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# The travel selfie: Exploring the writer's vision in contemporary travel writing

Abstract:

In 2013, the Oxford Dictionary declared 'selfie' the word of the year, defining this phenomenon as 'a photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically one taken with a smartphone or webcam and shared via social media' (BBC News, 2013). Instagram and personal travel blogs seem to be some of the most popular platforms enabling travel writers to express themselves through selfies, aka travel selfies. Many studies revolving around the culture of travel selfies have been conducted to better understand tourist behaviour, tourist marketing and consumer habits. However, there is a lack of interdisciplinary research surrounding this complex socio-cultural phenomenon. Travel selfies, although popular, often spark controversy and in some places, travel selfies are prohibited for safety reasons or to show respect at memorial sites. Selfies are often considered narcissistic and therefore, sometimes frowned upon by society. In this paper, I explore the larger socio-cultural complexities of travel selfies and explore what a travel selfie may contribute to a writer's travel account by investigating how the rise of the travel selfie has shaped the travel writer's personal vision that usually evolves throughout the writing process.

Bibliographical note:

Stefan Jatschka is in the second year of his PhD studies at Griffith University. His project investigates new research territory where travel writing and mother-son relationships are brought into focus. The project examines how a son at odds with his mother might better discover her by following a journey she took when she was a young woman, as recorded in her journal. This project promises research publication in the fields of Cultural Studies, Sociology and Creative Writing. He has been published in *Talent Implied* and *Getamungstit*.

Keywords: travel writing – creative writing process – selfie – visual writing – travel blogs

## Introduction

The act of travelling has developed significantly over the last millennium. Transportation modes, economical (in)stability and political situations not only dictate where, how often and when we travel but also influence the publication of travel accounts that shape our world view in the 21st century.

Until the 13th century, travel books, mostly written by missionaries and merchants, explored new geographical territories and revealed unfamiliar experiences, customs and people (Blanton 2002) and thereby, played an important role in uncovering the world and influencing how people perceived it. The Vinland Sagas, for example, a collection of 13th century Norse travel accounts, describe the first discovery and exploration of the North American continent, well before Christopher Columbus:

> They returned to their ship and put to sea, and sighted a second land. Once again they sailed right up to it and cast anchor, lowered a boat and went ashore. This country was flat and wooded, with white sandy beaches wherever they went; and the land sloped gently to sea.
>
> Leif said, 'This country shall be named after its natural resources: it shall be called Markland.' (Magnusson & Pálsson 1965: 55)

In the 16th and 17th centuries, the travel writing genre experienced a boom, resulting in thousands of Europeans exploring newly discovered regions in the world as 'conquering heroes' (Blanton 2002: 9), recording their experiences with the newly-encountered 'other' in travel memoirs, and for the first time producing travel books that offered the reader a 'triple opportunity of exploration – abroad, into the author's brain, and into our own' (Douglas 1925: 11). Douglas himself offers this kind of exploration in his travel account of *Old Calabria* (1915) in which he 're-discovers' his identity by wandering in the traces of Italy's history and by immersing himself in foreign traditions. By the 19th century, especially after World War 1, the theme of self-discovery had become prominent in travel writing (Blanton 2002) with travel accounts no longer focused on finding one single identity of the author but exploring various aspects of the person's identity. Several sub-genres have emerged since, such as the beat-travel genre with Jack Kerouac's travel-themed book *On the Road* (1957) and post-tourism accounts of travels such as *The Songlines* (1987) by Bruce Chatwin and a cornucopia of online travel blogs.

Investigating these aspects of the history of travel writing in accordance with society's rapid development has highlighted the fact that the form, as it is driven by the individual, and society, is in a constant state of motion, ever evolving. In 2002, Blanton foreshadowed what might still be discovered in an ever-travelling world:

> The new travel books are not our guides to places remote; nowhere is remote anymore… They are instead metaphors of a quest for ground zero – a place where values are discovered along the way, not imported; a place where other

> cultures can have their say; a place where self and other can explore each other's fictions; a place that is not down on any map. (29)

