

## Teabags and Fingerprints

A creative consideration of a  
presentation of traces of the self

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## Abstract

This research project is a creative exploration of the idea of the selfie in relation to the presentation of the self. Set against a backdrop of constantly proliferating selfies on social media sites, this practice-led research focused on a material investigation engaging with photography, imprinting, screen-printing and bookbinding. The cultural experience of selfies was initially explored and the physical appearance of a face was captured in an image. However, capturing the physical appearance of a person in a selfie does not present the authentic self as a multifaceted intangible being. Therefore the practice unfolded to examine daily life traces as a presentation of the self, without literally objectifying the self. Throughout life the body leaves traces behind, these traces show a relationship between the self and its surrounding. Ideas, imprints and processes of traces were researched and adapted into a method of personal mark-making using the lenticular effect and screen-printing. The developed process and the resulting images ensured evidence of the self remained as traces in all of the stages. Images as traces are generated as new subjects, which actualise the original imprint. The final images are bound into a book and propose the idea of a presentation of the self traced to the point prior to collapse, that is, the self is evident only as a trace.

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# Introduction

This research project is a subjective inquiry, which takes on the position of selfies being a presentation of the self to the world. In 2013 the Oxford Dictionaries declared the word 'selfie' as the word of the year. A selfie is a "photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically one taken with a smartphone or webcam and uploaded to a social media website".<sup>1</sup> The contemporary cultural experience of selfies is personally investigated and traces of the self as a presentation of the complex self were unfolded through the practice as a development of a personal process. The research question evolved through a heuristic enquiry and asks: compared to selfies that only capture the physical appearance of the face in an image, can traces constitute a presentation of the intangible self as multifaceted complex being?

In his seminal text 'Camera Lucida', theorist Roland Barthes stated, "I am neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object ... becoming a spectre".<sup>2</sup> In self-portraiture the artist is literally objectified; he or she "poses as an object"<sup>3</sup> to become the subject in a picture. Barthes's 'neither subject nor object' informs this thesis through an exploration of the presentation of the self in the early 21st century. The personal inquiry to examine selfies came from the researcher's private but puzzling struggle in understanding the idea and the reason to take selfies as a presentation of the self.

Within a material investigation, the project aims to find a form of presentation of the self that explores a point of departure from the current trend of selfies, exploring instead traces of the self. Traces as a presentation of the self as complex being were explored through a material investigation. The investigation helped to find an adequate form of presentation. Traces might be understood as a form of presentation of the intangible self, since every individual leaves their personal mark on the world. In a shift beyond the directly representational qualities of photography, this project retains Barthes 'neither subject nor object' position to explore imprints of daily life traces, in not 'becoming a spectre'.

The use of traces was supported by the investigation of the lenticular effect during the practice. Through life, traces are accumulated and with the lenticular effect, lines are generated. The lined images are layered, showing transparency and movement. Whilst these images are distorted just before the point of collapse of displaying the trace, they are still generated by the trace. In the much quoted essay, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', Walter Benjamin would now describe these generated images as unique in their existence yet also reviving the original imprinted object or in this case the trace.<sup>4</sup>

The exegesis supports the exhibition artifact (comprising 80%) by contextualising the practice and documenting the practical research (comprising 20%) in four sections. Section one is the contextual review around selfies and the underpinned presentation of the self. Section two describes the used methodologies and applied methods in this research. Section three documents the experimental practice of this project and includes discussions, images and embedded videos. Section four offers a conclusion the process of the research.

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<sup>1</sup> Oxford Dictionaries, "Selfie," in Oxford Dictionaries (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, translated by Richard Howard (New York: Hill & Wang, 1981), 14.

<sup>3</sup> Craig Owens, "Posing," in *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture*, edited by Steven Stuart Bryson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 215.

<sup>4</sup> Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1968).

## 1. Context

In this section photographic selfies are contextualised to understand the idea for presenting the self in a selfie. The aim is to gain a deeper understanding of the event of taking selfies and the images that are the result. The project focused on the selfie by means of the presentation of the self to the world and therefore excluded group selfies with various selves in one image.

To take photographic images of the self, selfies, as a presentation of the self, shows a need of feeling in control and having power. The medium of photography can be seen as a tool of control and power because one can manipulate the outcome.<sup>5</sup> During the event of taking a selfie, the selfie taker adopts two roles simultaneously, that of photographer and subject in the image, giving him/her total control of the image outcome, which is not possible when someone else takes the picture.<sup>6</sup> Despite explaining to a stranger what was wanted in terms of the image content and style, the result might often not satisfy, as the subject of the image had no direct control over the outcome. This idea relates to a self-portrait, where the artist and subject are the same person and therefore knows the adequate way in which the self should be presented.

Digital photographic advancements support the idea of the self being in control and having power when taking a selfie. Inventions such as the dual facing camera on Smartphones or the selfie stick help the selfie taker to instantly see and influence the content of the image. With these new inventions, photography "can easily be used as a tool for construction and performing the self. Photographic self-portraits offer ultimate control over our image, allowing us to present ourselves to others"<sup>7</sup> in a way that the selfie taker wants to be presented. Thus, a selfie taker can take hundreds of selfies before finding the satisfying picture (in their eyes) that will be published online. Nonetheless, these advancements are made for the mass-market and have limitations. The selfie taker can personalise the image only to a certain extent. Whereas the taker might think that the image presents the self in an

adequate manner, the advancements as well as the camera are only capturing the physical appearance (exterior) of the self but do not present the self as complex being (interior).

A selfie is used as a method of presenting the self as self-expression emerging into self-awareness. The self-expression can vary between showing the physical appearance of the self, the personality and/or other themes.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the selfie taker then portrays the self in "a mediated way."<sup>9</sup> In other words, the self only presents himself/herself in a curated way, profiling a preferred self. From the facial expression, make-up or hair to the angle, light and the background, a selfie taker has various possibilities in changing and influencing the self-expression and putting himself/herself in a different light. One idea of the curated approach is to take a mostly lifelike picture showing a flattering or photogenic version of the self.<sup>10</sup> But as mentioned before, only the physicality of the person is captured and not the person as a complex being.

Owing to the presentation of the self as a method of self-expression, the picture then might help as a tool of self-awareness. After expressing the self through a selfie, the individual can reflect back on the person in the image, making an analysis of his/her own look. The image might help the person to comprehend himself/herself as a reflection of who one is, in order to understand and improve oneself.<sup>11</sup> Looking at the image does not only help the individual to become more aware of the self but also to understand how others perceive him/her as the perception of others may differ. As a result, the selfie taker can react to these findings and can present the self to the viewer in the way he/she wants to be seen.

Different to traditional self-portraiture, selfies are produced fast by the use of digital technology and the selfie maker can engage with the outcome instantaneously.

Self-promotion, in the sense of presenting the individual to the world online as a promotion, and self-documentation are other aspects of the selfie. This way of promoting the self does not need a particular talent or photographic skills.<sup>12</sup> Saltz argues that selfies prove the modern time to be a time of a narcissistic generation. This generation wants to leave proof of their existence and importance via selfies, as selfies' "primary purpose is to be seen here, now, by other people."<sup>13</sup> The majority of selfie takers want to show how good they look to reinforce their importance. Although taking a selfie does not make one more important, the everyday accessibility to a Smartphone to be able to take a selfie reinforces and supports the selfie takers desire to promote themselves.

Apart from the narcissistic point of showing one's importance through selfies, some individuals engage with the idea of self-documentation. Different types of progress can be documented, e.g. losing weight, aging or illness, in aiming "to share ... experiences with others."<sup>14</sup> These selfies are presented as an inspiration (for oneself and others) to show progress. When documenting and publishing weight loss the individual wants to share his/her success and might aim to inspire and motivate others. Moreover, publishing these images online might even help the individual to stay motivated as there are others following his/her progress. Although the documentation selfies have less of a narcissistic approach for taking and publishing them (compared to the self-promotion

<sup>5</sup> Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Anchor Books, 1990).

<sup>6</sup> Jill Walker Rettberg, *Seeing Ourselves through Technology: How We Use Selfies, Blogs and Wearable Devices to See and Shape Ourselves* (Hampshire, United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan), 2014, accessed October 4, 2015, <http://www.palgraveconnect.com/pc/doi/10.1057/9781137476661>.

<sup>7</sup> Alise Tifentale, "The Selfie: Making Sense of the 'Masturbation of Self-Image' and the 'Virtual Mini-Me,'" In *Selficity*, New York, 2014, accessed March 31, 2015, <http://selficity.net/-theory>.

<sup>8</sup> Yoo Jin Kwon and Kyoung-Nan Kwon, "Consuming the Objectified Self: The Quest for Authentic Self," *Asian Social Science* 11, no. 2 (2015): 301.

<sup>9</sup> Tifentale, "Selfie: Making Sense".

<sup>10</sup> Kwon, "Objectified Self."

<sup>11</sup> Bronwyn Tara Watson, "Look at Me, but Not All of Me: Examining the Selfie Phenomenon through an Art Historical Lens" (Bachelor of Visual Arts and Design, Australian Catholic University, 2014).

<sup>12</sup> Neal Gabler, "Selfies: Turning the (Facebook) Page on a Generation of Wannabe Celebrities," *Boston Globe* (2014), published electronically 01 March 2014, accessed March 08, 2015, <http://ezproxy.aut.ac.nz/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/1503209829?accountid=8440>, p. 1.

<sup>13</sup> Jerry Saltz, "Art at Arm's Length: A History of the Selfie," *New York Magazine* (27 January 2014), 2.

<sup>14</sup> Rettberg, *Seeing Ourselves Technology*, 2.



ones), the individual still wants to be seen.<sup>15</sup> Documenting aging or illness on the other hand, is mostly inward looking, reflecting and concentrating on the self. Sharing illness selfies online can thus result in the formation of a support group and people with the same illness might exchange experiences and tips.<sup>16</sup> Yet, these images do not present the self as a whole, they lack showing the nuances the self possesses.

