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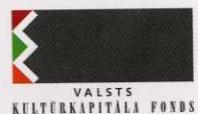
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Artist, Reality, and (Auto)biography in Rūdolfs Blaumanis's and Gottfried Keller's Fiction

Keywords: Rūdolfs Blaumanis, Gottfried Keller, 19th century literature, Latvian literature, autobiographical novel, art and artist.

Summary

The paper discusses aspects of the Latvian writer's Rūdolfs Blaumanis (1863–1908) fiction in comparative perspective. An important aspect of Blaumanis's efforts was devoted to the discussion of individual life stories of his characters, and he also dealt with the possibility or impossibility of a person to become his or her true self in the interpretative contexts of the 19th century society and culture. In European perspective, the image of an artist was often put at the centre of writers' attention, and the paper provides one such case study, a discussion of the Swiss author's, Gottfried Keller autobiographical novel "Green Henry" (*Der Grüne Heinrich*, 1st version 1855, 2nd version 1880) to which the works of Blaumanis are then compared. The paper deals with some of the Latvian author's most important novellas, written between 1882 and 1898, and discusses the impossibility of artistic career in the context of the 19th century Latvian society due to different historical and social background as discussed in Blaumanis's texts. Those aspects of the novellas where these features are particularly well articulated come into the focus of the paper, and the notion of colonial difference is applied to this discussion as well.

ALISE TĪFENTĀLE

Making Sense of the Selfie: Digital Image-Making and Image-Sharing in Social Media

Keywords: History of photography, digital photography, social media, Instagram, self-portraits, software studies.

Introduction

A wide range of photographic practices has flourished outside the institutional framework of the art world or commercial photography since the early 1900s, when the availability and ease of use of the Kodak Brownie camera gave rise to a new and massive movement of amateur photography. In literature on history of photography as well as social media, parallel to the term "amateur photography" multiple related terms are in use that often overlap in meaning and at times are used interchangeably, such as vernacular, personal, snapshot, candid or family photography. The term "amateur photography" in this context does not presume any judgment regarding genre, artistic merit of the image or photographer's skill; it is used to describe all photographic practices that are carried out at leisure, outside any professional framework and without direct material benefit.

In the 2010s, the digital image-making and image-sharing complex, which I propose to call the "networked camera", began to support and stimulate the production, dissemination, and consumption of digital amateur photography. Following the emergence and popularity of new image-making devices and online image-sharing platforms, new sub-genres of amateur photography have appeared, such as digital self-portraiture (selfies) or food photography (so-called food porn). Since November 19, 2013 when Oxford Dictionaries announced selfie as "the international Word of the Year", this hybrid phenomenon of vernacular photography and social media has created quite a bit of media hype. A selfie, according to Oxford Dictionaries, is "a photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically one taken with a smartphone or

webcam and uploaded to a social media website" (Oxford Dictionaries Blog 2013). The very *raison d'être* of these images is to be shared via social media, where they circulate as a new kind of aesthetic currency. But how to make sense of this currency, which obviously is more than just the "masturbation of self-image" (Marche 2013) or the "virtual mini-me" (Clark 2013)?

In order to explore the emerging sub-genre of amateur photography in social media, the leading new media scholar Lev Manovich and his lab *Software Studies Initiative* initiated a multidisciplinary research project *Selfiecity* (2013–2014). The object of the research was a dataset of 3,200 selfies posted to Instagram during one week in December 2013 from five global cities: Bangkok, Berlin, Moscow, New York, and São Paulo. Various computational analysis methods (such as software-driven face recognition and use of custom-made data visualization tools) were applied as well as formal and content analysis of each individual image. Computational methods were used to analyze characteristics such as pose (for example, looking up/down, left/right), facial expression, and mood. Research tools included media visualizations, imageplots, blended video montages, and a custom-made interactive web application *Selfexploratory*. This application as well as examples of other methods are made available online at www.selfiecity.net, and major findings of the research have been discussed elsewhere (for example, see Manovich, Tifentale 2015). This article focuses on selfie as a particular sub-genre of amateur photography and inscribes it into the broader narrative of the history of photography.

