Almatourism

Journal of Tourism, Culture and Territorial Development

_____

Fashion's Non-Places: Digital Complicity and Visual Codes

Leu, R.[*]
Zurich University of The Arts (Switzerland)

ABSTRACT

In the heterotopia that is the internet, fashion's social identities and representations are constructed and mediated through images: blogs and YouTube tutorials have developed a following in the millions and are often the first stop when seeking advice, opinions or product reviews. All of these channels have a very specific language, with its own precisely defined vocabulary of signifiers.

In this paper, I would like to examine the digital beauty parlor as a place of socio-geography: at the intersection of the natural and the unnatural, of late capitalism and emancipatory movements, the disembodied avatars and live bloggers generate a sort of impersonal complicity with their viewers. Digital self-representation takes on a variety of forms, loosely connected to real places and social codes. How is this connection manufactured? What ideologies lie behind digital beautifying tools? What types of knowledge do those channels generate, how does it relate to the fast-evolving cycle of fashion? What impulses are at the source of returning time and time again to these spaces of cultural phenomena? And what kind of place is the digital beauty parlor, compared to its real-life equivalent?

Keywords: Authenticity; Heterotopia; Internet; Body Modification; Fashion

In den Heterotopien des Internets werden Repräsentationen konstruiert und durch Bilder vermittelt: Blogs und YouTube-Tutorials erreichen Millionen von Zuschauern und sind oft die erste Anlaufstelle bei der Suche nach Ratschlägen, Meinungen oder Produktbewertungen. Mit ihrem hochgradig definierten Vokabular von Bedeutungsträgern ist die Sprache dieser Kanäle sehr auffällig.

In diesem Aufsatz möchte ich den digitalen Schönheitssalon als einen Ort der Soziogeographie betrachten: entlang der Schnittstellen von Natur und Künstlichkeit einerseits und spätkapitalistischen und emanzipatorischen Bewegungen anderseits erzeugen die körperlosen Avatare und Live-Blogger eine de-personifizierte

[*] E-mail address: rada.leu@zhdk.ch

Komplizenschaft mit ihren Zuschauern. Die digitale Selbstdarstellung äußert sich in vielen Formen, die lose mit realen Orten und sozialen Codes verknüpft sind. Wie wird diese Verbindung hergestellt? Welche Ideologien liegen hinter den digitalen Verschönerungswerkzeugen? Welche Art von Wissen generieren diese Kanäle, und wie hängt dieses mit dem sich rasant erneuernden Modezyklus zusammen? Was führt den Zuschauer immer wieder zu diesen Phänomenen zurück? Und was für ein Ort ist der digitale Schönheitssalon, verglichen mit seinem realen Ebenbild?

Introduction

Throughout the landscape of social networking sites, two in particular stand out: YouTube, the digital progenitor of virtually all tutorials, and Instagram, the platform which engendered beauty phenomena such as the Insta-brow. These two platforms are by no means separate from each other but rather intertwine like an ouroborous wound inside a Moebius band, with many of the users being present on both platforms: YouTube offers countless Insta-brow tutorials, and inversely, many Instagrammers will ask their audience for suggestions, which are then answered on YouTube. The video portal is more suited to the tutorial format, as it allows for longer uploads: while Instagram does allow users to upload short videos, those are limited to a maximum length of 60 seconds.

YouTube is notoriously nebulous on facts concerning its videos, and questions such as what exactly constitutes a "view per video" and the remuneration that its most popular vloggers receive from the platform are kept under lock and key. However, one estimate suggests that YouTube features more than 5.3 million beauty tutorials, amounting to 88 billion views in the year 2017 alone[1]; and it is a well-known fact that the top YouTubers can live off the income they generate through both the site's remuneration and advertising deals. These figures show that the beauty tutorial is not a niche phenomenon, but a trend that is produced and consumed across the globe.
With millions of subscribers and views per video, select YouTubers have joined the ranks of bona fide celebrities, thus creating a golden opportunity for the marketing departments of beauty industry giants. Product placement has become less and less subtle, and many multinational corporations – initially slow on jumping the bandwagon of digital marketing through user-generated content – have increased their presence and advertising spending on both YouTube and Instagram.