In conclusion, both types of selfies (promotion and documentation) aim for an engagement with the viewer once they are online. The self-promotion selfie taker (being narcissistic) wants to hear positive comments about his/her look in the picture. However, the self-documentation selfie taker aims rather for supportive feedback to motivate himself/herself and others by sharing experiences. In contrast to the self-expression and self-awareness, presenting the self as documentation moves the focus beyond solely the person's look and functions as encouragement.

Similarly, selfies that 'elevate daily life' are as well not only focussing on the physical appearance of the face in presenting the self, but also on the activities the individual does. Daily activities of the self are captured and documented to promote mundane and trivial events as extraordinary and "special".<sup>17</sup> The idea is to elevate and promote daily life by means of showing the daily routine to be more interesting than it actually is/was. The captured daily routine can be, for example, cooking, cleaning or doing sports. However, these are

events that most people do in their daily (or weekly) routine and are not particularly exceptional. This is linked to the idea of leaving proof of existence and importance. However, they only present parts of the self and lack of presenting the self as whole being.

While 'self-documentation' is one aspect of this type of selfie, the focus is on the documented activities and not solely on the appearance of the self. When taking an 'elevating daily life' selfie, a form of 'self-promotion' is traceable. A selfie of, for example, baking a cake and decorating it elevates the activity by promoting it, but also shows one's skill set in a field of domestic life. While this might then relate to self-portraits showing for example one's vocation, a selfie taker can take this further by sharing these pictures online and using the image as self-promotion for a business idea and to get potential clients. Consequently showing the self in a particular situation can often reveal more information about the individual (such as interests, fears and confessions) than the primary purpose.<sup>18 19</sup> The presentation of the self becomes more complex to the viewer than in the self-expression/self-awareness method. However, the image is still only showing a curated version of the self, as mentioned before, and not a self that is multifaceted.

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<sup>15</sup> This is not a new approach. In the past, artists such as Hannah Wilke and Cindy Sherman engaged with photographic self-portraiture for less narcissistic reasons. Hannah Wilke (Untitled from her Intra-Venus series 1991-92) and Cindy Sherman (1985 Untitled #153) used self-portraits to capture unconscious moments of themselves. Wilke's fight against cancer resulted in a self-portrait focussing on her thin hair. Sherman uses herself in her portraits by disguising herself in images (she is lying in dirt; her eyes open but empty and looking dead) - the idea of a self-portrait becomes a different concept. This is a concept with deeper meaning. It is not about beauty or exciting events captured in time (such as selfies do); it is about criticism of society or struggles in life documented. Refer to Frances Borzello, *Seeing Ourselves: Women's Self-Portraits* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998).

<sup>16</sup> Lisa Bonchek Adams, mother and wife, documented her struggle with breast cancer and explained, not so much in images but in text, about her journey and different medical procedures. She supported other women with the same illness and got support in return. Hence, Lisa shared her experiences and gave helpful tips. Refer to the twitter account [https://mobile.twitter.com/AdamsLisa?max\\_id=569144069802336256](https://mobile.twitter.com/AdamsLisa?max_id=569144069802336256), Accessed 02 October 2015.

<sup>17</sup> Rettberg, *Seeing Ourselves Technology*, 26.

<sup>18</sup> Saltz, "Art at Arm's Length."

<sup>19</sup> This is not a new idea. In her self-portraiture paintings, the artist Frida Kahlo's (1907 – 1954) expressed feelings about her personal and emotional life as well as the political and social activities in Mexico at that time. As Crary-Ortega describes, Kahlo used herself in her art as an image to explore "the different facets" (p.1) of herself. Kahlo's struggle as a female artist and her miscarriage were two different yet important events in her life that she processed within her work as two independent subjects. Nowadays, in selfies the selfie taker aims to present how versatile his/her face and life is, and they barely show struggles in life or criticism about politics as Kahlo did. Refer to Laura Crary-Ortega, "Representations of the Self: Problems of Image and Identity in the Self-Portraits of Frida Kahlo." (Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1997), 1.

For instance, when the viewer looks at a selfie and investigates the person in the image he/she finds an authentic and a photographed self. There is a difference between the “photographic self and ... the ‘authentic’ self.”<sup>20</sup> The photographic self is the best version of us (our face and our self), in a flattering light and an ideal angle – perfectly (in the eye of the picture taker) staged in front of the camera. The picture then only reflects our physical appearance and not the authentic self.<sup>21</sup> In other words, the viewer only looks at the photographic self and not necessarily at the authentic self. The authentic self is the true genuine self and not a staged or performed one. However, some people aim to capture the authentic self in a photograph, which looks similar to the ‘original’ self, to publish online. These selfies try to show the authentic self as not being perfect. The self is presented in a sincere way, showing physical and psychological scars, problems or struggles in life but yet they can always just show only so many aspects of the self and fail in presenting the intangible complex self with its nuances.

As described above these are different ways selfies operate as a presentation of the self, concentrating on the physical appearance of the face rather than on the being itself. If one sees the self as a complex being one no longer concentrates on self-promotion. This idea shifts into an internal rather than external look on the self. Whereas the exteriority of a person might easily be identified the interiority of a person can be disregarded. Now shifting beyond the person in the picture back to the human as a subject, the individual as whole can be explored. There is a relationship between the body, its physical presence and the body as a spiritual vessel of the soul,<sup>22</sup> which shows the self as a complex being. In this sense, the self is an intangible being with nuances and multiple aspects, which a selfie is not able to reflect. During life and movement this complex being and its body leaves traces behind.<sup>23</sup> These traces show a balance between

the being, its movement and its existence on earth. Consequently, a presentation of the self via traces, which can be unrehearsed, can be explored to show an authentic self by illustrating a relationship between the complex being and its surrounding.

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<sup>20</sup> Katie Warfield, “Making Selfies/Making Self: Digital Subjectivities in the Selfie,” in *Fifth International Conference on the Image and the Image Knowledge Community* (Berlin: Freie Universität, 2014), 5.

<sup>21</sup> Katharina Lobinger and Cornelia Brantner, “In the Eye of the Beholder: Subjective Views on the Authenticity of Selfies,” *International Journal of Communication* (19328036) 9, no. 13 (2015): 1848-60.

<sup>22</sup> Amelia Jones, “Absent Bodies,” in *The Artist’s Body*, edited by Tracey Warr (London: Phaidon, 2000).

<sup>23</sup> Walter Benjamin, “Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century,” in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, translated by Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken Books, 1986).

## 2. Methodology

Methodologies

Framework

Methods

This research project used a mixed-method approach. The advantage of a mixed-method approach is that different methods can help in different situations and each method helped to refine the outcome, enabling gaps to be identified such as the self being objectified through selfies. The following discussion briefly outlines the methodologies, framework and methods used. These methods in relation to the practice are discussed in section three to show the advantages of each method.

## Methodologies

Autoethnography is a methodology to “analyse ... personal experience ... in order to understand cultural experience.”<sup>24</sup> It combines autobiography with ethnography, relating the researcher’s experience to common values and beliefs.<sup>25</sup> Therefore ‘tacit knowledge’<sup>26</sup>, as a means of intuitive understandings, is an important aspect of the methodology.<sup>27</sup> As a researcher the “past experiences”<sup>28</sup> of the person help to deliver a possible outcome. In ethnography the researcher observes and analyses what happens in the culture by becoming a participant, engaging within the culture and analysing artifacts.<sup>29</sup> The researcher reflects on experience analytically to use it for the research and to communicate ideas.

Autoethnography was partly used in this project as it points out evidence of cultural happenings and “then describing these ... using facets of storytelling ... showing and telling, and alterations of authorial voice.”<sup>30</sup> The methodology was mainly used at the beginning of the research to collect data and to become a part of the cultural experience. Especially the first two experiments ‘Selfie a day’ and ‘Capturing me in my everyday life’ used this approach, where the researcher became a participant in the event of taking selfies, publishing these online and reflecting back on the personal experience. It helped give direction to the project as the idea evolved from personal experience, from the researcher’s private but puzzling struggle in understanding the cultural trend of selfies. In the process the approach of autoethnography changed into a heuristics approach as the project unfolded during the

making as can be seen in the third section. The research project moved beyond the personal and cultural experience to a material investigation with an intuitive driving force within the heuristics approach.

The heuristics methodology helps the researcher to explore “personal experience”<sup>31</sup> by means of being introspective.<sup>32</sup> This methodology aims at discovery being non-linear and focusing on empirical knowledge to solve creative problems.<sup>33</sup> It involves answering questions via intuition, using tacit knowledge, and identifying relationships where the insights are “rarely describable.”<sup>34</sup> The artist becomes intrinsic to their own work, using tools such as subjectivity, self-dialogue and reflection. Even though no specific formula exists on how to conduct a heuristics approach, the researcher reflects internally on the work produced. It is important to be open to new concepts; the topic of the research might change over time so the collected data should show variations/perspectives and the research aims towards the discovery of similarities within the found data.<sup>35</sup> An example of heuristics is evident when reflecting back on all conducted experiments and produced artifacts. By reflecting, similarities in ideas and concepts were found such as the lenticular effect being used earlier on in the research by layering of lines.

Heuristics was also used in this research project as it focused on the presentation of the self as an intangible being and eventually personal mark-making which is a subject-

<sup>24</sup> Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams, and Arthur P. Bochner, “Autoethnography: An Overview,” *Forum: Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 12, no. 1 (2010), published electronically 24 November 2010, accessed March 16, 2015, <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1589/3095>.

<sup>25</sup> Margot Duncan, “Autoethnography: Critical Appreciation of an Emerging Art,” *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 3, no. 4 (2004): 28-39.

<sup>26</sup> Michael Polanyi and Amartya Sen. *The Tacit Dimension*, reprint, reissue, revised ed., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009, originally published 1966), 9.