Theoretical Framework: Why Selfies Matter?

Majority of the theoretical literature on amateur photography is anchored in the seminal writings of the 1970s and 1980s, especially the Marxist-inspired critiques of Allan Sekula and John Tagg. Sekula has shown that even the most inconspicuous family photographs are in fact ideologically charged (Sekula 1984). Tagg has suggested a history of photography as a history of capitalist industry and concluded that within such context all amateur photography is insignificant, powerless, and forever oppressed (Tagg 1988, 111–112). In the 1990s, amateur photographs-snapshots, casual portraits, and family photographs – entered art museum exhibition circuits, largely thanks to the pioneering curatorial efforts and theoretical writings by Douglas Nickel and Geoffrey Batchen. Landmark exhibitions include "Snapshots: The Photography of Everyday Life" at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, curated by Douglas Nickel (May 22 to September 8, 1998); "Other Pictures: Vernacular photographs from the Thomas Walther collection" at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, curated by Maria Morris

Hambourg and Mia Fineman (June 6 to August 27, 2000), and "Forget Me Not: Photography and Remembrance" at the Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam, curated by Geoffrey Batchen (March 26 to June 6, 2004). Nickel and Batchen mainly have established a trend of art history, museology, and curatorship of amateur photography that is based on selection of anonymous and vintage photographs. Singled out images are analyzed as cases of accidental genius, thus forcing these images into the discursive field of art. In many of the following publications, the focus remains on the medium of private photography album and on the genre of the family snapshot, and often unnecessarily strong emphasis is placed on nostalgia and memory, which, I believe, do not limit the functions of amateur photography (see, for example, Langford 2001; Heiferman 2008).

Abundant debates about digital amateur photography in social media have emerged in social and computer sciences during the last decade. A positivist and techno-centric paradigm dominates, emphasizing democratization, participation, and empowerment that digital photography brings, and zooming in on particular image-making devices like iPhone or image-sharing platforms such as Flickr or Instagram (Senft 2008; Burgess 2009; Hjorth, Burgess, Richardson 2012; Larsen, Sandbye 2014). Although mostly unconcerned with a broader historical perspective, these writings reinvigorate the field of history and theory of amateur photography.

Vilém Flusser has interpreted such photographic practices as the anti-thesis of creativity and individuality – an unimaginative repetition of a rigid formula, an embodiment of the meaningless flow of collective consciousness under control of the globalized consumerism (Flusser [1983] 2011). According to Flusser, any sub-genre of amateur photography cannot possess any agency because they are not critical, and they cannot be critical because of their dependency on market-driven technologies and their lack of originality. Gregory Sholette, on the contrary, has observed that amateur image-making constitutes the invisible part of a metaphorical iceberg, and this "dark matter" of photography has long been denied the scholarly attention it deserves (Sholette 2005).

This research responds to the challenge, best articulated by Geoffrey Batchen who posed this question in regards to tintype portraits, which flourished in the nineteenth-century United States: how to deal with the "monotonous conformity" of large numbers of formally similar amateur images, "when [histories of photography] are usually driven by the story of origins and originality, as embodied in masters and masterpieces?" (Batchen 2008, 20). Instead of searching for originality of individual photographs, research in the field of amateur photography suggests focusing on larger

patterns, on genres and their conventions. Many of the patterns that *Selfiecity* revealed can be interpreted as important attributes of this emerging sub-genre of amateur photography. At least in the context of this research, these attributes are not interpreted negatively, as lack of originality or individuality, but rather as a format, a framework or template that provides certain given elements while also leaving enough room for individual creativity. In agreement with the concept that "genres operate dynamically as interaction between expectations and conventions" (Lüders, Prøitz, Rasmussen 2010, 954), *Selfiecity* attempted to discover some of the conventions of the selfie genre. Conventions are "making the genre distinguishable and recognizable, in spite of variations" (Lüders, Prøitz, Rasmussen 2010, 953), and this understanding of selfie helps to reduce the tension between the affirmative viewpoint and the more skeptical art historical perspective. During different stages of research, the research team was looking for answers to questions such as: Can a single selfie tell us something meaningful about a whole city? A thousand selfies? A million? Does the quantity of selfies make a difference? Can the methods used to analyze selfies produce a new meaning that could not be discovered otherwise? What could possibly a group of selfies, taken in a particular city, reveal us about this city?