1. YouTube, Instagram, and the beauty industry, or why we really want "cute pores" now

Since its creation in 2005, YouTube has been primarily known as a platform for user-generated content. The platform's popularity is partly due to its openness: anyone with access to a computer can upload footage. And seemingly everyone does. YouTube features billions of videos, with some studies suggesting that over 300 hours of video

are uploaded on the platform per minute[2]. Most of these will remain unwatched or are viewed only by a very small audience. Long before the platform opened up to its now most popular format, the pop music video, it was home to a plethora of low-profile videos, mostly coming from countless subgenres of the Do-It-Yourself (DIY) community. The aura of authenticity that tutorials and life-hack videos exude still sticks to them via the association of YouTube being a predominantly amateur-oriented platform in its early days.

Currently, the platform is widely known for its countless tutorials, and beauty tutorials are clearly amongst the most watched. According to statistics, beauty videos have been viewed over 230 billion times since 2006[3]. A large portion of these views can be attributed to a handful of the site's top channels. Mexican YouTuber YuYa is one of the most popular accounts on the platform, with over 22 millions subscribers; and the US-American vloggers Nikki of Nikki Tutorials and Jeffree Star have an audience of 11 millions each (in comparison: pop megastar Ariana Grande has 26 million subscribers, and Madonna only a somewhat modest 2 millions).

These numbers have not slipped by unnoticed to large beauty corporations, who have been quick to realize that this enormous popularity can be translated into an exceptional possibility for profit. The beauty industry was valued at USD 532.43 billion in 2017[4] and is rapidly and consistently growing: it is expected to reach USD 805.61 billion by 2023 and seems to be one of the few industries remaining largely unaffected by global financial crises and market meltdowns. A rising middle class that can afford to spend money on cosmetics contributes to this global trend. Asia Pacific, according to numbers published by L'Oréal Group[5], has the biggest share in the cosmetics market. The rising popularity of social media and increased online spending are cited as the two main factors for the group's profit.

With about half of the overall views coming from an audience between 25-34 years old[6], makeup tutorials are mostly watched by young women in the beginning of their careers (a queer audience presumably also largely contributes to the views - vloggers Jeffree Star and James Charles are amongst its best-known representatives, along with countless drag makeup channels). Most videos are watched in the early morning hours[7] (applying makeup before work) and in the evenings (when getting ready for social events). However, these times are by no means exclusive, as beauty fans will also experiment with different looks throughout the day and post them online in the form of selfies.

As the selfie gains in importance as a form of self-representation, it is obvious that beauty trends will focus on tools both material and digital to heighten the face's appeal. Sharing selfies on social networking sites makes them more than mere momentary snaps: they manage the boundaries of outward representation of a person's privacy, the image that one wishes to present to world, the localization of one's social standing, and are a visual form replete with cultural codes. Almost synonymous with selfie culture, the social media platform Instagram has emerged as the 21st century's favourite digital mirror on the wall.

Since the early 2000s, when apps such as Hipstamatic and Instagram were mainly known for their use of nostalgic filters, there has been a notable shift in the visual

language of makeup-selfies: the vintage-inspired look of Hipstamatic has given way to a digital culture oriented towards the ephemeral, exemplified by Instagram and the decreasingly popular Snapchat. The older filters of Hipstamatic (along with other design elements of the user interface, such as shutter noises and an overall design of handheld retro photo cameras) attempted to infuse the digital image with the aura of analogue photography. Instagram gradually forced Hipstamatic out of the market, as the former always had a focus on social sharing: users could share and upload their own content, comment and discuss images, tag people and follow tags (as opposed to Hipstamatic's model of only being able to edit pictures within the app). Instagram became the most used image sharing app shortly after it was purchased by Facebook in 2012, and, very much like it, a large contributor to the meta-connectivity of the digital world. Parallel to this development, the cameras on mobile devices steadily increased the image resolution, resulting in photographs with a constantly clearer image quality. As of 2017, Instagram allows users to upload videos of up to 60 seconds. This in turn has popularized a form of ultra-short tutorials that are edited with time-lapse to fit the temporal limitations of the app. It also allows users to zoom in on pictures on their mobile devices. This, combined with the aforementioned image quality, produces close-ups of makeup whose clarity of representation rivals that of pornography: everything can be seen, and everything wants to be seen.