<sup>27</sup> Donald A. Schön, *Educating the Reflective Practitioner: Toward a New Design for Teaching and Learning in the Professions* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1987).

<sup>28</sup> Duncan, “Autoethnography,” 30.

<sup>29</sup> Ellis, “Autoethnography: An Overview.”

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 3. Writing Autoethnography: The Product, fifth paragraph.

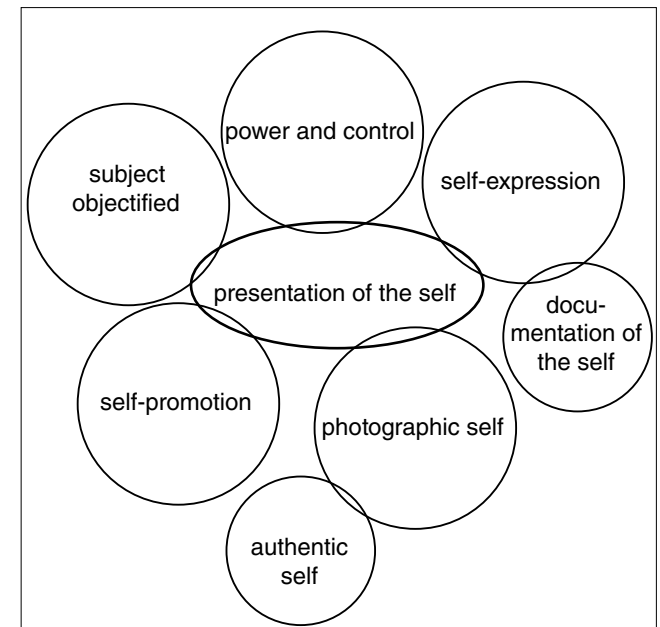
<sup>31</sup> Welby Ings, “Managing Heuristics as a Method of Inquiry in Autobiographical Graphic Design Theses,” *International Journal of Art & Design Education* 30, no. 2 (2011), accessed August 20, 2015, doi: 10.1111/j.476-8070.2011.01699.x, 226.

<sup>32</sup> Gerhard Kleining and Harald Witt, “The Qualitative Heuristic Approach: A Methodology for Discovery in Psychology and the Social Sciences. Rediscovering the Method of Introspection as an Example,” *Forum: Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 1, no. 1 (2000).

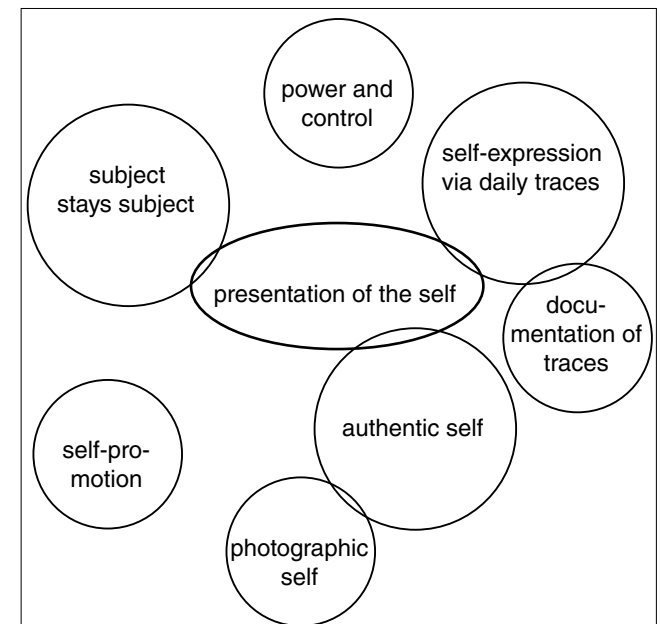
<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ings, “Managing Heuristics,” 228.

<sup>35</sup> Kleining, “Qualitative Heuristic Approach.”



1. Project map 1  
Start of the project, assumed priorities of the research for exploration, size/placing show importance



2. Project map 2  
End of project, priorities unfolded and changed during the research intuitively via heuristics approach

## Framework

tive approach. To present the multifaceted intangible being, traces of the self were investigated and screen-printing was used as a technique to leave a personal mark on an artifact. This methodology implies a focus on the individual, simultaneously being researcher and participant, discovering creative insights and generating connections.<sup>36</sup> The heuristics approach is subjective and therefore the imagination and intuition of the researcher are needed to critically reflect to gain deeper understanding. Heuristics has a conceptual and philosophical orientation, focusing on ideas. As described by Scrivener, in this approach “practice is not driven by the unexpected per se but by the desire to learn from experience.”<sup>37</sup> As the project started without having a precise problem to solve, the flexible inquiry of heuristics helped to give the project a direction and to concentrate on a presentation of the intangible complex self via traces beyond solely the physical appearance of the face captured in a selfie.

### Practice-led Framework

A practice-led framework is a practice form that is rigorous, open and reflective.<sup>38</sup> The researcher investigates a phenomenon and approaches it through practice. In this research project the practice was a material investigation using different processes, media and materials such as screen-printing, drawing, photography, video, printing, laser-cutting, paper, cotton, mdf and sand. The framework generates new ideas through combining theoretical and practical research so a dialogue arises.<sup>39</sup>

This research project employed a practice-led framework including a review of contextual knowledge and a practical reflective/reflexive inquiry to investigate the cultural trend of selfies. The practical inquiry led to the development of a material process for the creation of artwork through the desire to learn from experience as a ‘reflection on action’, described by Scrivener as an approach of heuristics.<sup>40</sup> This concept means that the research is initiated in as well as carried out through practice. This framework allowed for the combination of critical practice and experiential practice.

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<sup>36</sup> Ings, “Managing Heuristics.”

<sup>37</sup> Steven Scrivener, “Reflection in and on Action and Practice in Creative-Production Doctoral Projects in Art and Design,” *Working Papers and Art and Design* 1 (2000): The Importance of Reflection in Creative Production, first paragraph.

<sup>38</sup> Carol Gray, “Inquiry through Practice: Developing Appropriate Research Strategies,” in *No Guru, No Method* (Helsinki: UIAH, 1996), accessed October 4, 2015, <http://carolegray.net/Papers%20PDFs/ngnm.pdf>.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Scrivener, “Reflection.”



## Methods

Divergent and convergent thinking were applied during the different phases of this project. Divergent thinking (or inductive reasoning/bottom-up approach)<sup>41</sup> helped to generate open-minded, broad ideas by conducting a variety of experiments. The outcomes were then used in the convergent thinking phase. While the first experiments with selfies such as the 'Selfie a day' or 'Capturing me in my everyday life' were broad and open-minded the outcomes helped to narrow the research down to no longer concentrating on self-promotion but on the presentation of the multifaceted self via traces. In the following phase the experiments were open-minded again, in 'Exploring a different self' or 'Absence and presence', but in more of a critical analytical form to refine ideas and so on. Convergent thinking (deductive reasoning/top-down approach)<sup>42</sup> generates concepts and refines them.<sup>43</sup>

All methods were seen as material for communication to myself for reflecting on these records for 'decision-making'.<sup>44</sup> By recording the outcomes, the reflection on the process became a central part of the research, changing the direction in which the research was conducted.

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<sup>41</sup> William M. K. Trochim and James P. Donnelly, *The Research Methods Knowledge Base*, 3rd ed. (Mason, Ohio: Atomic Dog Publishing Incorporated, 2006).

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Brenda Laurel, *Design Research: Methods and Perspectives* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2003).

<sup>44</sup> Scrivener, "Reflection."

## Visual diagrams

Visual diagrams are applied to research to formulate a project.<sup>45</sup> Brainstorming helped to generate quick ideas by visualizing them and mind maps discovered the relationship/connections between, for example, selfies and self-portraits and traces being a presentation of the self. Visual diagrams and brainstorming are both approaches that generate piggy-back ideas.<sup>46</sup> Lotus blossom was a fast way to connect new ideas, of traces for example, to the main concept, the idea of selfies generating strategic scenarios.<sup>47</sup> When problems arose, these diagrams were helpful to find new ideas and/or solutions. The qualitative data gained helped in describing and categorizing conducted experiments.<sup>48</sup> Collecting this visual data helped to explore detailed understandings of the phenomenon of taking selfies, seeing differences and similarities around self-portrait and mark-making and detecting the voice of the researcher while conducting open-minded experiments.<sup>49</sup>

## Blogging and research journal

The mixture of text, photography and video on the online blog helped to document the process.<sup>50</sup> An online blog<sup>51</sup> was important to keep a record of all thoughts such as observation, experiments or inspirations around the subject selfies in a time linear manner so as to be able to write about and reflect on the process later.<sup>52</sup> A bound A5 journal was used for mind maps, quick notes, thoughts and received feedback, and it became a time linear journal. This journal helped to reflect back on earlier ideas and to see connections. Using loose A3 paper felt more appropriate when analysing an experiment or a technique, which did not have to be in a time linear manner, such as the lenticular effect. The conceptual and material development of this research tended not to be linear just as the heuristics approach is not linear.

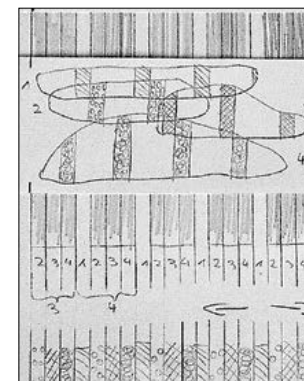


### 3. Mind map 'selfie - self-portrait'

Mapping connections and differences of selfie and self-portrait

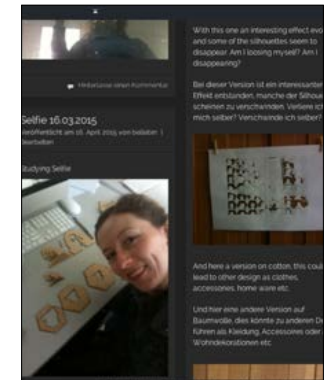


**4. Lotus blossom 'time'**  
Quick mapping, moving beyond  
'selfie' starting point, towards ideas  
such as 'time' to see connections



### 5. Lenticular effect technique

Technical drawing to understand the way the lenticular effect works



6. Online blog detail March/ April 2015  
<https://memyselfmyselfportrait.wordpress.com/>



**7. Notes and sketches**  
Theoretical ideas documented in a journal for consideration during the practical work

**45** Trochim, *Research Methods*.

**46** Hilary Collins, *Creative Research: The Theory and Practice of Research for the Creative Industries* (Lausanne: AVA Academia, 2010).