Methodological Framework

Generally, selfies definitely can tell quite a lot about the specific individuals who happened to take and post their selfies from a given geographical area within a given time. They also tell a lot about Instagram as an exemplary online image-sharing platform and thus offer some insights into some of the uses of social media in general. Selfies make us aware about a particular method of self-fashioning and communication that is historically time-specific in the sense that it could materialize only in the moment when several technologies have reached a certain level of development and accessibility. These include the availability of Internet connection, hardware such as easy to use smartphones with cameras, and software that drives the online image-sharing platforms, geo-tagging of uploaded images and other features. Moreover, selfies suggest new approaches to studies of vernacular photography in general, as smartphones in this case function as cameras connected to the Internet (networked cameras), thus presenting a new and hybrid image-making and simultaneously image-sharing device significantly different from all its predecessors. New image-making and image-sharing technologies demand also radically new ways of looking at these images.

The selfie is a hybrid that requires hybrid methodological approaches. In

Selfiecity, the selfie is treated as a form of self-expression of individual Instagram users as well as a communal and social practice. The research project considers both the individual artistic intentions of a singular image and the overall patterns revealed by a large amount of selfies made in a particular geographic location during one week. The team downloaded Instagram photographs that were shared publicly from the central areas of five global cities during one week in December 2013: Bangkok, Berlin, Moscow, New York, and São Paulo. From all images, random 140,000 photographs were selected for further analysis. After multiple levels of filtering, finally 640 selfies were selected for each city by human researchers. This labor-intensive and time-consuming procedure was given preference over filtering by hashtags in order to avoid confusion with use of multiple languages, different hashtags that could mean the same as well as could not (#selfie or #me?), and also incoherent use of hashtags (not all selfies on Instagram would be marked with a hashtag explicitly saying that it is a selfie, as well as not all images with such a hashtag necessarily are selfies). Finally, a set of 640 selfies per city was set up from these results. By analyzing a large sample of selfies taken in specified geographical locations during the same time period, *Selfiecity* aimed at seeing beyond the individual agendas and noticing larger patterns. During the different stages of the research, the project team employed a variety of methodological approaches including computational image analysis methods and custom-made software tools for big data analysis and visualization.

Connecting the Image, the Medium, and the Message

The selfie among else can function as a means of self-expression, a construction of a positive image, a tool of self-promotion, a cry for attention and love, a way to express belonging to a certain community. We could confirm or reject such claims by inspecting individual selfies photos. Sometimes the claims are made based on outstanding exceptions that catch people's attention, go viral, and easily become a symbol of the whole phenomenon (such as the notorious Kim Kardashian selfies). Yet such symbolic images are not necessarily representative of larger trends. Therefore, before making conclusions in order to avoid generalizations unsupported by measurable evidence, some methodological questions should be clarified. For instance, if we use content analysis, a standard method used in communication studies, we should be able to answer the following: what is the source of the selfies we are to analyze and why we have chosen this particular source, what is the total amount of selfies inspected, what kinds of categories we should use for analysis, what is the statistical breakdown within this set of selfies

supporting and contradicting our preliminary hypothesis, etc. By analyzing a large sample of selfies taken in specified geographical locations during the same time period, *Selfiecity* argues that we may be able to see beyond the individual agendas (such as the notorious celebrity selfies) and instead notice larger patterns, which sometimes can contradict popular assumptions. For example, considering all the media attention the selfie has received in 2013, it can easily be assumed that selfies must make up a significant part of images posted on Instagram. Paradoxically enough, *Selfiecity* revealed that only approximately four percent of all photographs posted on Instagram during one week were selfies.