While this quote reflects contemporary travel literature, it does not acknowledge contemporary online travel writing and blogging. Online travel writing is often overlooked by researchers because of the guide-like and visual nature of this genre, mostly offering how-to advice and to-do or to-don't lists. On the travel blog *Dan Flying Solo*, a young traveller named Dan shares – with his over 25,000 followers – blog posts with titles such as 'Which Luxury Island Hostel is right for You: Aruba, Antigua, Fiji, the Maldives or Mauritius?' (James 2018). Another influential traveller, Mel, shares travel tips on her blog titled *A Broken Backpack* (Giroux n.d.). Both digital nomads engage in travel writing by offering help with planning a trip based on sharing their personal experiences and expectations. Social media platforms such as Instagram, Snap Chat, Facebook and travel blog websites encourage the use of visuals and have influenced the ever-changing genre of travel writing once again by offering Blanton's aforementioned metaphorical 'quest for ground zero' (2002: 29). Online travel content is often published while travellers are still travelling and exploring a specific country. The fact that travel content is published online in the moment of the travel experience, is new and provides insight into the traveller's experience before they fully finished their journey. Visuals and travel selfies play an important role in the production of in-the-moment travel content as selfies can function as key tools to reflect, remember and stage travel moments while on the journey and not after as it used to be the case. Social media platforms, accessible even in the most remote places, offer travellers a space to create their own 'on the go' travel maps of reflection, representation and self – which sometimes is the most remote place a traveller seeks to explore.

Social media and the use of smart phones with a front-facing camera have encouraged the use of selfies – a photograph of oneself, taken by oneself. The phenomenon of the selfie and the selfie abroad (also referred to as a travel selfie) has received the attention of scholars from various disciplines. Important research on selfies has labelled them as cultural phenomena that keep evolving. However, there is a lack of interdisciplinary research that could provide a better understanding of how selfies function in various contexts. Sorokowski et al (Sorokowski, P 2015), for example, have examined men's selfie-taking behaviour and linked the tendency to take and post selfies to narcissism among men. An interdisciplinary approach by Douglas and Cardell (2018), who investigate how selfies can be read in autobiographical travel narratives in their article 'Visualising Lives: The Selfie as Travel Writing', highlights the narrative power of selfies that has not been explored deeply yet. Furthermore, Georgakopoulou (2016) investigates the act of posting selfies in the context of small stories. Her findings suggest that the story-telling elements of travel selfies and how the travel selfie functions as a genre, needs further interdisciplinary research. In this article, I explore the vision of the 21st century online travel writer who uses travel selfies as a narrative device. I argue that travel selfies, if read in the right context, provide insight into the creative writing process of online travel writers and function as an important drafting or editing tool. I will also provide a case study of influential online travel blogger Drew

Binsky, who frequently uses combinations of travel selfies and text. My analysis of Binsky's online content will focus on common travel literature themes, such as belonging and place, the traveller's search for self and interactions with locals, in order to provide a better understanding of the socio-cultural aspects the travel selfie inhabits.

## The vision of the traveller and the writing process

The combination of photography and text as a tool to narrate discoveries isn't a novel one and bears its own history and evolution that has been discussed in various other articles and books. Travel writers often interweave illustrations, maps, sketches and photographs with their travel accounts not only to document details of their experience they can't express in writing but also to provide their readers with a sense of truth and authenticity. The use of travel texts and images also reminds us of the relevance of travel writing throughout its history and highlights how travel writers seek to capture their travelling selves in places, cultures and encounters that are in constant flux. Walter Benjamin (1992) and Roland Barthes (1990) were among the most influential thinkers of the 20th century who have discussed the complex relationship between text and image extensively. Benjamin points out that the ability to capture moments on camera provides us with 'unconscious optics' of the self (1992: 230) thus revealing psychoanalytical aspects of our selves that cannot be explored through text alone. Barthes' exploration of the relationship between text and visual and the unique functions of both media seem to be in accordance with Benjamin's idea since he states that the image previously 'illustrated the text (made it clearer); today the text loads the image, burdening it with a culture, a moral, an imagination' (Barthes 1990: 26). The combination of visuals in form of maps, photographs or sketches, therefore, seem to allow the travel writer to tell more than just one account of his or her journey. For Wagner (1955), for example, the combination of text and image urges 'the reader to make sense with both verbal and iconic signs in one artifact' (16) while Alu & Hill (2018) add that texts that combine semantics and visual cues 'have the potential to create spaces where image and text do not always tell the same story' (2). These in-between spaces on the page and the reader's mind allow readers to create meaning of the visual and the text in a way that lets us connect with the author's experience on a deeper level.