47 James M. Higgins, "Innovate or Evaporate: Creative Techniques for Strategists," *Long Range Planning* 29, no. 3 (1996), accessed August 20, 2015, doi: 10.1016/0024-6301(96)00023-4.

48 Geoffrey R. Marczyk, David DeMatteo and David Festinger, *Essentials of Research Design and Methodology* (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2005).

**49** John W. Creswell and Vicki L. Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research* (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2011).

**50** Darren Newbury, "Diaries and Fieldnotes in the Research Process," *Research Issues in Art Design and Media* 1 (2001).

51 <https://memymselfmyselfportrait.wordpress.com/>

52 Robert M. Emerson, Rachel I. Fretz and Linda L. Shaw, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes, Second Edition*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

### Visual diary

A wall in the studio was used to hang the newest as well as the most important experiments to be a visual record of the work.<sup>53</sup> The studio wall became a reflective diary within the heuristics intuitive approach. The wall changed over time, with experiments being added and taken down, moved around to see the connections between them, but the most important ones were always kept on the wall. Having all experiments on the wall (at least for a certain amount of time) helped to not lose sight of some ideas that at the time might not appear to be relevant enough but became more important later in the process. Different from the online blog, where every experiment was listed, this diary helped to retain the most important experiments.

### Experimenting and testing

The experimenting and testing phases were visually practical and physical phases of the research where problems were identified and further knowledge was gained.<sup>54</sup> A combination of craft-based and technology-based techniques was applied as they complement each other.<sup>55 56</sup> The use of technology helped to approach the project from a different point of view and to solve issues that arose from the craft-based techniques, and vice versa.<sup>57</sup> For example, a crucial point of the research was the experimenting with manually taking imprints of my face and digitally testing and changing these into the lenticular effect. Risk-taking, such as trying new techniques, was an important approach to the process as the knowledge of the researcher grows when pushing oneself into unfamiliar territory.<sup>58</sup> Working in unfamiliar areas helped to develop new strategies beyond the direct photographing of one's face to generate unique artifacts as imprinting traces. It was a heuristics process where the experimental approach towards an experiment came from the researcher's tacit knowledge.

<sup>53</sup> Newbury, "Diaries and Fieldnotes."

<sup>54</sup> Laurel, *Design Research*.

<sup>55</sup> Claude Marzotto, "Craft-Based Techniques as Heuristic Tools for Visual Investigation: Redefining the Role of the Handmade within Graphic Design Process," *Design Principles & Practices: An International Journal* 3, no. 4 (2009).

<sup>56</sup> László Moholy-Nagy, *Vision in Motion* (Vol. 4, Chicago: P. Theobald, 1947).

<sup>57</sup> D. Crow, "Magic Box: Craft and the Computer," *Eye: The International Review of Graphic Design* 18, no. 70 (2008).

<sup>58</sup> Ings, "Managing Heuristics."



8. Visual display 21.05.2015  
After examining the event of selfies,  
towards experimenting with the  
selfie images



9. Visual display 22.05.2015  
Idea of 'exploring a different self'



10. Visual display 04.08.2015  
Idea of 'self as tool to generate new  
subjects'

### **3. Documentation of research**

**Presentation of the  
self through selfies**

**The subject not  
becoming an object**

**Trace**

The following section aims to show the development of and approaches towards the presentation of the self beyond the physical appearance of one's face in a photographic image. It is the practical part of the research. The documentation of the experiments is not structured in a chronological manner, as the experiments were not conducted in a linear way. Instead it is organised in terms of the ideas explored and used. This section is presented in three different voices: the theoretical, practical and inner voices of the researcher. The intention behind the use of these voices is to help in understanding the reasoning for certain experiments and these voices complement each other.

**Presentation of the  
self through selfies**

**Selfie a day**

**Capturing me in  
my everyday life**

**Capturing a  
likeness of the self**

**Facets of the self**



## Selfie a day

Practical investigations began with trying to get a better personal understanding of the event of taking selfies. This included photographing myself and putting these pictures online as self-promotion. I conducted these 'Selfie a day' experiments for around seven weeks. I started with photographing my face in headshots. Initially I worked with a Smartphone that only had a back camera. Therefore I was not able to see myself on the screen while taking the picture. While it was a surprise for me to see how the pictures looked, I went ahead and uploaded these first images on a personal online blog that was open to the public, without changing anything.

At the start I felt uncomfortable putting the pictures online without altering them, as I did not know who (if anyone) was looking at them, what their reactions might be and what they might think about me as a result of the images. As Hunter commented, there "is a fear of vulnerability. To present myself in an open, public space, means to subject myself directly to the public – their opinions and responsive actions."<sup>59</sup> Although I did not enjoy this experiment, over time I could feel a change in my behaviour – I was not being so critical about how I looked in a picture. Later I changed to a Smartphone that had a dual-facing camera. My behaviour during the event of taking selfies changed immediately. I started to pose, correct my hair, the angle etc. by looking at the screen before actually taking the picture. As a result of this experiment I could feel that my 'fear of vulnerability', of promoting my self online, was fading but the fear of taking selfies in a public area remained. Except for one picture, I took all the pictures in private and was controlling what was shown to the viewer. The outcome was that I was less scared of what people might think of me in the images as the pictures felt more like a documentation than a form of self-promotion.

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*Why do people take selfies? How does the event of taking selfies feel? How do they feel when they put them online and they do not know who is looking at them and what the viewer's reaction might be? Why are so many people enjoying the act of taking selfies and why on a daily basis?*

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<sup>59</sup> Whitney V. Hunter, "Self-Portrait: A Repository of Identity" (Master of Fine Arts, Long Island University, The Brooklyn Center, 2012), 18.



11. 26.03.2015  
Workplace at AUT



14. 30.03.2015  
At home



12. 28.03.2015  
At home on the balcony



15. 31.03.2015  
Workplace at AUT



13. 29.03.2015  
At work, staffroom



16. 01.04.2015  
Workplace at AUT



21. 10.04.2015  
At home, mirror selfie



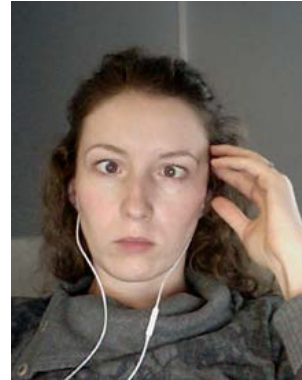
26. 03.05.2015  
At home



17. 04.04.2015  
Elevator at home, first mirror selfie with multiple 'self'



19. 07.04.2015  
At home



24. 21.04.2015  
Workplace at AUT, using laptop camera



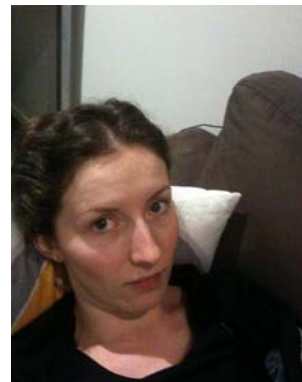
29. 09.05.2015  
At work, staffroom



20. 08.04.2015  
At home



22. 15.04.2015  
Workplace at AUT, first time looking silly purposely



25. 01.05.2015  
At home



27. 05.05.2015  
At home



18. 06.04.2015  
At home



23. 19.04.2015  
At home, first time using the laptop camera, not a Smartphone



28. 06.05.2015  
Workplace at AUT



30. 11.05.2015  
At Britomart train station, mirror selfie, first and only in public area

## Capturing me in my everyday life

As I became more relaxed with the event of taking selfies I immersed myself in documenting and capturing the self during my daily life. This was driven by the idea of trying to promote my mundane and trivial daily activities as special and extraordinary – something that selfies are used for. This involved taking 13 selfies of everyday life activities in one day and publishing these on my online blog. It felt very unnatural trying to promote my daily activities by capturing them in a photograph because I felt I was acting or performing in front of the camera. Also, making these photographs public on my online blog felt awkward because I could not understand how people would find it interesting to see me doing these daily activities – they were neither special nor extraordinary compared to other people's daily activities. During the experiment I felt no "physical pleasures of making"<sup>60</sup> and I could not understand the reason other people might have for recording and promoting such selfies online.

However, I did wonder whether, when the moment is captured, this may enhanced one's daily life. Is the next moment (after the photograph) then uninteresting and boring? Is there a need to quickly take another picture to give the following activity and moment of life more importance? The outcome of the experiment was capturing time-frozen moments. The moment of taking that particular picture was gone and it could not have been repeated in the same way. While I captured me in my everyday life activities, I wondered how relevant these were in presenting who I was.

*Why do people take selfies doing boring everyday life activities and then publish them online? Why do I need to show: hey I'm in the park, at the market, getting my groceries? Does it make the daily routine somewhat more interesting by recording it and showing it online?*

<sup>60</sup> Quentin Newark, *What Is Graphic Design?* (Mies, Switzerland: RotoVision, 2002), 108.