Once more, the beauty industry has quickly tapped into this means of self-representation by offering new products specifically developed with a focus on making the subject look good for the phone camera. Numerous products promise flawless skin: using the *#nofilter*-hashtag in their names, they suggest that the application of said product would render a filter obsolete. Pore-minimizing creams promise the magical disappearance of pores, those cumbersome holes in a skin that could otherwise be a picture-perfect smooth surface. It seems that we now live in a reality where the character of Quinn Morgendorffer and her notorious obsession with small, cute pores is no longer just satire[8].

2. The Internet is a Third Place, and so are YouTube's bedrooms

Beauty tutorials, like many other DIY platforms on YouTube, follow very strict formulaic rules: there are a couple of sub-genres[9] that each vlogger will post at least once in their career. These include the *GRWM* video (*Get Ready With Me*, in which the viewer follows the beauty routine a vlogger applies on a daily basis), *My Boyfriend Does My Makeup* (in which the vlogger's partner, usually male and thus supposedly completely unaccustomed with the concept of makeup, does their makeup), the *Haul* and *Unboxing* genres (where vloggers go on shopping sprees and show the audience how much they spent on which products, and subsequently unpack and demonstrate them in pure consumerist rapture) and the *Original vs Drug-Store* (in which the bloggers compare cheap knock-offs to the original brand products). Another popular format are transformation videos, where vloggers transform their faces using makeup and a plethora of decorations and prosthetic materials, thus becoming everything from celebrity lookalikes, superheroines, animals, alien creatures or corpsepainted

metalheads[10]. Some of these transformations are only applied to one half of the face, leaving the other half "natural" as a counterpoint.

A bizarre trend that raises at least a few perfectly shaped eyebrows is the *Destroying Makeup* trope, in which entire makeup collections are drilled into, cut, smashed, stabbed, hammered, pulverized, burned or melted. In those videos, the shock value is created by stating the monetary value of makeup sets, often ranging in the thousands of US-dollars. What might seem like a critical stance towards unbridled consumerism to the untrained eye, is in fact a tool of creating a heightened value for those desired objects: the brands and the price tag of the products are at the very center of the spectacle. These videos are often exacted as a form of staged revenge by vloggers' boyfriends or husbands (which is frankly a little disturbing), and the drama of product destruction is underlined by tearful outbursts and shrieks of the beauty bloggers themselves (which is even more disturbing). The reasons for exacting revenge are secondary to the plot, but the source of almost pornographic fascination those videos have on viewers is clearly the distress of the vloggers, who obviously have a nearly physical attachment to their commodities.

The background music choices for beauty tutorials would be an enticing subject for further research, but this essay will touch upon it only briefly: the soundtracks can themselves be found on various royalty-free YouTube channels, and seem to heavily rely on xylophones, happy, plucky guitars and an overall sound aesthetic that can only be described as "girly". Remixes of popular hits are somewhat of an exception, but when featured, they will attempt to match the bass-drop to the final transformation shot of the tutorial. Needless to say, any self-respecting corpsepaint tutorial will be set to the deadliest of death metals.

In a majority of tutorials, the viewer finds herself in the intimate setting of the vlogger's bedroom, the most private zone of domestic interiors. She becomes a tourist in an imagined, de-localized private space, a spectacle unfolding seemingly for her eyes only - in spite of the millions of clicks a video might have. Differences in production techniques are a moot point here: whilst many channels use equipment that is on the lower range of the price spectrum, others have resorted to filming with semi-professional lighting and camera equipment. Some popular vloggers have entire rooms dedicated to filming their tutorials and will spend dozens of hours in editing their videos. Whilst most videos are perfectly edited, eliminating awkward pauses between words, bloopers and slips of the tongue, others will make the filming process conspicuous and break the fourth wall: their creators will openly voice their insecurities and curate exactly this aspect in an attempt to feel more relatable. Examples include pets and people walking into the shot, seemingly oblivious that they are intervening in the process of content generation, and wrongly applied makeup which then has to be removed.