The novelty of photography in the context of travel writing in the 21st century is the emergence of the travel selfie – a cultural phenomenon that has been embraced and criticised but also misunderstood. Similar to traditional photography, the travel selfie's function is to 'capture what the eye can't (or doesn't) see: that fracturing, dislocating vision that only the camera supplies' (Sontag 2008: 91). Mirzoeff points out that 'the selfie resonates … because it expresses, develops, expands and intensifies the long history of the selfportrait' (2015: 31) and links the traveller with the audience. Yet experiencing the world through selfie-taking might raise the question whether the contemporary traveller is still able to immerse himself or herself in the moment and whether a selfie can 'depict an authentic, natural snapshot of a person's life' or travel

experience (Diefenbach & Christoforakos 2017: 2). In *On Photography*, Sontag states that photographers aim to create 'the ideal image' and further explains that people feel 'rebuked when the camera doesn't return an image of themselves as more attractive than they really are' (2008: 85). An idealised image of one's travel experience is not necessarily good or bad, but certainly helps the traveller shape his or her story and allows to focus on the positive aspects of one's journey or oneself. However, the quest to produce largely glamourised travel shots on social media has led to questions about the authenticity of the captured experience of the traveller.

Similarly, online travel blogs focus heavily on the positive side of the narrator's journey and hardly ever discuss negative experiences, unless they can be turned into a positive experience. In comparison to travel literature, travel blogs and the use of travel selfies may seem overly positive and staged, but these images of the traveller are important tools that act as visual frames for the traveller's experience and provide insight into the creative writing process. I argue, in order to understand a travel selfie's narrative power, one must look at a selfie like a traveller, not like a spectator. The meaning of a selfie isn't primarily the object or the subject of the image, it is the process that went into creating that particular selfie. The combination of angles, filters, the decision to crop an image, all play an important part in the sense-making of a travel selfie and how it relates to the written text. Travellers pose and stage candid moments, but this should not be the target of criticism: to me this demonstrates engagement with the 'other' and the self and offers new insights into the meaning-making process of human behaviour through writing.

Taking selfies and posing for selfies is a performative act of travel writing that enables the traveller to engage with several 'others' – the travel writing readership, the versions of the self, and the others engaged with in foreign encounters. How do I want to be perceived? What do I want to reveal about myself? About my location? About my identity as a traveller? These are questions travel writers ask themselves when they start writing about their travels or, even later, when they're editing their stories. Selfies point out, to travellers, what is visible about themselves externally and internally. Furthermore, selfies capture the traveller's own gaze and constantly highlight what lies ahead of them, how they've changed on their journeys, and also provide them with possibilities of self-presentation through reflection.

Online travel writing takes many forms – structurally and content-wise – but most commonly, travel blogs provide insight into a traveller's experience abroad by presenting travel hacks on how to get upgraded on a flight and various to-do or to-don't lists. Bosangit et al point out that 'travel narratives are not only reflective of travel experiences but also of the self' (2015: 4). Travel writing explores the self as much as the 'other' (Drace-Francis 2005) and helps the traveller shape his or her identity through reflections of experiences abroad. Identity and the search for the self in travel writing is a common theme many travellers and writers explore but a real sense of self often takes shape during the writing process of one's travel account (Stylianou-Lambert 2012). Hence, travel writing and travel photography have been a popular combination

to discover the self on journeys and provide readers with various perspectives. Travel selfies also inspire others to travel and follow in the footsteps of influential travel bloggers, however, some argue (Barry et al 2017; Weiser 2015; Lobinger & Brantner 2015) that selfies are staged and might not capture authentic candid-in-the-moment experiences of a traveller. Sontag questions authenticity in experiences captured by photographs. She states that, 'reality has always been interpreted through the reports given by images' and draws an interesting connection to Plato's allegory of the cave by asking whether 'an image world is replacing the real world' (2008: 153-54). It would appear that online travel writers rely on illusions – in the form of selfies – that not only capture the 'other' but also their own self. How real is a travel account if it is evoked by an image taken of oneself by oneself?

Arguably, the most difficult task any writer faces is to put words on the blank page or the blank screen because as we write, we think, process and create certain contents in our mind. This process, however, takes time and may be too complex to understand or to research as it happens internally. Taking travel selfies embodies this internal process of thinking and searching for the traveller's ideal – or other – self. Freiman (2015) suggests that the mind can be externalised through maps, sketch books, or a travel selfie perhaps, and argues that the cognitive process can only be completed through this externalisation of the mind. Taking selfies, therefore, may be a useful tool for the identity construction of the traveller and may provide insight into the traveller's experience, where a candid travel photograph may not.