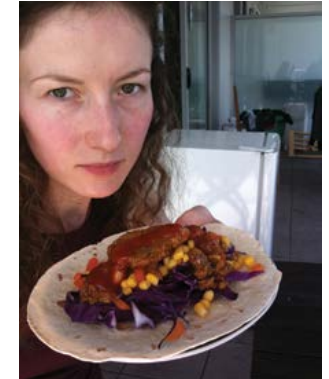
31. Coffee selfie  
Having coffee in the morning on the balcony at home



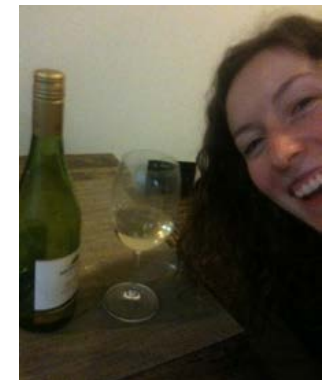
32. Washing selfie  
Finished hanging the washing on the balcony at home



33. Research selfie  
Doing research, at home



34. Lunch selfie  
Having lunch on the balcony at home



35. Catch up drinks selfie  
Having drinks at a friend's place



## Capturing a likeness of the self

The dissatisfaction of the previous experiment led me to consider whether an image of a face could be captured without using a camera but still working within the photographic medium. The aim was to find out if other photographic mediums could capture the authentic self. The idea evolved into using a scanner as a photographic medium, which works in a similar way to a camera. Both devices can optically capture one's physical appearance of the face in an image. I produced prints of my face by pressing my face onto the glass of the scanner while scanning. It was awkward and uncomfortable to keep my eyes closed whilst having the lid shut. As with the 'Selfie a day' when first using a Smartphone with a back camera, I could had limited influence of the outcome of these prints.

*Do I have to take a photographic image of myself to present my self?  
How can I capture a presentation of my self without the use of a camera?  
Can another medium than a camera present the self in an authentic manner?*

The prints show a vignettted effect where the parts that touched the glass are very bright and clearly seen, whereas the other parts slowly disappear. This effect intensifies a feeling of being trapped in the picture as well as floating and disappearing at the same time. Because the eyes are closed, it also looks as if the self as the subject in the picture is dead. The prints show a ghostly looking self, as stated by Barthes: I became a phantom.<sup>61</sup> Not only was the self ghostly looking but by pressing my face on the glass a distortion happened in which the face did not present the self (as I know it) anymore. The self is inauthentic as a presentation of the self in these images as the self does not look like this naturally, which it does in a selfie. It could even be argued, that the self captured is a self that in reality does not exist at all. It is inauthentic. This experiment showed that photographic media do not capture the authentic self but just a version, if not even an inauthentic version, of the self.

<sup>61</sup> Barthes, *Camera Lucida*.



36. Scan 1  
Front view, forehead pressed on glass



37. Scan 2  
Front view, nose and lips pressed on glass



38. Scan 3  
Left side, eye pressed on glass



39. Scan 4  
Left side more frontal, eye, nose and lips pressed on glass



40. Scan 5  
Left side, eye and lower cheek pressed on glass

## Facets of the self

If someone only knows part of a person they cannot know that person entirely, as a complex self. Novelist Chimamanda Adichie explains in her TED talk that there is a “danger of a single story.”<sup>62</sup> Chimamanda, born in Nigeria, explains when she moved to America to study, her roommate was surprised by her well-spoken English. The roommate assumed that people from Nigeria were listening to tribal music and did not know how to use a stove. Chimamanda, however, was listening to American music and was fully capable of using a stove. The roommate had assumptions based only on the fact (the single story) that Chimamanda came from Nigeria, but did not know the full story.

*How can we know the self as whole complex being if we only know a part of that person by looking at one selfie?*

After exploring the event of taking selfies, I started to analyze and experiment with the images themselves. In previous experiments the selfies only captured one facet of the self in an image but the self is more complex than what one image could possibly show. As an example, a selfie at a concert shows the interest in that particular music group, yet the selfie does not capture the idea that the individual might also like other types of music or other activities. As a result the image then only shows one facet of the self, making the self less complex than it is. Thus the idea arose in investigating possibilities to include different aspects of ‘the self’ in one image by using earlier produced selfies.

First, I trialed combining several selfies into one artifact. This resulted in a flipbook (see figures 41/42), where another person can discover a series of different sides of myself by turning the pages. The other person has full control and power over flicking the pages and discovering the self. At the same time by quickly flicking through the book, movement is created through time-frozen images. Another technique incorporating several images of myself into one was to take selfies with different poses and to use developed silhouettes to generate patterns. I digitally manipulated the images using techniques such as layering (see figures 43/44), transparency (see figure 44) and duplication (see figures 44/45).

In both approaches different facets of the self were captured in one artifact/image but only within facets of facial expressions or angles. They were accumulated ‘single stories’, as discussed by Adichie, and not capable of showing the ‘full story’. Although the techniques in this phase were useful, the outcomes were still images where I as the subject became a ghost, captured in a moment of time. Furthermore this experiment did not help any further in the explorations to present an authentic self than the experiments before, the self as subject was objectified in the image.

<sup>62</sup> Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, “The Danger of a Single Story,” 18:49, filmed July 2009, TED video: TED Conferences, LLC, 2009, accessed March 25, 2015, [http://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda\\_adichie\\_the\\_danger\\_of\\_a\\_single\\_story/transcript?language=en](http://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story/transcript?language=en).



41. Selfies flipbook  
10 pages with different facial expressions, selfies



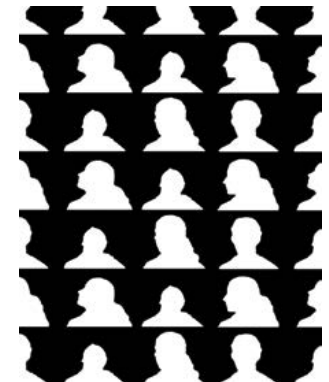
42. Selfies flipbook 2  
Refer to figure 41., different page



43. Image layering - green  
Digital manipulation, 3 different coloured images layered, reminiscent of a Warhol screen-print



44. Digital transparent layering  
Digital, 1 image layered/ moved with increasing transparency



45. Silhouette pattern  
5 Selfies, digitally transformed into silhouettes and arranged into a pattern

**The subject not  
becoming an object**

**Exploring a  
different self**

In the previous experiments the self was presented through photographic images of the physical appearance of the face. These images were still images, capturing the self in a moment of time. In the event of taking a photographic self-portrait, the individual will be moved around (by the photographer) so that everything is captured in the photograph that the 'artist' wants. As soon as the right position is found, the person needs to hold still as an object. As described in Barthes' statement, the self then becomes an object and a 'spectre' in the image.<sup>63</sup> In this part of the research I aimed to investigate ways to present the self without being objectified.

In the event of taking a photographic self-portrait, different sets of realities of the subject are becoming objects: the person I (as the person in the picture) think I am, the person I want others to think I am, the person the photographer thinks I am and then if the photograph is exhibited, the person who is in the picture.<sup>64</sup> This shows the various selves inhabiting the event: the inward looking self, the outward looking self, the self being looked at during the event of photographing and the self in the photograph being looked at. When taking a photographic self-portrait it can be argued that none of these 'objectified selves' are then the 'authentic self' anymore. Whatever is left over of the 'authentic self' in the self-portrait or the selfie is a ghostly presentation of the self. As Jones states, a photograph "cuts off a piece ... a fragment, a part object."<sup>65</sup> The photograph becomes a still image, capturing a moment in time when the subject was standing in front of the camera.

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<sup>63</sup> Barthes, *Camera Lucida*.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Amelia Jones, "The 'Eternal Return': Self-Portrait Photography as a Technology of Embodiment," *Signs* 27, no. 4 (2002): 947-78, accessed November 25, 2014, doi:10.1086/339641, 953.

## Exploring a different self

Barthes' statement was adapted for an exploration using abstract images to aim for the 'subject not to become an object'. The purpose was to investigate if the self is still presented in an image without having to capture the face and being objectified. Instead of becoming an object in images, I (the self) generated subjects by being a subject. As a starting point I used silhouettes from previous experiments (see figure 45). I

screen-printed the silhouettes (see figures 46/47), as well as a detailed selfie (see figure 48), laser cut silhouettes (see figures 49 – 51), used manual techniques to draw the outlines of my face (see figures 52 – 60), and digitally captured and manipulated selfies (see figures 61 – 65) to explore possibilities beyond the direct image of the physical appearance of the face.

The technique of screen-printing allowed me to leave my personal mark on the work during the process of printing. None of my screen-prints or someone else's screen-prints can look the same, because of the different amounts of ink and varied gestural pressure or changes in the environment (humidity or the paper might be produced differently). Accordingly, as none of my screen-prints can look the same; the idea of presenting an aspect of an authentic unrehearsed self is supported. The self is now included and presented in the image on two levels, being in the image itself and also manually making the image and leaving a mark on it.

The interaction of manual and digital techniques was an important part of the research and led to more ideas and experiments. Through heuristics, the intuitive process of 'cross-fertilisation' to connect ideas and techniques evolved.<sup>66</sup> I laser cut and layered previous silhouettes so the developed forms became three-dimensional. However, the laser cuts were too abstract and indistinct to present the self. Yet they gave ideas for manual exploration of colour, structures (see figures 52 – 60) and digitally generated images (see figures 61 – 65).

The outcomes of the experiments were all focussed on the physical appearance of the face but the face was presented as a new subject. The self therefore was not objectified anymore but was also not presented authentically as it was a rehearsed self.

*Can the self, as subject, be captured  
to present itself without becoming  
an object?*

Artists use handwriting as a technique of mark-making to personalize their work. Graphic designer Stefan Sagmeister "personalizes the piece"<sup>67</sup> through the use of handwriting by leaving his own visible mark on the work. In his poster 'AIGA program' (1999), Sagmeister had his intern cut into his upper body by writing the information for his lecture on it. The writing arose through the bleeding of the body after being cut. The intern therefore left his mark on Sagmeister's body; however, it was only a temporary mark that was gone after a few weeks.

<sup>66</sup> Ings, "Managing Heuristics."

