

reach by 2050, for those who can afford it. Until then, our collective effort to upload ourselves into the Cloud is enabling a new permanence. Artists have long sought immortality; self-digitization makes it real, sort of. We are nearing an age of unlimited storage and unlimited bandwidth: everything archived, everything accessible, even the dead. A South Korean company recently created an app called With Me that lets you take selfies with your dead friends and relatives, or at least, a “3D photo-realistic AI avatar” of them. It looks terrible, but it is foretaste of Kurzweil’s prediction that we will upload our consciousness into machines and live forever.

Looking out over Jericho from the top of Mount Temptation, the Devil presented Jesus with his final offer: the whole world would bow to him, if he would just bow to the Devil. In other words, you can get everyone’s attention if you stop being you. Or, to take it further, if you become a version of you that’s intelligible to everyone. This symbolic dilemma is now a mundane reality. We’re replicating ourselves from the perspective of everyone forever. It’s like taking a picture of yourself from space. Forever may be here, but it’s still very far away.

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CCC is a collection of artists, writers, and audio producers. We like to be described as a nebulous assortment of curious individuals who work together to create temporary installations and uncanny experiences that exist in the world for a few moments until they don’t anymore. Recent installations include *Hold On Hold On Some Things Last Forever* at Katzman Contemporary (Toronto) and at Forest City Gallery (London). Recent audio works include *The Slow Now* and *Lazaro’s Dream* produced for the Koffler Center of the Arts (Toronto). Their work has also been featured at the old BBC Building (London, UK); CCA (Glasgow, UK) and Princeton University (New Jersey, US).

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THE SUBLIME IN QUOTATIONS

BY MARK MANN

The oldest continuously inhabited city in the world also happens to be located at the lowest point on earth, about a half hour's drive east of Jerusalem. Jericho is a dusty town full of derelict hotels and ruined buildings. The main outdoor market circles a small public square populated by palm trees wrapped in blue and red LED lights. Local men sometimes stroll around holding hands, disconcerting the Christian tourists who sail back and forth across the Holy Land in sleek, air-conditioned buses to visit place-names in the Bible. In Jericho, most of the buses line up outside a gated compound toward the edge of town, from which emanates a 1600-meter funicular that travels halfway up a nearby mountain. There, Jesus and the Devil once stood and looked out over the whole world.

It must have felt unique at the time, but looking out over the whole world is now everyone's problem. Astronauts report that seeing the planet from space induces a cognitive shift, whereby earth's inequities appear more tragically absurd than they do from the ground. It's called the "overview effect," but you don't get it from pictures. Almost the opposite, in fact.

Rather than universal empathy, Heidegger looked at images of earth taken from space and identified an obliterating power. "This is no longer the earth on which man lives," he said. Seen from far enough away, it's like we're not ever here.

Perhaps this latter experience is what animates our current frenzy to leave the planet and colonize space: to un-annihilate ourselves by making "out there" more like "down here." But even with IMAX cameras on the International Space Station, it isn't the God's-eye-view of the world that really troubles us; it's the one we get on our phones. These screens can show us anything, and so they signify everything. They really feel like it too, like everything that's happening in the world, and everything we should know and do and think—an overwhelming opportunity, an impossible burden.

The place where Jesus and the Devil ostensibly stood together and surveyed "all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour" is now the site of the Mount of Temptation Monastery. On the right after you exit the cable car, there is a gift shop and eatery called the Temptation Restaurant. To the left, a wide stone pathway leads to a winding set of stairs that climbs to the monastery, which is perched on top of a steep escarpment and built into an overhanging cliff. It looks like a rustic stone cathedral that's been cut in half and pinned to a giant wall. Inside, the rooms burrow into natural caves in the mountain. Early Christians thought that Jesus's forty days of fasting in the wilderness were spent in one of these caves; there's even a stone that he sat on. Today, tourists from places like Poland, America, and South Korea shuffle into the monastery's various cramped, candle-lit grottos, holding out their phones to take pictures of the painted saints on the walls.