The experiences captured through selfies by the traveller reveal that the act of self-photography is similar to the process of telling a story. As Douglas and Cardell point out, 'where travel selfies and text intersect a new interpretive challenge is introduced' (2018: 115) and this combination of text and selfies might have the potential to uncover the editing and thinking process inherent in the creative writing process. According to Bosangit et al:

> [B]loggers frame experiences in relation to their life worlds – their personal history, realm of experience, everyday norms, personal goals and aspirations – and draw contrasts with the activities and events, people and cultures that they encounter on their travels. (2015: 12)

Freiman also states that editing in creative writing 'is part of the creative meaning-making process and has to do with the writer's reading, remembering and imagining of her own text in process throughout its various stages or transformation' (2015: 62). The notion of remembering and imagining is an intrinsic part of the writing process that can be captured by travel selfies as they externalise the travel writer's internal journey. Not only does a travel selfie allow a traveller to decide what to remember, but also how. Taking a selfie is a conscious act that enables the traveller to position himself a certain way and allow him to convey specific emotions to the spectator of the photograph – which often is the traveller himself.

Selfies can be perceived, superficially, as narcissistic and sometimes as inappropriate tourist behaviour if we only look at the image without the appropriate context.

However, if we view selfies through a more perceptive framework and allow ourselves to ask the right questions and pay attention to the selfie-taking process, travel selfies may offer us insightful information on the meaning-making of a writer's creative writing process. 'When looking at the selfie – critically, ethically – one is forced to ask where we are looking from, as well as who we are looking at' (Brager 2017: 162). Travel selfies taken at places of trauma, such as the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin, for example, are often frowned upon and labelled as distasteful because the traveller seems to distract from the trauma by glamourising a place that should be treated more carefully. However, taking a selfie at tourist sites of trauma carries with it complex layers of perspective and brings transparency to a process that could otherwise not be captured in a textual mode alone: the meaning-making process, the self-reflection of the traveler, and the place he or she experiences. While a travel selfie does not necessarily capture the real (emotional) experience a traveller has, selfies certainly seem to capture the process of dealing with this experience and the emotional circumstance a traveller seeks to remember by taking away an image of themself.

## Narrating the selfie gaze

Seeing is an automatic process just like walking and therefore it can be taken for granted. However, the process of seeing, and how we see the world, keeps changing. According to Mirzoeff, modern visual technology impacts our learning process such that 'seeing the world is no longer about what we see but what we make of what we see' (2015: 73). Travel bloggers create travel accounts by combining the written and the visual, allowing our understanding of the world to emerge in the process of putting together our lived experiences interstate or abroad. In order to discuss the relationship between travel writing and travel selfies further, I will look at the travel blog by Drew Binsky who has travelled to 153 countries since 2012. I will analyse his blog entries and travel accounts in relation to common travel writing themes such as belonging, interaction with the 'other', and finding the traveller's self. I argue that travel selfies can do more than reflect the traveller's ego: as Bosangit et al state, 'travel blogging as a modern form of travel writing, is more than reportage about places, people, and culture; it is also about the self and the author's world or how they see others.' (2015: 4).

In Binsky's blog post titled 'Ultimate travel guide to Hanoi, Vietnam', he posts the following combination of textual and visual travel account (including Figure 1):

> Ha Long Bay – Ha Long Bay is the main reason why people visit Vietnam. It's the Grand Canyon or Niagara Falls of Vietnam, and it simply cannot be missed on any trip to Vietnam. It's one of the best displays of nature I've ever seen in my life. You can take either a day trip, or a 2-3 day trip from Hanoi (I recommend taking a 2 day trip). It's about a 4 hour drive each way from Hanoi. If you take a 2 day trip, you will sleep overnight on the boat and wake up to the best sunrise you've ever seen. Day Trips to Ha Long Bay are about $40, and 2 day trips are around $80. (Binsky n.d.c)

**Figure 1 © Drew Binsky**

The written caption for the selfie he posted (Figure 1) does a number of things, including that he sells a product, his experience, to fellow travellers by highlighting the fact that he was indeed at the location he describes and by providing advice on how other travellers can undertake a boat trip along Vietnam's Ha Long Bay to have a similar positive travel experience. The post overall – in its combination of narrative text + image elements – is informative, educative, and also enticing.