<sup>67</sup> Stefan Sagmeister, "Type and Typography," accessed October 4, 2015, <http://www.sagmeisterwalsh.com/answers/category/type-and-typography/>.



46. Silhouette pattern screen-print  
Black ink on cotton



47. Silhouette pattern screen-print 2  
Screen-printed twice (gold and opaque ink), slightly moved between prints, on paper



48. Screen-print foil leftover  
Applied foil to a screen-print, creating ghostly looking image



49. Lasercut zoom  
1 image, scaled proportionally, selfies, refer to figure 45.



50. Lasercut Honeycomb  
5 different images, scaled in size





51. Lasercut smiling  
Selfie refer to Flipbook



54. Pencil drawing 2  
Pencil 5B



52. Pencil drawing lasercut  
Positive and negative lasercuts,  
pencil 2H



53. Pencil drawing 2 (in progress)  
Pencil 5B



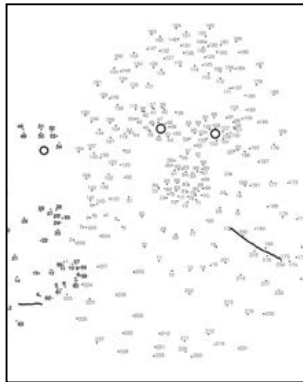
55. Sand selfie  
Exploration of materiality



56. Sand selfie silhouette and outline



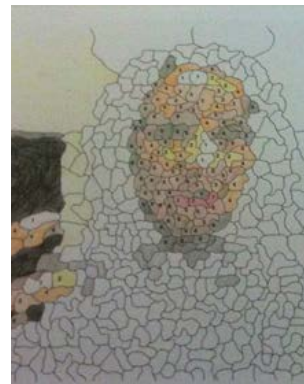
57. Crayon drawings  
Image developed through pattern



58. Paint by numbers template  
Exploration of others drawing my  
selfie



59. Paint by numbers drawing  
Selfie drawing



60. Colouring picture  
Selfie converted into colouring  
picture



61. Smartphone mirror selfie  
Digitally duplicated cameras from  
original selfie



62. Smartphone selfie?  
Digitally duplicated cameras from  
original selfie, face disappeared,  
refer to figure 61.



63. Eyes pattern  
Digitally duplicated eyes to gen-  
erate pattern, pattern from 1 selfie  
image



64. Reflection selfie (in glass)  
Face and details visible



65. Reflection silhouette (in glass)  
Details invisible, abstract silhouette

**Trace**

**Absence  
and presence**

**Presenting  
the self as traces**

**Reflection**

**Final work**

As the previous experiments moved beyond the objectified presentation of the self, the idea of traces evolved. Traces that a person leaves behind can be a presentation of the self as they are individual and always relating back to the person. Walter Benjamin states that to “live is to leave traces ... In the interior these are emphasized ... the traces of objects of everyday use are imprinted. The traces of occupants also leave their impression on the interior.”<sup>68</sup> In daily life, individuals leave traces behind, even if they are not visible to the human eye. Some of these traces might even change the environment one is living in e.g. dust (dead skin cells).

Also, photography is documenting “an indexical trace of the presence of its subject, a trace that both confirms the reality of existence and remembers it.”<sup>69</sup> This is similar to the idea of a selfie as self-promotion (showing ‘we are’ and/or that ‘we are here’) that presents the idea of selfies inhabiting traces in a catalogued form. In summary, a selfie shows a trace of the earlier existence of a situation. Selfies are not a form of trace itself but a presentation of trace-making by capturing a moment in time that now only exists in the picture. The following experiments aim to find a presentation of the self via traces. As the outcomes of the earlier experiments were unsuccessful in presenting the authentic self, I stopped using ‘traditional’ imagery of my face for further experiments and pushed against the idea of the presentation of the self through selfies, towards the idea of using traces.

A trace is a “mark left in or on a solid surface by a continuous movement.”<sup>70</sup> A trace can be additive or reductive, by means of adding lines onto a surface or taking material away. The work by Richard Long ‘A line made by walking’ (1967), however, neither uses additive nor reductive traces as Ingold explains.<sup>71</sup> The artist walked up and down in a field of grass. The grass bent under the pressure of the self and left a line. Long produced a lined trace without adding or taking any material away. Long uses the idea of ‘I was here’ as a selfie does, but the viewer does not see Long in the field of grass and can only imagine how Long was walking up and down.

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<sup>68</sup> Benjamin, “Paris, Capital,” 155.

<sup>69</sup> Geoffrey Batchen. “Snapshots: Art History and the Ethnographic Turn.” *Photographies Vol. 1*, no. 2 (2008): 121-42, accessed August 10, 2015, doi: 10.1080/17540760802284398, 135.

<sup>70</sup> Tim Ingold, “Traces, Threads and Surfaces,” in *Lines: A Brief History* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 43.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

## Absence and presence

Similar to Long's idea, other artists use the idea of absence and presence in presenting the self. Amelia Jones states that "artists ... use traces of their bodies - casts, imprints, photographs - as stand-ins for their physical presence ... The imprint or trace is redolent with memory, absence and the artist's inner life, setting up a contrast between the body's physical manifestation and the spiritual or unconscious."<sup>72</sup>

Ana Mendieta worked with her absent self-portraits of her silhouette in nature to show the relationship between herself, earth and art.<sup>73</sup> Even though Mendieta is not visually present in these images, the traces that she left on the landscape are clearly visible and the viewer can relate the trace back to the self.

Similar to absent self-portraits, vanitas use the idea of absence and traces of oneself. Louis Boilly Leopold painted a self-portrait 'Trompe l'Oeil' (1780) showing a table with objects that were part of his profession.<sup>74</sup> The artist himself is not visually present in the image but his belongings are. Hence these belongings in vanitas are then a presentation of the self as they are traceable back to the individual.

*How much do I need of myself in an image to still have a presentation of the self?*

An exploration was conducted to understand the relationship of the self in an image and the information that needs to be contained to relate back to the self. Rettberg states that 'self-tracking' images are a presentation of the self.<sup>75</sup> Self-tracking tools are capturing and presenting images of the individual without the individual being in the picture. If the subject itself is not physically visible in the picture, the self cannot literally be objectified. Hence I took pictures where my face was not visible anymore (see figures 66/67) but they still captured the self by way of traces (see figures 68 – 70). The 'hair selfie' and 'shadow selfie' were still showing a presence and physical appearance implying the face of the self, whereas the 'pillow absent selfie' became more abstract by only showing traces of the self in absence. These examples showed that a presentation of the self is more than the image of one physical appearance of the face. The image still relates back to the self. The 'movement plan' and the 'web-page usage' on the other hand, became too abstract to be traced back to the self. At this point the recorded information became too undefined to be a presentation of the specific self. The outcome needs to be "familiar enough to be recognisable, and unusual enough to be memorable."<sup>76</sup>

<sup>72</sup> Jones, "Absent Bodies," 162.

<sup>73</sup> Borzello, *Seeing Ourselves*.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Rettberg, *Seeing Ourselves Technology*.

<sup>76</sup> Newark, *Graphic Design*, 120.



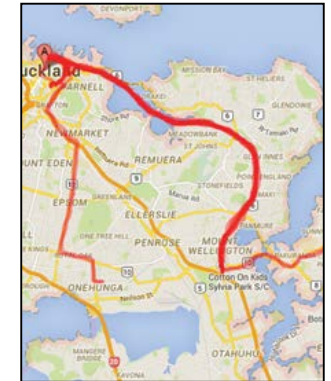
66. Hair selfie  
It is me and my hair, but the face is not visible anymore



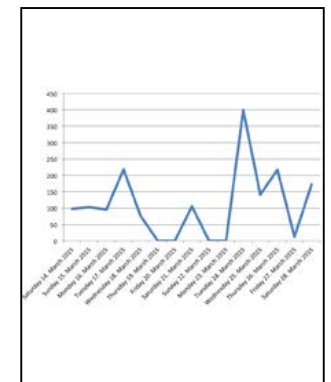
67. Shadow selfie  
Shadow silhouette on the wall, becomes abstract



68. Pillow absent selfie  
Imprint of the head visible, but self invisible



69. Movement plan  
Self-tracking for 1 week, digitally drawn on digital google map



70. Webpages usage  
Self-tracking for 1 week, record of number of daily watched websites



## Presenting the self as traces

In the previous experiment the outcomes were not memorable and personal enough to relate back to the self. This part of the research investigated the presentation of the self via direct traces of the body. Instead of using a machine (camera or scanner as in earlier experiments) to capture my face, I applied face paint to my face and pressed my face quickly onto paper to leave a distinct mark in the form of a trace. I adapted Barthes' statement: by not becoming an object but being a subject helps to produce a subject. First I worked with black, white and red face paint (see figures 71 – 80).

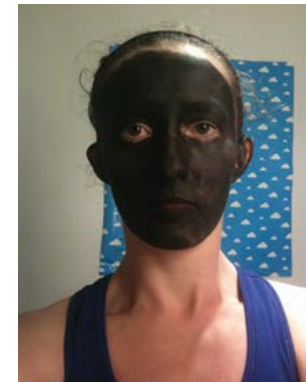
I started to concentrate only on my imprints as the process involved "the use of 'chance as a medium' in a calibrated blend of accident and control."<sup>77</sup> I imprinted on different paper (where one of them left marks on my face, see figure 79), folded paper before imprinting (see figure 80) and printed a series of facial expressions (see figures 91/92) to see if the imprints changed with the same facial expression. I used the imprints and combined techniques from earlier experiments such as laser-cutting (see figure 81) and debossing (see figure 82). Debossing gives "a very tactile quality to a piece ... Most letterpress presses still in existence are used for high-quality, specialty pieces."<sup>78</sup> The resulting artwork added a sense of preciousness to the silhouette by adding a tangible feeling.

