statement of survival against a backdrop of carnage. Death and destruction are seamlessly juxtaposed in the 'disaster selfie' as it collapses the temporal frames to proclaim a testimony of survival. More importantly it integrates the phenomenon of post-witnessing where time and space and equally the media event are appropriated to curate the self(ie). Attention is then focused upon preserving and extending this mortal life against the historicity of the media event through self imagery.

The abject or death becomes a phantom presence in these portrayals thus contrasting our mortal life against a scene which may have harboured death and bloodshed. Post-witnessing through the intimate imagery of the selfie invokes the intertextual frames and meanings of the disaster site while contextualising it for self-curation and aestheticisation. There is perverse pleasure in invoking and consuming the abject or that which is the boundary or the limit. The disaster selfie as a specific genre mediates this duality of death while being alive in a place of carnage exclaiming, 'I'm alive where others have been sacrificed.' According to Roland Barthes (1982: 76), the image "is neither art nor communication, it is reference'. The disaster site becomes a referential site to compose the self-image.The selfie as a cultural genre is not about responding to the tragic but utilising the abject as context for curating the self and in constructing the self(ie) as an entity which can transcend time, space and moral boundaries in catering to a consumption community. The public consuming the image would be equally reading and encoding the selfie through the narration of the disaster as its backdrop. The selfie is performance working for the 'society of spectacle' where sites can be stripped of its sacred meaning and where the phantasmagoria of death acts as a prop. Baudrillard (1988: 27) describes this collapsing of bounded spheres in society (both reel and real) as an intrinsic element of postmodernity creating 'an over-proximity of all things, a foul promiscuity of all

things'.   Like Baudrillard's hypereality, the disaster selfie is about mixing medium and genres where self-imaging is enmeshed with the disaster event to thwart the tragic but to extrapolate the place memory for self-representation.

The selfie becomes the limit figure straddling between voyeurism, abjection, perversion and pleasure. The disaster site becomes a space of cultural appropriation to re-narrate the self(ie). In the postmodern world, Baudrillard (1993) contends that there is increased reification in commodities, technologies and materiality dominating mortal lives which further divest them from human qualities and capacities. Baudrillard's hyperreality consisting of entertainment, information and communication technologies provide experiences which are more intense where the models, codes and structures come to control thought and behaviour, yielding a new terrain of experience and meaning making. Douglas Kellner (2006) in reading Baudrillad contends that the "ecstasy of communication" means that the subject is in close proximity to instantaneous images and information, in an overexposed and transparent world. Hence in the media-saturated consciousness and with the extreme fascination with image and spectacle, that the concept of meaning becomes thwarted and destabilised. This coupled with a furtive aestheticisation of all forms and objects or what Baudrillard (1993: 72) terms as 'transaesthetics' collapses boundaries in distinct spheres particularly art such that there are no normative standards to judge the object or art with the increasing blurring of lines between the two. For Baudrillard, contemporary individuals are indifferent toward taste and manifest only distaste as "tastes are determinate no longer" (cf. Kellner 2006). The disaster self as a mixed genre between media event, the abject and self-aesthetics inhabits a space of disruption symbolising collapsing boundaries between the sacred and puerile and equally between morality and divesment from human qualities to feel empathy or pity.

Strategies for immortality

The extension of the media event through the disaster selfie and the endeavour to equally insert oneself into history and memory through the disaster site courts death as a phantom figure in its narratives. At this juncture, it would be relevant to draw on Bauman's (1992) 'strategies of immortality' where the quest for immortality can range from bodily violation to cultural violations where we compete for attention and memory. Geoffrey Gorer (1965) in *The Pornography of Death* draws parallels between death and sex and public attitudes towards these as taboo topics in the Victorian era and in the twentieth century society respectively. Death is treated in twentieth century society much like sex was treated in the nineteenth century where the subject is avoided or couched through euphemisms.

Death has become a hidden phenomenon which takes place behind closed doors. Social historian Philippe Aries (1981:393) writes about the co-mingling of these two taboos (i.e. sex and death) in society; and its loosening of strictures over time since the middle ages. He asserts while society 'erected a system of defences including religion, morality, government, law, even technology against the uncontrollable forces of nature (i.e. ageing and dying), these defenses were not impregnable; for the bulwark erected against nature had two weak spots, love and death, through which a little of the savage violence always leaked' (Aries

1981:393). Schopenhauer similarly asserts in *The World as Will and Representation* ((1966: 463)) that "all religions and philosophical systems are…primarily the antidote to the certainty of death'. Society restrained sexuality and death by means of taboos and ritualization, all of which subjected the individual to the control of the collective.

Bauman (1992) equally points to the uneasy relationship with death in modernity. He argues that in pre-modern times death was less of an issue than it has been in modern times. ''In those times, death struck frequently, early, blindly and without warning; death was a daily and highly visible occurrence, neither a secret nor an extraordinary event'' (1992: 96 – 97). With Enlightenment new, revolutionary ideas about the nature of man and his place in the universe emerged conceiving men as individuals rather than as members of a collective (whether these be parishes, families or guilds). Hence our preoccupation with mortality became a prominent feature of society (Castano & Dechesne 2005). The project to defeat death is central to modernity. Modernity fought death relentlessly censoring it from daily life. The process of dying now occurred in hospitals and other places away from public view (Fernandez 2011: 354).

