

Selfie Culture

Arts & Sciences 1138.**, First-Year Seminar

One Semester-Hour Credit

Date TBC



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Department of Classics
Office Hours Tuesdays 10-12pm or by appointment
328 University Hall

Course Description

Exhibitionist, narcissistic, selfish, shameless - contemporary selfie culture has been attacked from all angles as the bane on 21st century life and as the debasement of culture itself. But is there another way of looking at it? Selfie culture did not suddenly spring up with the invention of the smart phone. For example, ancient Rome had a fully-fledged selfie culture, from the poet Ovid's retelling of the myth of Narcissus to ideas about mirrors, philosophies of the self and the public image of the emperor. In addition, the art of the selfie predates digital culture in the form of autobiographies, self-portraiture and the idea of the care of the self, each of which has been examined as part of a critical examination of the subject in the work of Michel Foucault. Finally, in forms of activism, protest and witnessing, selfies become a crucial part of a network of perspectives to create new models of collective action and foster, rather than inhibit, empathy between people. This course will take a closer look at historical, artistic and political frameworks for selfie culture, comparing ancient and modern ideas, exploring the art of the selfie across pre-digital and digital media and looking to the contemporary politics of the selfie as a medium of community and collective action.

Course Aims

- To understand how contemporary selfie culture operates within broader historical, artistic and political frameworks.
- To evaluate how selfies can become sources of participatory and collective action.
- To engage with each other and appreciate difference through the medium of the selfie.

Class Activities

In each class, students will be expected to:

1. Participate in class discussions about the weekly reading
2. Share and explain an entry from their *Selfie Diary*
3. Work together to create their *Other People's Selfies* Project

Assignments

Selfie Diary

Take selfies during the week before each class and write a brief (100 word) comment about one of the selfies taken. Share the selfie and comment *24 hrs* before each class (via Canvas) and participate in class discussion about your selfie and comment.

Other People's Selfies Project

This is a group project (of between 3-5 students), which will be a compilation of images and text formed by the collection and discussion of (i) selfies produced during the class (via the *Selfie Diary* assignment); (ii) the history, art and politics of the selfie through online research and the Wexner Center Exhibition visits. In the last two weeks of class, each group will present (i) their own research on the project and (ii) the collective research of the project.

Requirements

Class Participation & Discussion (30%)

Selfie Diary (20%)

Other People's Selfies Project (50%)

Grading

This course will be graded Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory (S/U) grade. To earn a grade of S, you will need to turn in every assignment and participate in class discussions.

Academic Misconduct

It is the responsibility of the Committee on Academic Misconduct to investigate or establish procedures for the investigation of all reported cases of student academic misconduct. The term "academic misconduct" includes all forms of student academic misconduct wherever committed; illustrated by, but

not limited to, cases of plagiarism and dishonest practices in connection with examinations. Instructors shall report all instances of alleged academic misconduct to the committee (Faculty Rule 3335-5-487). For additional information, see the Code of Student Conduct (http://studentlife.osu.edu/pdfs/csc_12-31-07.pdf).

Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities that have been certified by the Office for Disability Services will be appropriately accommodated and should inform the instructor as soon as possible of their needs. The Office for Disability Services is located in 150 Pomerene Hall, 1760 Neil Avenue; telephone 292-3307, TDD 292-0901; <http://www.ods.ohio-state.edu/>

Biographical Statement

Richard Fletcher is an Associate Professor in the Department of Classics and his recent teaching and research is focused on the dynamic between ancient philosophy, literature, mythology and contemporary art. In addition to collaborations with artists and writing for exhibition catalogues, he has curated three exhibitions in Columbus: *Donald Lokuta: Segal's Studio – Plato's Cave*, *Myths of the Academy* and *Come Along With Me*. He also writes the blog *Minus Plato: Classics and Modern/Contemporary Art* (<http://minusplato.com/>).

Class Schedule

(All readings will be made available electronically on Canvas)

Selfish History: Ancient Rome & the Revenge of Narcissus

Week 1: Ovid's Narcissus & the new narcissism

- Ovid *Metamorphoses* Book 3 (Narcissus)
- Selection of media articles that use Ovid's Narcissus to discuss selfie culture e.g. Peter Jones 'Ancient and Modern: Ovid on selfies' <http://www.spectator.co.uk/2014/01/ovid-on-selfies/>
- Kristin Dombek, 'Artists' in *The Selfishness of Others: An Essay on the Fear of Narcissism*, 2016, 111-120.

Week 2: Mirrors, exhibitionism & celebrity culture

- Suetonius' *Life of Horace*; Seneca *Natural Questions* 1 (Hostius Quadra); Apuleius *Apology* (on the philosopher's mirror).
- Kim Kardashian *Selfish* (selection)
- Mehita Iqani and Jonathan E. Schroeder *#selfie: digital self-portraits as commodity form and consumption practice Consumption Markets & Culture*_Vol. 19. 5,2016

Week 3: Networks: Selfies, social media and the state

- Seneca *Letters* (selection)
- Henry A. Giroux ‘Selfie Culture in the Age of Corporate and State Surveillance’ *Third Text* Vol. 29.3 (2015) 155-164

The Art of the Selfie: Self-Portraiture, Autobiography and the Care of the Self

Week 4: Picturing the Self

- Michel Foucault ‘Las Meninas’ from *The Order of Things*

Week 5: Writing the Self

- Michel Foucault ‘Self Writing’

Week 7: Care of the Self

- Michel Foucault ‘The Cultivation of the Self’ from *History of Sexuality Vol. 3: The Care of the Self*

Other People’s Selfies Project: Part 1

Week 8: Wexner Center Exhibition Visit

Week 9: Discussion of Exhibition Visit

How Ya Like Me Now: Selfie Citizenship and the New Empathy

Week 10: Selfie as witness

- Koliska M., Roberts J. (2015). ‘Selfies: Witnessing and participatory journalism with a point of view’ *International Journal of Communication*, 9, 1672-1685

Week 11: Race, Portraiture & Protest

- Richard Powell ‘The New Black Portraiture’

Week 12: Gender, Selfies & Sexual violence

- Debra Ferreday ‘Like a Stone in Your Stomach: Articulating the Unspeakable in Rape Victim-Survivors’ Activist Selfies’, in Adi Kuntsman, *Selfie Citizenship*, 127-136.

Other People’s Selfies Project: Part 2

Week 13: Selfie Presentations – me, myself and I

Week 14: Selfie Presentations – collective selfies