The use of Photoshop as a tool helped to change my imprints into silhouettes and outlines (see figures 83 – 92). These images were used in experiments of layering, transparency (see figures 85/86), with colour (see figure 87), rotating (see figure 88), and copying to produce patterns (see figures 89/90). The coloured images distracted too much from the form itself, and this is when monochromaticity became significant in my project. As a result of this experiment I discovered that the self can be used as a tool to generate new

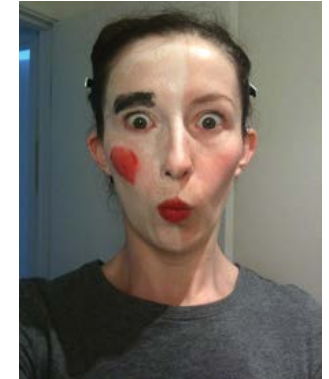
subjects without being literally objectified. Beyond the direct physical appearance of the face the imprints show traces of the individual. These traces relate back to the self as a presentation of the self. As these imprints of body traces are 'real', unrehearsed and therefore original, they present the self in an authentic manner. Not only are the traces made by the spiritual vessel of the soul, the body, but the movement and the relationship of the authentic self to its surrounding is captured.

*Can traces of the self be a presentation of the self as a complex being?*

A trace of the self does not always have to be visible to the human eye. The design company 'Random International' works with the idea of incorporating the self and traces in their work by making invisible traces visible. The 'Future Self' (2012) encompasses human movement and aims to reveal information about the relationship between the world and the being. In this interactive light installation, the light reacts to the movement of the person standing in front of it and it becomes a 'living' sculpture. The installation creates a moving three-dimensional presentation of the self by reflecting the movement of the viewer; it is "part of an investigation into the ... physical engagement of the viewer with objects and environments."<sup>79</sup> The viewer can create a different version of themselves and is able to shape the installation. When the viewer engages with the environment it makes the individual aware of the movement in space and visualizes the traces that the person leaves behind.



71. Black face-painted selfie  
Preparation for imprinting face



74. Clown face-paint selfie  
Exploration of colour



72. Imprint selfie - black  
Neutral facial expression, right side



75. Imprint clown selfie  
More detailed than black paint, water-sprayed face before imprint



73. Rolled over selfie  
Black painted face, red lips, face rolled side to side over paper

<sup>77</sup> Marzotto, "Craft-Based Techniques," 75.

<sup>78</sup> Ryan Hembree, *The Complete Graphic Designer: A Guide to Understanding Graphics and Visual Communication* (Massachusetts: Rockport, 2006), 56-57.

<sup>79</sup> Anonymous, "Digital & Interactive Installations: Random International," *Creative Review* (December 2010): 49, accessed October 4, 2015, <http://ezproxy.aut.ac.nz/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/817281251?accountid=8440>.



**76. Red imprint selfie**  
Colour distracts from details and form



**79. Testing materiality - folded**  
Thin paper, folded before imprinting



**77. Full face imprint selfie**  
Instead of face pressing on paper, paper layed on painted face



**78. Multiple facial expression imprint**  
Face parts imprinted



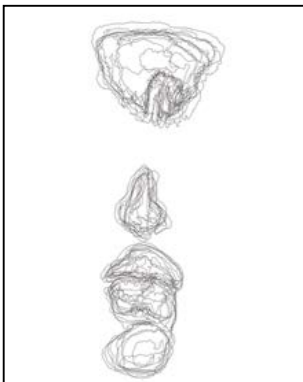
**80. Marks on face selfie**  
Traces of paper dye left after facial imprint (unexpected)



**81. Lasercut from imprint selfie**  
MDF lasercut, refer to figure 72.



**82. Debossed from lasercut selfie**  
Looks like a map with islands on it, cotton paper, refer to figure 81.



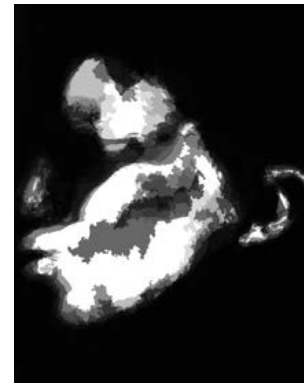
**83. Facial imprints - grumpy frontal**  
Digitally changed into outlines using multiple images of self, refer to figure 91.



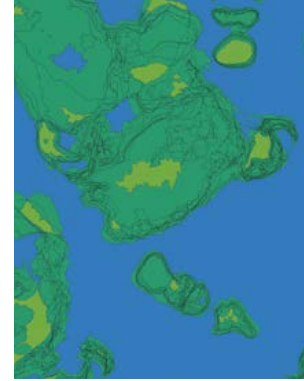
**84. Facial imprints - grumpy side**  
Digitally changed into outlines using multiple images of self, refer to figure 92.



**85. Facial imprints - surprised front**  
Layered with transparency, 10 images, facets of self, refer to figure 91.



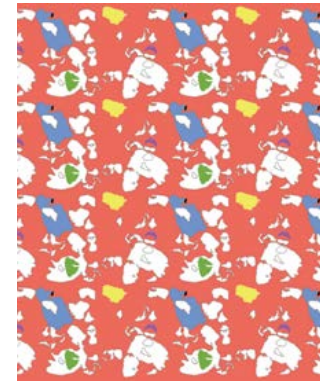
**86. Facial imprints - surprised side**  
Layered with transparency, 10 images, facets of self, refer to figure 92.



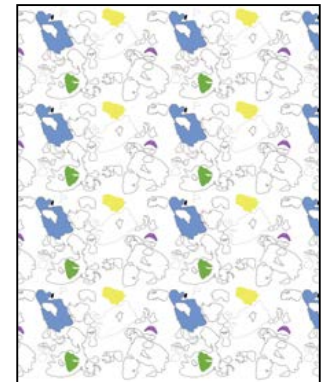
**87. Outlines imprints layered in colour**  
Idea refer to figure 82.



**88. Facial imprints - rotated surprised side**  
Refer to figure 84.



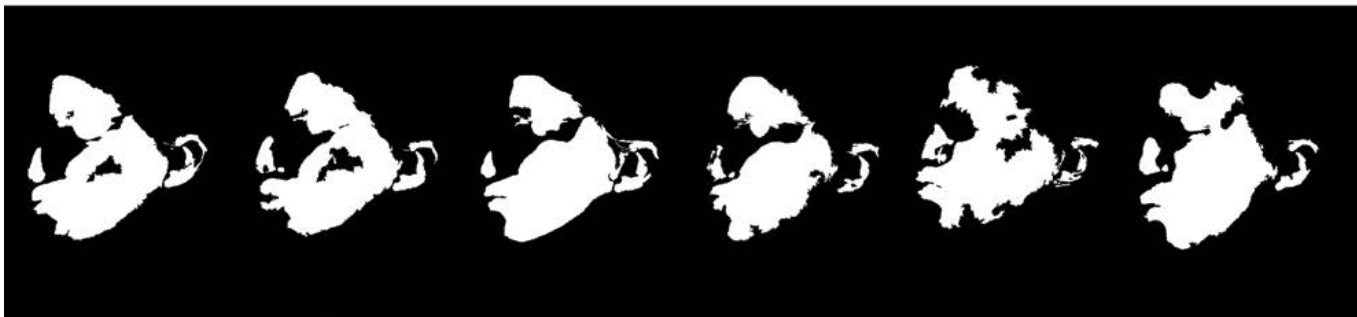
**89. Facial imprints - pattern red**  
Various self presented through colours in 1 single layer, reminiscent Chinoiserie



**90. Facial imprints - pattern white and blue**  
Various self presented through colours in 1 single layer



91. Collage front  
Digital silhouettes from frontal imprints, series of facial expression, row 1: neutral, row 2: surprised, row 3: grumpy and row 4: smirking



92. Collage side  
Digital silhouettes from side imprints, series of facial expression, row 1:  
neutral, row 2: surprised, row 3: grumpy and row 4: smirking



## Reflection

At this point it was important for the research to establish if it was still about the imprints of my face or if the imprints used could be other items too. Because they were accessible, just as my face was constantly accessible to me in earlier experiments, I imprinted objects that I had at home. Some of these objects related to everyday activities (relating back to the ideas of selfies). I applied face paint to the objects and pressed these on paper (see figures 93 – 97). For example, as I moved a glass over paper the painted rim left marks (see figures 96/97); these marks were very distinctive because of the amount of colour I applied, the pressure I put on the glass and my movement. It became a presentation of an authentic self in the form of a trace, as someone else's imprint would look different to mine. As the self produced the imprints, the self is evident in and presented through its trace. The imprints from the glass and ceramic rims looked like water, creating movement reminiscent of the human body. Movement is an aspect that the usual selfie does not exhibit as it is a still image and the subject becomes 'a spectre'.

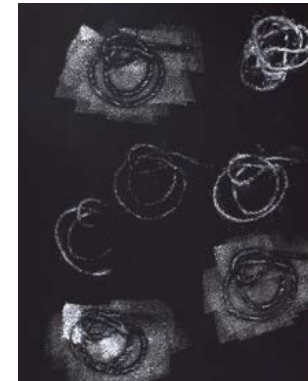
*If the self can be presented by a traceable imprint of the face, can any personal item imprinted still relate back to the self?*

Ingold states, "gestures leave their trace, enfolding *into* the hand the very ways of life that it points or carries *out* in the person's manoeuvring through the world."<sup>80</sup> Life leaves traces in people's hands through gestures e.g. wrinkles or scars. In life, individuals use items that they hold in their hands. These items then leave their trace on the world. This trace is only produced by the self using the items, therefore referring back to the person.

<sup>80</sup> Ingold, "Traces, Threads," 47. (Italic in the original.)