Queer beauty bloggers Jeffree Star and James Charles resort to using neutral backdrops, whilst most of the female YouTubers will set their tutorials in a highly curated, girly setting. The colour schemes offer numerous shades of pink, and props often feature flowers and vases, IKEA picture frames (sometimes with the original store-bought picture left inside) and candles – attributes that are recognizable enough as staples of femininity without being too distinctively personal. Their

interchangeability is one of the key factors contributing to the recognition value of the makeup tutorial look. Neither cultural background nor geographic location can be determined from these interiors. They could be anywhere, in Asia, the United States, South America, or Europe; inside an apartment, hotel room, or any other room that has enough space to film a tutorial in. As such, these rooms are digital non-places in very much the same way that airports and parking lots were to sociologist Marc Augé (1995, p.94) – replaceable, anonymous, transitory, serving one purpose alone, and globally similar, if not identical, in their décor. Inextricably tied to consumerism and common to hypermodern societies worldwide, they lack distinguishing characteristics, but have a very clear set of codified rules and injunctions. Similarly, the digital beauty parlors of YouTube tutorials all follow a clear blueprint in their visual and sonic aesthetics, as if following the same set of highly codified rules issued upon entering the non-place that is the Internet.

The greeting formula is a further staple of the tutorial canon: beauty bloggers address their audiences in an almost comically cheery manner. The standard greeting such as "Hi, guys!" always implies an audience of more than one person, but this is the only reference to the multitude of viewers a channel might have across time. The vlogger will then continue in a similarly upbeat, particular voice - a differentiator which has become known as the "YouTube voice"[11]. A combination of over-enunciation, stressed syllables, exclamations and drawn-out vowels, all delivered at top speed, this style of speaking is noteworthy for a particular reason: in its ubiquity, it has become de-localised, much like the aforementioned bedroom design. Vloggers from around the globe have adopted it, turning the speech patterns into an auditory code, a meme that can be understood as a signifier of a tutorial video. In this aspect, this globalized phenomenon is similar to Received Pronunciation (otherwise known as The King's English[12]), a formalized British accent which, unlike a dialect, is based on social class (upper class, in this case) and upbringing rather than local belonging. Much like Received Pronunciation, the content of the message is strongly mediated by its linguistic form: the audience can immediately recognize the field of signifiers it has entered and knows what to expect. Since this norm is so ubiquitous and very few vloggers deviate from it, it has become a ready material for countless parodies: American feminist comedian Sailor J created a widely popular account, in which she slips between the YouTube voice and upper-class British and American accents, whilst desperately trying to conceal her forehead (since having a forehead "might mean you have ugly things, like opinions, and thoughts of your own", inside it)[13].

As we have seen, de-localization occurs both on the linguistic plane and in the field of visual aesthetics. Taking this into consideration, we can now examine why the Internet is a paradigm of a de-localized place. Available wherever you can connect to it, its "sites" fit neatly into Foucault's definition of heterotopia (1984): it obeys a different set of codes of conduct than other places (sometimes, as is the case of anarchic channels like 4chan, none at all), it is a "counter-site" (Foucault, 1984, p. 3) mirroring and simultaneously subverting real-life society (for instance, online media both follows the classic newspaper format and produces its very own media outlets) has "precise and determined functions" (Foucault, 1984, p. 4) (a medical advice channel, for instance, serves a completely different designated purpose than a cat video compilation), is "capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible" (Foucault, 1984, p. 6) (one can jump from a cat video to

pornography in just a few clicks), and "presupposes a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable" (Foucault, 1984, p. 7) (some websites are completely inaccessible from certain countries, and many sites require some form of registration to be accessed).

Another tool useful to the analysis of virtual spaces is the term "third place", coined by the US-American sociologist Ray Oldenburg in his 1989 book *The Great Good Place*. Oldenburg defines it as a space outside the binary of the fields of work and home, where neither the domestic codes of familiarity not the formal rules of the work-environment apply. Examples include coffee houses, clubs of all kinds, bars, and, notably, beauty parlours: these informal gathering places have other sets of rules than the first two social places. In many communities, the beauty parlour serves much more than its direct purpose: it is a place for watching sporting events, discussing local politics, exchanging gossip and life-advice. This sociological definition is widely applicable to the virtual beauty parlours of YouTube. They, too, function as spaces where users can exchange advice, voice wishes and complaints. This is seen most clearly in videos offering advice to transgender people who are in the process of transitioning[14]. The importance of these videos (which often combine general life advice as well as makeup tools to pass as either male or female) cannot be stressed enough, as they offer independent advice from people who have had similar experiences to their viewers, and are unique in the possibility of anonymity that social media offers its viewers– something that is widely valued by the transgender community and has no real-life equivalent outside of the Internet.