The project has also specific socioeconomic limits as data (i. e. selfie) production is limited to users of smartphones who are also active users of Instagram. Even though it may seem that about everyone in the world is, actually only a relatively small fraction of the world population is on Instagram. The United Nations' International Telecommunications Union have mentioned "around 6.8 billion mobile subscriptions" by the end of 2013, which is a significant number considering the current world population of approximately 7.1 billion (Embley 2013). The number of smartphones, however, was significantly lower – only 1.4 billion by the end of 2013 (Heggestuen 2013). The number of Instagram users was even smaller – more than 150 million monthly users (Rusli 2013). For a person to be an active Instagrammer anywhere in the world means to fall within a certain income bracket that supports the purchase of a smartphone and monthly expenses related to network subscription and service fees (or to be a dependent of such a person). It is mostly young adults who post selfies to Instagram – median age of a selfie-maker in *Selfiecity* sample of 3,200 photos was estimated to be 23.7 years.

Describing an earlier research project *Phototrails.net* that also was based on analysis of photographs posted on Instagram, Nadav Hochman and Lev Manovich have emphasized the following: "Our work takes advantage of the particular characteristics of Instagram's software. Instagram automatically adds geospatial coordinates and time stamps to all photos taken within the application. All photos have the same square format and resolution (612 x 612 pixels). Users apply Instagram filters to large proportion of photos that give them an overall defined and standardized appearance" (Hochman, Manovich 2013). In addition, the whole phenomenon of Instagram is a perfect example of "softwarization" that Manovich discusses in his most recent scholarly book *Software Takes Command*: "The new "global aesthetics" celebrates media hybridity and uses it to engineer emotional reactions, drive narratives, and shape user experiences" (Manovich 2013b, 179). What else

makes Instagram so fascinating to study is that we can view it as an archive in the process of becoming. Unfinished, live and living archive evokes multiple exciting questions from the perspective of the recent and much discussed "archival turn" in art historical writing and digital humanities as well.

Selfie as Old and New Genre of Photography

The selfie can be interpreted as an emerging sub-genre of self-portraiture within the broader field of amateur photography, as an example of the digital a turn in vernacular photography as well as a side product of the recent technological developments, which in their impact and scope are not unlike the revolution in photographic practice associated with the Kodak Brownie camera in the early 1900s. Often the term "selfie" is applied retroactively to proto-selfies – self-portraits made in the nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century. Such accounts inevitably mention Robert Cornelius's proto-selfie, a daguerreotype self-portrait made in 1839. Another outstanding example of early attempts at dramatically staged self-portraiture is Hippolyte Bayard's *Self-Portrait as a Drowned Man* (1840), which can be seen as a distant predecessor of today's digital self-portraiture in social media (for an engaging discussion of Bayard's photograph, see Sapir 1994).

Art historian Kandice Rawlings asserts: "It seems that from photography's earliest days, there has been a natural tendency for photographers to turn the camera toward themselves." (Rawlings 2013) Photography can easily be used as a tool for constructing and performing the self. Photographic self-portraits offer ultimate control over our image, allowing us to present ourselves to others in a mediated way. The same problem has been encountered and addressed by artists and photographers. Dawn M. Wilson has pointed out that "[i]n self-portraiture, an artist seeks to have the same kind of access to her own face as she has to the face of any other person whom she might choose to portray; this is why mirrors are invaluable: it is not possible to see my own face directly, but I can see my own face in a mirror" (Wilson 2013, 58). It seems even disquieting how true and relevant is what art historian Jean-François Chevrier wrote almost thirty years before the explosion of the selfie-mania: "The most intimate place for narcissistic contemplation, the room with the mirror – a bathroom for example – becomes in this context the most common of places, where every distinction of the self is in the end abolished." (Chevrier 1986, 10) By inspecting individual Instagrammed selfies that were analyzed in *Selfiecity*, a selfie taken in front of a mirror stands out as a particular type. Moreover, often it is the very bathroom mirror mentioned by Chevrier, sometimes also a mirror in an elevator or a gym.