A common theme in travel literature is the theme of adventure, going against mainstream tourism and finding one's place in the world through experiences abroad. Online travel accounts usually focus on how their content can be useful to other travellers and often provide a generic how-to guide that lacks depth and originality. At first glance, the above travel selfie (Figure 1), taken with a selfie stick, may seem generic and flawed. There are light reflections in the water and in the sky, highlighting the amateurism of the selfie taker. A water drop smudges the lens on the bottom centre of the picture, the surface of the canoe is dirty, the paddle he is holding up as he poses for the selfie covers a big portion of the water (distracting from the encountered 'other' abroad) and the true, breath-taking beauty of the Ha Long Bay Binsky describes in his post is not captured well, because something else is the centre of attention – the traveller. While the brief blog entry that justifies this selfie tells the beginning and end of a story (how he got to Vietnam's Ha Long Bay, preparation and how satisfied he was), the selfie tells a much deeper story of the traveller's journey. It becomes a performative act of the search for the self of the traveller and an exploration of how and where he belongs. Posing with the paddle and the slight angle from above suggest that the traveller was trying to engage with the 'other' and to find his place. This is an active engagement with the 'other', enabled through selfie taking. It allows the traveller to see the self from a different perspective and to reflect on it.

Binsky's writing about his trip lacks emotional depth or personal value. He writes a generic how-to guide for fellow travellers. The selfie accompanying the text, however, evokes a feeling to the reader of 'I can do that', 'this could be me', and provides a rare

insight into the travel writer's creative writing process as he actively seeks to find his place in this part of the world. Thanks to modern technology, travellers can take hundreds of selfies in just seconds and later choose the one they like best. I can only speculate when I say that Binsky must have taken a few dozen other selfies as well. The act of taking multiple selfies acts as a drafting stage of the creative writing process, allowing the travel writer to shape his vision as he travels, as opposed to after, when he writes about his travels. Sontag notes that 'each photograph is a piece of the world' and thereby, it is the traveller's quest to find out what piece of the world – and of the self – he is looking at (2008: 93). Framing oneself within a particular location (Nunes 2017), like the Ha Long Bay in Vietnam, may have enabled Drew to assert one fragment of his identity – the risk taker, the adventurer – which completes the narrative as this selfie (Figure 1) offers an emotional and meaningful middle part to his blog post.

The second selfie I'd like to analyse can be found in Binsky's blog titled '18-day expedition of a lifetime to Antarctica with Hurtigruten', in which he narrates (Figure 2) his visit to the Falkland Islands as follows:

> Along the way, we came across several species of penguins (Magellanic, Gentoo), as well as giant black-browed albatross, leopard seals and more dolphins nearby the rocky shore.
>
> When we finished our 2 hour walk in the tundra, we were greeted by a local Falklander inside of his house for some tea, coffee and the BEST pastries I've ever had. I cannot tell you how amazing these pastries were – his chef was pumping out pastry after pastry and we all stuffed our faces in happiness. I will never forget this experience.


**Figure 2 © Drew Binsky**

The most interesting fact about this selfie (Figure 2) is the fact that visually it does not reflect any of the experiences mentioned in the text. The tundra is blurry and secondary, the mentions of penguins and locals are not evident in the visual and there is no significant evidence at all that this picture was taken on the Falkland Islands. What does this particular selfie contribute to the writing process, then?

While Magasic argues that 'the selfie is frequently taken with an audience in mind … the digitally connected traveller's selfie gaze searches for sites that will improve the traveller's esteem in the eyes of their social networks' (2016: 176-77), Douglas and Cardell (2016) remark that the viewer of selfies follows the portrayed gaze to witness what the traveller sees. In this case, the audience of the selfie is also the traveller, the subject of the picture who also took it. The traveller's gaze falling onto himself, through the front facing camera of his mobile device, experiencing his travel through an external and internal reflection, highlights an integral element of travelling and the writing process: finding oneself. This kind of reflection and exploration of the self usually happens through the writing process. This selfie (Figure 2) suggests that online travel writing at first glance revolves around giving advice and using one's positive travel experience as examples. However, the combination of travel selfies and travel writing, allows the travel blogger to present their quest for self through the act of taking a travel selfie. Selfies allow the traveller to explore different aspects or fragments of their identity that travel texts alone won't be able to explore.

In *Eat Pray Love* (2006), for example, Elizabeth Gilbert takes the reader on a journey and together they discover the author's newly-found identity through different experiences, and she presents this version of her identity as a whole:

> And now I'm coming back to Gili Meno under notably different circumstances. Since I was last here, I've circled the world, settled my divorce, survived my final separation from David, erased all mood-altering medications from my system, learned to speak a new language, sat upon God's palm for a few unforgettable moments in India, studied at the feet of an Indonesian medicine man and purchased a home for a family who sorely needed a place to live. I am happy and healthy and balanced. (Gilbert 2006: 344)

This is all well and good. However, travel selfies focus on tiny aspects of the self and help us discover who we are in terms of authentic, complex fragments of ourselves, rather than ourselves as a whole such as Gilbert suggests. In Figure 2, Binsky appears to capture an emotional moment that affected his sense of who he is, and this selfie captures what travel accounts like Gilbert's travel memoir overlook – the meaning-making process of the written text through visual narratives.