There is no more compelling argument for the power of digital photography to mediate experience than the naturalness with which some pious people snap pictures of sacred objects.

It's as instinctual as bowing, as intuitive as kissing. People do it with art too, and all the things you can't touch or take. Our phones give us a button to look with. They resolve seeing into concrete action. It's better to think of picture-taking not as a pastime, but as an additional sense, just like sight, touch, taste, smell, or hearing, only more shareable, and therefore, in a sense, more real.

Wherever we encounter the uncertainty of experiences that are supposed to be meaningful, pictures crystallize a response. Likewise with our unsettled identities, the phone's camera proposes a method of formulation, and its applications furnish us with opportunities to become intelligible. All these programs are variations of a single feature: the feed. To the extent that the



Internet is a social environment, the feed is its organizing principle, in the same way that time organizes our relationships in

the physical world. Without a feed, picture-taking requires a rationale, such as self-expression. With a feed, picture-taking is simply being yourself.

Many people relish the clarity of digital selfhood. They convert inner tension into public resolution by repeatedly taking pictures of themselves, whether by reversing the camera on their phones or aiming them at mirrors. Mirror selfies are the most revealing. Some people hold the phone directly in front of their faces, so for the viewer their faces are replaced by the phone, manifesting the cyclops prediction described by one of the interlocutors in CCC's *The Sublime in Quotations*. Or instead of creating the charade of eye-contact by looking at the camera lens in the mirror, they watch themselves on the screen—looking at themselves looking at themselves.

Theoretically, taking a mirror selfie creates an infinite recursion, or in other words, an infinite self-extension. But mirror selfies simply render the trick more explicit; selfies in general offer a method for seeing yourself from very far away, like looking through the wrong end of a telescope. If you're far enough away, it's like you're not even there. You've inhabited the stranger's gaze, and turned it on yourself. This is a prize that anyone would enjoy.

In his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, published in 1959, the sociologist Erving



Hoffman described a process of "impression management" (how we perform information about our various selves—the self we think we are, the self we want to be, and the self we think we should be) that depends on "audience segregation", whereby we tailor our performances for specific audiences. The feeds on our phones dramatically simplify audience segregation, and for many people, eliminate it. By default, we perform our identities for an audience of everyone. When we submit selfies to an open feed, we configure ourselves for the whole planet.

Before they arrived at the top of Temptation Mountain, Jesus was subjected to two

preliminary temptations. Knowing he was hungry, the Devil encouraged him to exercise his divine power by turning some stones into bread. When Jesus refused, the Devil took him to the top of a temple and dared him to jump. If he was God, the angels would catch him. Both of these temptations belong to a single category: prove yourself. Seek validation.

If you type #selfie into the search bar in Instagram, you can scroll for what seems like a long time and only travel a few minutes backward into the history of selfies. You'll meet #polishgirl and #gayboy and #successmodel and #femaledj and #tattooaddict. For the most part, the selfie feed is a chart of positive feelings: feeling fresh, feeling cute, feeling special, feeling cool. But despite the good vibes, it is likely to make you feel bad, because looking at so many people threatens a cognitive limitation whereby humans can only maintain relationships with a maximum of 150 people. For chickens, the threshold is 110; any more, and they start pecking each other to death.

Selfies also nudge us toward another biologically enforced perimeter, beyond which lies the Uncanny Valley—the term neurologists use to describe the creepy feeling we get from looking at avatars and robots with a near-human appearance. Selfie-takers frequently use filters to enlarge their eyes, add animal features, or make themselves look older or younger. These approximations are already pitching forward into the Uncanny Valley, but all selfies lean over the edge to varying degrees. As distillations prepared for an audience of everyone, selfies sometimes look like robotic simulacra, such as when people repeatedly take the same picture from the same angle with the same expression. Nevertheless, whether you practice selfie-ness or not, every action you take online contributes to a constant process of virtual self-replication that can hardly be undone. You spend your life producing a self that will persist unmitigated by your physical death.

Ray Kurzweil, now the director of engineering at Google, believes that technological advances will place a mortality within