Chevrier makes unpacking this construction of the self and the selfie even

more complicated by applying terms of Lacanian psychoanalysis to photographic self-portraiture. According to Chevrier, "We can no longer escape the obvious truth that every identification pre-supposes the mediation of an image and that there is no identity that does not pass through this process of alienation. [...] Every self-portrait, even the simplest and least staged, is the portrait of another" (Chevrier 1986, 9). This "another" is also a social construction, which is being performed publicly via selfies. As Nancy Van House has observed, "making, showing, viewing and talking about images are not just how we represent ourselves, but contribute to the ways that we *enact* ourselves, individually and collectively, and reproduce social formations and norms" (Van House 2011, 31). Furthermore, in photographic self-portraiture in general, according to Amelia Jones, "technology not only *mediates* but *produces* subjectivities in the contemporary world" (Jones 2002, 950, emphasis in original).

Rawlings notes that "on the one hand, this phenomenon is a natural extension of threads in the history of photography of self-portraiture and technical innovation resulting in the increasing democratization of the medium. But on the other, the immediacy of these images – their instantaneous recording and sharing – makes them seem a thing apart from a photograph that required time and expense to process and print, not to mention distribute to friends and relatives." (Rawlings 2013) Accordingly, the use of the new image-making devices and the new online platforms of image circulation is what make selfies different from earlier forms of self-portraiture. Instantaneous distribution of an image via Instagram and similar social networks also separates the selfie from its earlier, analog precursors. It is a product of a networked camera. The selfie consists not only of a self-portrait photograph, but also of the metadata, generated automatically and by the user, and the chosen platform of sharing it. By sharing a selfie Instagram users express their belonging to a community, or a wish to belong to one. Thus performing the self is at once a private and individual and also a communal and public activity. The individual and unique #me becomes part of #us, a virtual community via means of a common platform for image sharing and the uniform image format provided by Instagram.

Taking a Snapshot of the Paradigm Shift

It is a paradox of photography in social media: each individual image is and is not important. Lynn Berger in 2011, even before the craze of Instagram and the selfie, pointed out that with the advent of smartphone cameras readily connected to the Internet, "the *practice* and *experience* of everyday photography have become more important than the pictures themselves" (Berger

2011, 183; emphasis in original). Does this turn signify a qualitative change, a real shift of paradigm? Berger rather argues for just a quantitative change: "digital cameras, photo sharing websites and cameraphones do not fundamentally alter snapshot photography; they simply amplify an already existing practice" (Berger 2011, 184). However, *Selfiecity* more easily relates to the opinion of other scholars who have argued for a noticeable paradigm shift, or what Edgar Gómez Cruz and Eric T. Meyer have called "the fifth moment of photography" (Cruz, Meyer 2012). The simplicity of online sharing of the images taken with a smartphone is one of the factors that contribute to this shift, which Cruz and Meyer characterize by "complete mobility, ubiquity and connection" (Cruz, Meyer 2012, 219).

According to Manovich, new research tools and methods are required for an adequate analysis of this paradigm shift: "The goals of digital humanities' analysis of interactive media will be different – to understand how people construct meanings from their interactions, and how their social and cultural experiences are mediated by software" (Manovich 2013a). The project team indeed developed new tools and methodologies as well as expanded the approaches elaborated in previous research projects by *Software Studies Initiative* (such as phototrails.net), "integrat[ing] methods from social computing, digital humanities, and software studies to analyze visual social media. [...] Using large sets of Instagram photos for our case study, we show how visual social media can be analyzed at multiple spatial and temporal scales. [...] We introduce new visualization techniques which can show tens of thousands of individual images sorted by their metadata or algorithmically extracted visual features." (Hochman, Manovich 2013)

Yet at the same time, the dataset of *Selfiecity* significantly differs from the original mode of existence of selfies. They 'live' in an online environment that can be described as a real-time flow of collective consciousness. Selfies in *Selfiecity* are extracted from this original context. They are removed from their authentic online narrative. They lack the connection to the larger body of images and textual input from each user that makes their Instagram accounts a communication tool that is meaningful for their followers. Such dataset is an example of "imaginary communities" (Hochman, Manovich 2013), an artificially constructed set of samples, which none of the users of Instagram have ever experienced directly. Thus a broader question about the specific modes of spectatorship, authorship, and participation in social media remains open. At least one aspect is clear, however: if for earlier moments in history of photography image-making, image-sharing, and image-viewing required different apparatuses, then now one device, the networked camera fulfills all three functions.