3. "My face, but better": Authenticity and the Self(ie)

Becoming yourself is an endless process, and contemporary society is obsessed with it. We are encouraged to become true to our presumed innermost identity (which, incidentally, is supposed to be our best possible self), by altering our bodies through exercise, plastic surgery and tattoos, expressing our affinities through the decoration our homes, showcasing who we are through our sartorial choices, and changing our makeup routines to reflect who we think we are. Rimbaud's statement "*Je est un autre*" can be a different persona, a different "I" for each and every day. Selfies are a continuation of this idea, representing facets of an ever-changing, ever-evolving self. They do so in accordance with the fundamental promise of contemporary society: you can become yourself if you are willing to work hard enough on transforming yourself. You can and should become a better you, a healthier you, a more successful you, a more productive you, and this transformation process should be made visible. Achieving the "you" that you could be is strenuous work, consisting of forms of self-surveillance (selfies, dieting plans, progress timelines) and continuous sisyphean self-improvement.

We can still find the romantic idea of an inner core at the root of this idea of the self. This centre is surrounded by the personae we present to the outside world, and each of these aspects has a clear moral rating attached to it: "The inner/outer opposition is

clearly valorized: the inner is regarded as higher or more real than the outer" (Guignon, 2004, p. 82).

In line with this valorisation, applying makeup is still often perceived as frivolous, vain, and shallow – adapting one's image through makeup in accordance to pre-given beauty standards is perceived as a "low" occupation, stigmatizing people who invest time in their appearance as lacking inner depth. This relies on the perceived notion of time as a limited resource, which can be "invested" either in vain hobbies (applying makeup; fashion) or in activities with a higher purpose (education, reading, going to the opera to look at performers wearing copious amounts of makeup). Those lines have been somewhat blurred through the idea of self-care (e.g. yoga, fitness, meditation, bubble baths), which suggests that spending time on yourself is both beneficial and necessary for the development of a well-rounded individual. And yet double standards still persist, especially when it comes to women and their presentation – a woman should be nice to look at whilst being inconspicuous about the time she invests in her beauty rituals. Makeup videos clearly break with this idea by making transparent the time and effort put into achieving this appearance.

If true beauty lies within, the outer shell has to be made to match this beautiful core. This transformation process is often framed like a modern Cinderella myth: before-and-after images show patchy skin and sparse eyebrows, which are then groomed to perfection for the ultimate reveal. Yet unlike Cinderella, who only had to get married to the prince once, the beauty vlogger does not live happily ever after: their beautifying process has to be reiterated over and over again. We can observe the multiplicity of "true" selves here, each one emerging more authentic than its precedent. Here, self-optimization is not only a tactic: it is performative, spectacular, and we enjoy watching and re-watching it. We live in the decades of the spectacle, of the celebrity for celebrity's sake, of the confession booth. And much like a virtual tree falling in a virtual forest, if no-one is there to witness a spectacle, it is probably also not worth seeing.

In the last couple of years, beauty vloggers have begun to preface their videos with short statements that usually goes something like this: "It's absolutely fine to not wear any makeup at all, just do whatever makes you feel good about yourself. Remember, everybody is beautiful! However, if you feel that makeup does empower you, you can follow the fourteen easy steps to glowing skin that I will demonstrate now." The comment sections are invariably split into two types of comments: on the one hand those affirming that everyone is beautiful just the way they are (followed by multiple heart emojis), and on the other those that state that the application of makeup makes them feel more confident about themselves. Both presuppose the existence of the aforementioned true authentic self, one that is either enhanced or presented in its unadulterated state. Or, as YouTuber Kaushal puts it: "My face, but better"[15].

Authenticity of the presenter is both the key to selling products, and its antithesis: the main appeal of YouTube tutorials of any kind is that the viewer receives unbiased information. But why is it that the girl next door is to be trusted more in her recommendations? Over the years, consumers have become more aware of the subtle mechanisms of capitalism, whose livelihood depends on creating more and more needs