Bauman (cf. Jacobsen 2011: 391).contends that the type of death signalled by the corpse as the tangible presence of the shadow of human existence, exited the ritual of daily life. Death as spectacle flourished in media representation and on celluloid in cinematic techniques. Death was told or shown moral tales to inoculate us against the fear of death by banalising and de-toxicating the sight of dying (Jacobsen 2011: 392). Bauman emphasises not only the domestication and standardisation of death in modernity, but also the fact that an individual identifies with the corpse only at a distance, a dress rehearsal of the living that is empty of any actual serious meditation upon death and 'becoming' corpse (cf. Fernandez 2011: 356). Death enters in the attire of 'deathertainment'.

Bauman (1992) in his book *Mortality, Immortality and Other Life Strategies* conceptualises death as a necessary condition for the formation of human cultures and the development of man as a cultural being. According to Bauman the awareness of human mortality drives the creation and development of culture (1992: 31). Bauman contends that the belief in some form of immortality resonates as a longstanding need. While immortality can be imagined through a transcendental afterlife from the theological standpoint, it can be enacted in a symbolic sense. Such strategies can encompass passing on our genes to our children or creating something valuable to be remembered (1992: 76-77). For Bauman forms of 'ethereal living' or the sense of continuing to be present in human memory and never disappearing from it provides the possibility of an 'ethereal' immortality; an immortality-through-other-people-memory. Bauman asserts that 'It was precisely the knowledge of having to die, of the non-negotiable brevity of time, of the possibility or likelihood of visions remaining unfulfilled, projects unfinished and things not done, that spurred humans into action and human imagination into flight' (Jacobsen 2011: 383).

Bauman asserts that these strategies for immortality 'is the principal engine and the flying wheel of cultural creativity and societal survival – and arguably their main raison d'eˆtre as

well' (Jacobsen 2011: 387). Bauman (1992: 2013) contends these attempts to leave traces can be class specific where the more affluent may have more recourse to leaving traces of mortality whether others may succumb to an anonymous presence. Individuals who cannot, for instance by virtue of their social class, aspire to individual immortality will be more likely to pursue forms of collective immortality, notably through embracing nationalist causes and collective ideologies (Castano & Dechesne 2005: 242-243). For Bauman elites possess the 'weapons of self-assertion' to make their 'presence in the world significant and consequential'' (1992, p. 103). Bauman contends that the masses in contrast while aware of their mortality have 'little or no room for them to forge any decent forms of immortality for themselves'.

The digital cultures through a multitude of discourses and in enabling a myriad of social and political behaviour have celebrated the masses whether it be in the guise of citizen journalism, user-generated content or through the 'cult of amateurs' (Keen 2007) mediating knowledge. These democratisation discourses often present the digital terrain as a virtual platform for cultural creativity and societal survival; where it is conjoined to a technical architecture with a capacity to 'not forget', to store and retrieve data. The digital memory and notions of virtuality coalesce with a screen culture where the self can be watched and consumed online both by the self as spectator and others. The screen cultures present opportunities to enact new forms of 'immortality strategies' where an attendant attention economy can create a 'reality culture' celebrity just living out their own life on screen. The mix of the screen culture through this celebrification and the possibilities to enact self online in digital platforms provides new strategies to leave traces of oneself in the virtual world.

The disaster selfie which enmeshes media event and media memory is a form of immortality strategy. The mixing of genres (i.e. selfie and the disaster event) and spheres (i.e. art, politics, etc) as observed by Baudrillard (1994: 3) collapses art and reality createing a confusion or rather an 'ecstasy of communication" where the subject is in close proximity to instantaneous images and information, in an overexposed and transparent world. This confusion also means a re-negotiation of the boundaries between the sacred and the puerile. The intense mixing of genres enable new forms of aestheticisation to emerge as part of this digital creativity. It equally presents strategies to imagine and immoratalise the self online whether drawing on historicity, the media event, the abject or the phantasmagoria of corpses.

Conclusion

The disaster selfie as a genre of mixing the self(ie) with a post-event disaster site raises new ethical and moral challenges in the politics of self-representation and the ethics of visuality online. The insertion of the self in a site of human tragedy reconfigures our relationship with death in our digital world. Death banished behind closed doors yet banalised and spectacularised becomes reclaimed as a present-absent figure in the disaster selfie. The disaster-selfie equally reveals the pull towards the abject in human condition but equally our pre-occupation with mortality despite our endeavour to make death 'our best kept secret in

modernity' (Bauman 1992: 14). The disaster selfie as a strategy for immortality available to masses claims historicity through the media event and its resonance with the population. In the process it co-opts the abject as a context to narrate itself and to juxtapose its immortality (through the image) with the dead other.

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