Conclusion

Selfiecity is more than a photographic image that we recognize as a self-portrait and that may or may not bear formal resemblance to canonical photographic self-portraits from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Selfie is more than an image: besides the visual information it equally consists of multiple layers of metadata. Furthermore, this hybrid unit cannot be separated from the conditions and means of its production, dissemination, and consumption.

Selfiecity reaches into different fields of inquiry. In a way, the project is very much about photography and self-portraiture, the traditional fields of art historical scholarship. Yet it is as much about testing the limits of software designed to analyze large amounts of visual information and visualize the results of such analysis, which traditionally belongs to the field of computer science. While focusing on Instagram, one of several available platforms of image-sharing, *Selfiecity* comments on the social media in general. The project views social media as a vehicle of voluntary interpersonal communication, thus becoming a study of human behavior that could as well be approached from perspective of sociology or communication studies. Further debates on the outcomes of the *Selfiecity* as well as the selfie in general could also benefit from insights and research methods used in statistics, sociology, media and communication studies as well as from theoretical perspectives of visual culture and gender studies.

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Pašbildes jēgu meklējot: digitālo attēlu radīšana un to koplietošana sociālajos medijos

Atslēgvārdi: fotogrāfijas vēsture, digitālā fotogrāfija, sociālie mediji, *Instagram*, pašportrets, datorprogrammatūras studijas.

Kopsavilkums

Raksts aplūko digitālu, fotogrāfisku pašportretu sociālajos medijos (tā dēvēto pašbildi) kā attīstībā esošu amatierfotogrāfijas žanru. Raksts ir balstīts pētnieciskajā projektā *Selfiecity.net* (2013–2014), kurā tika analizētas 3 200 pašbildes, ko *Instagram* lietotāji bija augšplādējuši piecās pasaules lielpilsētās: Bangkokā, Berlīnē, Maskavā, Nujorkā un Sanpaulu. Šo pētniecisko projektu realizēja Datorprogrammatūras Studiju Iniciatīva Dr. Ļevas Manoviča vadītajā zinātniskās izpētes laboratorijā, kurā tiek attīstītas un izmantotas eksperimentālas datorzinātņu un datu vizualizācijas metodes, lai analizētu lielu skaitu fotogrāfiju, kuras tiek publiskotas tādos sociālajos medijos kā attēlu koplietošanas platformā *Instagram*. Rakstā definēta pašbilde kā populārs amatierfotogrāfijas žanrs, skatot to plašākā fotogrāfijas vēstures kontekstā un analizējot to kā

jaunu, tapšanas procesā tvertu posmu fotogrāfiskā pašportreta vēsturē. Raksts sniedz ieskatu lidzšinējā zinātniskajā literatūrā par amatierfotogrāfiju un norāda uz jauniem izaicinājumiem, kurus šai mākslas vēstures un vizuālās kultūras nozarei pēdējās desmitgades laikā radījusi digitālā fotogrāfija interneta sociālajos medijs. Lasītāji tiek iepazīstināti ar pētnieciskā projekta *Selfiecity.net* metodoloģiju, kura paredz aplūkot pašbildi gan kā individuālu *Instagram* lietotāju pašizpausmes formu, gan arī kā sabiedrisku parādību. Pašbildes kā amatierfotogrāfijas žanra jēgas meklējumos sava loma ir gan katram individuālam attēlam, gan arī lielākām kopsakarībām, kuras atklājas, vienlaikus aplūkojot un analizējot tūkstošiem attēlu.

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