that can be filled with newer and newer products. Consumers are aware of the wide array of marketing techniques and design tactics employed by supermarkets and shopping malls (music choices, colour schemes and architecture) in order to make the time spent there more pleasant and persuade the potential buyer to hand over their hard-earned money in exchange for smooth, shiny things. Furthermore, it is no big secret that magazine covers, cinema billboards and advertising posters rely heavily on the use of Photoshop to smooth out wrinkles, lengthen legs, flatten bellies, increase muscle volume, plump up lips and make hourglass figures more hourglass-y. We are still negotiating the aftermath of 90s controversies: the decade was characterized by the cultish following of supermodels, the emergence of "heroin-chic" and the subsequent outrage over impossible beauty standards and anorexia. Naomi Wolf's 1991 book *The Beauty Myth* was among the most popular to criticize the bigotry of women's magazines, which would simultaneously encourage women to be more empowered and advise them on how to become more attractive by losing weight all within a few pages. Some advertisers - skincare manufacturer Dove being the most notorious one – soon altered their strategies and resorted to using "normal" and "natural"– looking women in their adverts. This created a whole new target group to be solicited: the critical, body-positive feminist consumer could be integrated quite comfortably in the logic of neoliberalism. But whilst this shift occurred, Dove's mother company Unilever still continued to sell skin whitening products to dark-skinned women and air the incredibly sexist AXE deodorant ads.

In this context, the concept of authenticity is a key element in many contemporary marketing strategies. This is one of the reasons why consumers are increasingly turning to user-generated content. Aside from the "girl-next-door" type of beauty blogger, the most successful ones have been those attached to big celebrity names (Rihanna's beauty line Fenty Beauty, for instance, was so popular that some of its darker foundation shades sold out within a matter of days). The authenticity of a celebrity can be equated to attention, and attention means being valued, especially as a celebrity.

Being perceived as authentic is one of the key factors in pop media and the marketing of celebrities is not a new phenomenon, but its iteration has changed in the last years. Currently, much of the attention that pop stars receive centers not so much on what they do, but on how they present themselves. Pop singer Alicia Keys stirred up quite a controversy when she decided to appear in public without any makeup in 2016, saying that she wanted to be comfortable exactly as she was[16]. Interestingly enough, she equated going makeup-free and looking "natural" to being honest and free, presupposing that there *is* such a thing as a non-mediated, unaltered and unprocessed representation of the self.
Similarly, but at the opposing end of the makeup spectrum, celebrities Kim Kardashian and her half-sister Kylie Jenner have become known largely due to the makeup selfies they post on Instagram. Both Kim Kardashian and Kylie Jenner have launched their own makeup lines (KKW Beauty and Kylie Cosmetics). According to *Forbes* magazine, whose cover Jenner graced in September 2018, her cosmetics brand has set her to soon become the youngest self-made billionaire at the age of 21[17].
A big part of the reporting on both Kardashian and Jenner focuses on their physical features: the former famously modelled her backside to achieve almost superhuman

proportions, whilst the latter rose to popularity after denying that she had had plastic surgery on her lips. "Has she or hasn't she?" became the "To Be or Not To Be" question of celebrity gossip in 2015, after an informal internet contest (the "Kylie Jenner Lip Contest") saw many young adults attempt to achieve similarly voluminous lips by sucking the air out of bottles and the ensuing swelling. The health hazards of this contest became such a source of criticism that Jenner admitted to having had fillers injected in her lips soon thereafter. The young socialite is now synonymous with her lips, which might be one of the main factors behind the success of her lip-kits.

Nicknamed the "Queen of Selfies", Jenner's half-sister Kim Kardashian published an entire book comprised only of selfies she had taken over the years. She is also known as the queen of contouring, a makeup approach using light and dark shades to accentuate and exaggerate certain features of the face, much like the chiaroscuro painting technique adds emphasis. The contouring technique originates from the drag-performance community and has very little to do with any semblance of verisimilitude: eyes, lips and eyebrows are all exaggerated to fantastic proportions, playing with bizarre, surreal and extravagant aesthetics. It is extremely well suited to the celebrity brand of the Kardashian/Jenner clan, where no part of the public image is left to chance.

In their smooth and doll-like appearance, Jenner and Kardashian have become paradigmatic for a certain look typical of the new millenium. The socialites hardly ever smile in pictures, and their sharp Insta-brows (arched, clear-cut, full brows that feather out at the start and become increasingly darker towards the end; similar to the eyebrows drawn on dolls like Barbie or Bratz Dolls, and also a staple of drag culture) and plastic-like skin gives them an appearance reminiscent of CGI-generated gaming avatars, virtual reality holograms, or sci-fi cyborgs. The smooth surfaces of their faces become consumable archetypes, polished shells that offer no obstacle to visual consumption (Han, 2018, p. 48). Most users encounter their image largely through Jenner's and Kardashian's selfies on Instagram, in which the pair rarely speak, and, when doing so, barely move their facial muscles.