Finally, I will discuss a third blog entry by Binsky. When he visited Dhaka in Bangladesh, he posted the following combination of text and selfie (Figure 3):

> My favorite part about visiting Bangladesh was the people. Almost everyone I came across was super friendly and they always went out of their way to help me. I was stopped on the street dozens of times everyday from people who asked if I needed any help with anything. I was offered to go inside people's homes for chai (tea) and food. If I stood on a street corner looking around, someone would come up and ask me if I knew where I was going. It seemed that people were just as interested to get to know me as I was to know them.

> In addition, I never once felt harassed or unsafe. I really enjoyed the kind hospitality of Bangladeshi people.

**Figure 3 © Drew Binsky**

The notion of connection or interconnection with locals is a common theme a majority of travel writers discuss and explore in their travel accounts. In his written text, Binsky highlights the friendly qualities of his local encounters and provides examples of the hospitality offered to him. The travel selfie he uploaded with this post tells a more elaborated story, adding emotional depth to his travel blog. He experiences the interaction with locals through the lens of his camera, eyes on himself. The background of Dhaka, blurry and lacking geographical signifiers that could offer an audience a better insight into Dhaka's everyday life, is not the focus. Taking a travel selfie with another person, especially a stranger, can be an intimate interaction. Binsky could have used a selfie stick but decided to stretch his arms as far as possible to capture the closeness between him and his local encounter, emphasising the performative qualities a selfie can take. In this case, the selfie not only captures an event or encounter that the traveller experienced, it also captures the expectations a traveller has. Taking a travel selfie gives the traveller power over how he or she remembers encounters and how he or she situates their self abroad. The self abroad is an intrinsic self that is difficult to capture in writing, however, the travel selfie does exactly this with more intimacy. Nunes (2017) adds to Douglas and Cardell's notion of the self(ie), as discussed earlier, that travel selfies are meant for online circulation and that 'this sign of proof inscribes both event and self in a relationship that is simultaneously highly personal, yet at the same time presented to the world' (2018: 109). Therefore, as Hartung suggests, we should view selfies through 'the complex context in which they are taken and received' in order to achieve a more 'nuanced understanding of how we come to make meaning of selfies' (2017: 45).

## Conclusion

Many scholars have studied the creative writing process and each article that explores another element of it uncovers another layer of this intriguing cognitive process. I believe my research in this article provides further insight into how selfies contribute

to the creative writing process by capturing the internal creative process and highlighting the fact that selfies carry insightful value when viewed in the right context (Brager 2017). Furthermore, the performative act of taking travel selfies enables the traveller and the viewer to gain insight into the travel writer's thinking and imagination processes by analysing the travel blogger's search for self, i.e. the quest to place him- or herself in the world in relation to interaction with 'others' met along the way. This research comes with limitations as I've only looked at one particular online blog by a white, male American traveller. Throughout my research, I also noticed a different trend arising in online travel blogging that needs further discussion and interdisciplinary research. There seems to be a trend away from the selfie and towards more obviously staged, model-like pictures with props and costumes. This new trend seems to echo Sontag's notion of the power of photography as she declares that 'images possess the qualities of real things, but our inclination is to attribute to real things the qualities of an image' (2008: 158). With new technology, the process of photography will become more accessible and people will blur the line between reality and image even further. Mirzoeff foreshadows the development of technology in the way we see and perceive the world and ourselves within it:

> Software computes for us the world we see. Google, Apple, Microsoft – or whichever digital giants succeed them – interpose themselves between us and the world, carefully filtering what we may see and know by means of screens and software alike. (Mirzoeff 2015: 160-161)

New forms of technology will challenge the way we see and make sense of the world in the future. The new iPhone 11 Pro was unveiled in September 2019 and presented a new image-taking function – the slofie. This new iPhone camera feature is a slow-motion selfie that promises selfie takers to capture details that were previously invisible in regular selfies (Apple 2019). It will be interesting to investigate user comments in relation to travel selfies and slofies and travel blogs in order to gain a better understanding of how travellers see each other and not just themselves. I continue my research journey.

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