What is interesting is how smoothly the half-sisters can switch between artificiality and authenticity. They both participated in the *#nomakeup* and the *#wokeuplikethis* trends, in which women would upload selfies wearing no makeup or makeup that was hardly noticeable. These trends started a genre of tutorials which focused on "natural" makeup, or "no-makeup makeup". Many "natural" tutorials have a duration of close to twenty minutes – and that's including time-lapses. Featuring dozens of products, each applied in a series of up to twenty steps, these tutorials often solicit comments questioning the notion of what a "natural" look might be. To many viewers and commentators, a natural look achieved through a plethora of products is a contradiction in terms. And yet, the "nature" that these tutorials are referencing is a heavily mediated idea, one that is perceived through the lens of the camera. These selfies focus on the appearance, not the essence of the natural, forgoing flashy colours and using a palette that is as close to the wearer's skin as possible. They are paradigmatic of their digital habitat: after all, the natural state is always hazy at best in its definition.

Conclusion: To Thine Own Selfie Be Untrue

Ridding ourselves from the notion that the authentic self is an inorganic, immovable entity provides a much better approach to understanding the fluidity of self-representation. Selfies and the regularity with which they are recorded and shared are representations of singular moments in the curated timeline of the self. The authentic self then is a permanently unfinished project, a work constantly under construction, a Babylonian tower rising higher with each click of the camera. Whilst corporations have not been oblivious to the marketability of authenticity, and neoliberal market economy has not halted its constant appropriation of things it cannot create, makeup and its virtual sharing still has an emancipatory potential for under-represented communities and their fluid self-expression. Attempts to reconcile the post-modern fragmented self have been numerous, with the current trend pointing strongly toward self-optimization as a one-size-fits-all remedy to every social *malaise*. Whilst it is important to remain critical of cunning marketing strategies, the constant reframing of the self in digital media could potentially offer a way out of the valorization of certain types of appearance over others, so that, in the long run, we wouldn't have to pick up the pieces of our shattered mirrors.

References

Augé, M. (1995). *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropolgy of Supermodernity*. London: Verso.

Foucault, M. (1984). *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias*, in Architecture/Mouvement/Continuité, October 1984, cited from *Des Espaces Autres*, March 1967, translated from the French by Jay Miscowiec.

Guignon, C. (2004). *On Being Authentic*. London-NewYork: Routledge.

Han, B. (2018). *Saving Beauty*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Wolf, N. (1990). *The Beauty Myth*. London: Chatto & Windus.

www.en.wikipedia.org

www.forbes.com

www.loreal-finance.com

www.mtv.com

www.reuters.com

www.statista.com

www.theatlantic.com

www.tubularinsights.com

www.vice.com

www.videonitch.com

www.youtube.com

---

[1] https://www.statista.com/statistics/294655/youtube-monthly-beauty-content-views/
[2] http://videonitch.com/2017/12/13/36-mind-blowing-youtube-facts-figures-statistics-2017-re-post/
[3] https://www.statista.com/statistics/294655/youtube-monthly-beauty-content-views/
[4] https://www.reuters.com/brandfeatures/venture-capital/article?id=30351
[5] https://www.loreal-finance.com/en/annual-report-2017/cosmetics-market

6 http://tubularinsights.com/youtube-beauty-industry/

7 http://tubularinsights.com/youtube-beauty-industry/

8 http://www.mtv.com/episodes/8p1lf3/daria-monster-season-2-ep-206

9 https://www.statista.com/statistics/294967/youtube-beauty-vlogger-content-consumption/

10 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AA3LM_K190M

11 https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2015/12/the-linguistics-of-youtube-voice/418962/;
https://www.vice.com/en_uk/article/aepn94/the-rise-of-youtube-voice-and-why-vloggers-want-it-to-stop

12 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Received_Pronunciation

13 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zJaaLXZwmsU

14 https://youtu.be/_m7i1G1nLTk

15 Kaushal Beauty, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FkjtUTJStrk

16 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GmbFPPiK6D8

17 https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesdigitalcovers/2018/07/11/how-20-year-old-kylie-jenner-built-a-900-million-fortune-in-less-than-3-years/