93. Personal object imprint test  
Soft toy



94. Rope imprint  
Positive and negative imprint



95. Pipe-cleaner imprint



96. Glass rim test 1  
Looks like moving water



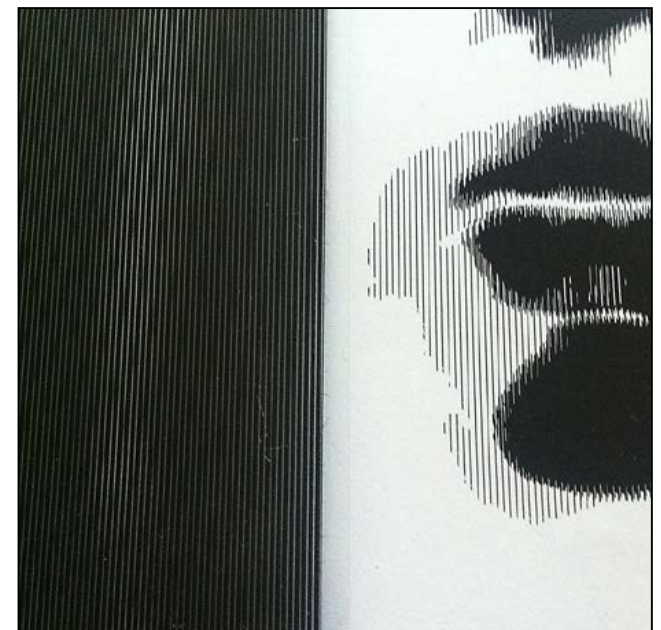
97. Glass rim test 2  
Purposely moved bezel while pressing on paper, more paint applied

Reflecting back on all experiments, I discovered similarities. In most cases I worked with lines on top of each other such as generating silhouettes or outlines (see figures 45 – 60, 67, 72 – 92), multiplying (see figures 43 – 47, 49 – 50, 83 – 92), laser-cutting (see figures 49/50) and rotating (see figure 88). With the help of layering lines, the images become complex and create movement. The complexity is similar to the idea of the facets of the self and seeing several facets suggests to the viewer the idea of the self as complex being. The lenticular effect works with the same idea: layering of lines to reveal complexity. The effect is a mathematical process where images are translated into lines.<sup>81</sup> By slicing pictures and putting a lined transparency on top, through movement, the sliced pictures start to become alive and to move around (see figures 98 – 101). Slicing images is reminiscent of selfies where time is sliced and cut, whereas a selfie does not show movement. I adapted the lenticular animation technique for my research by manipulating different types of movements as silhouettes (see figure 103), outlines (see figure 104), and having a sequence of movements (see figures 105/106).

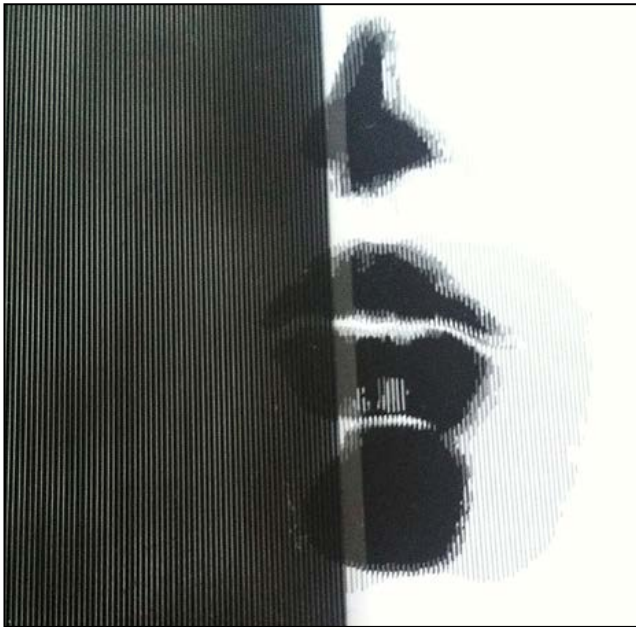
<sup>81</sup> An image for a transparent paper is generated by having lines that are 1 pixel (transparent) and black lines comprising the number of images minus 1 pixel. The black lines are then subtracted from image 1, moved to the side via 1 pixel, subtracted from image 2, moved to the side and so on. The result consists of black lined images that are layered on top of each other. Now when moving the transparency over the images, they start to move as the human eye and brain are too slow, still seeing the previous image and therefore seeing a movement.



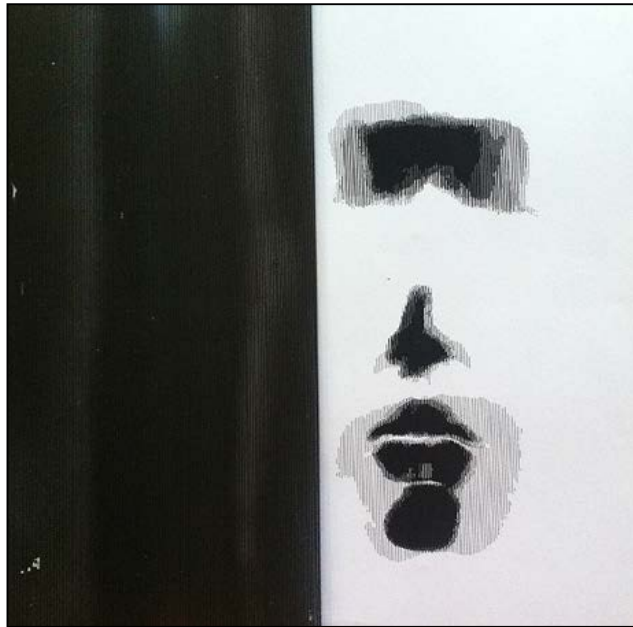
98. Video lenticular effect from imprints  
Manually moving transparency over  
printed image, 00:10 Minutes  
[Click on image to view](#)



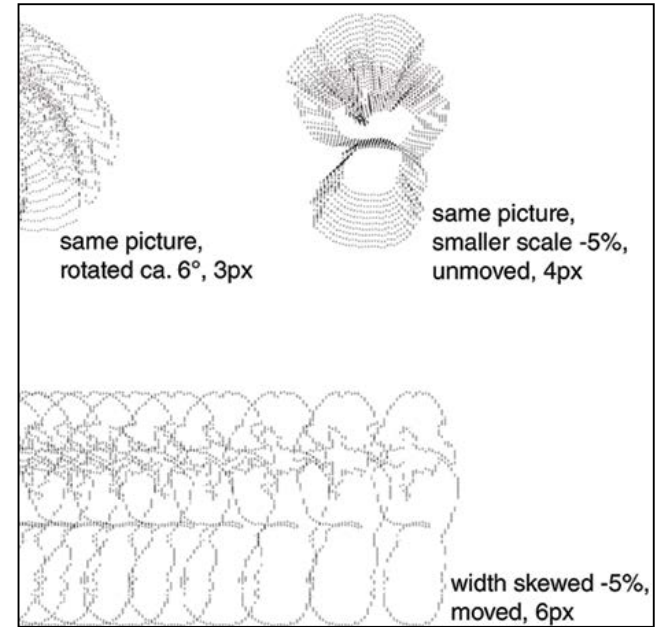
99. Printed image detail  
Printed image of the two components used to create video, refer to figure 98., left transparency, right printed image, process was to move left transparency over right image



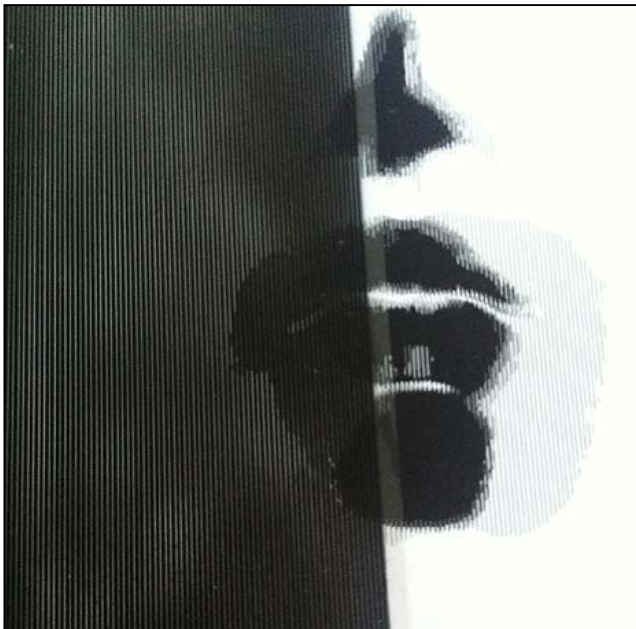
100. Transparency on image 1  
When moving the transparency, the image changes



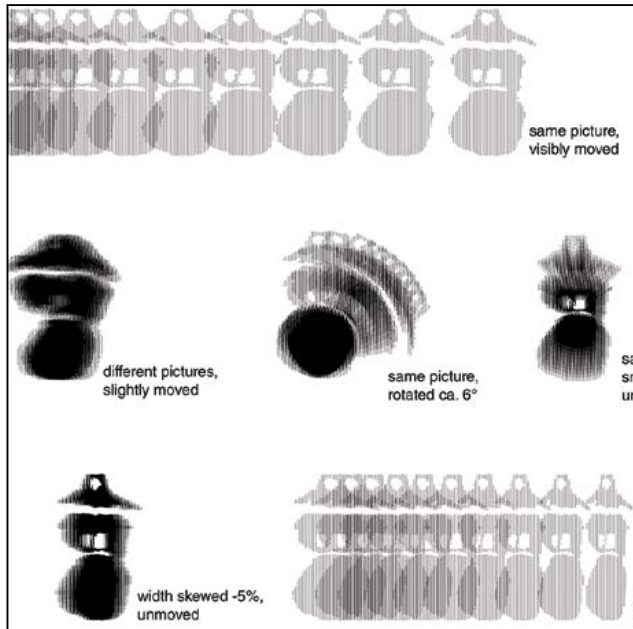
102. Printed image full  
Left transparency, right printed image



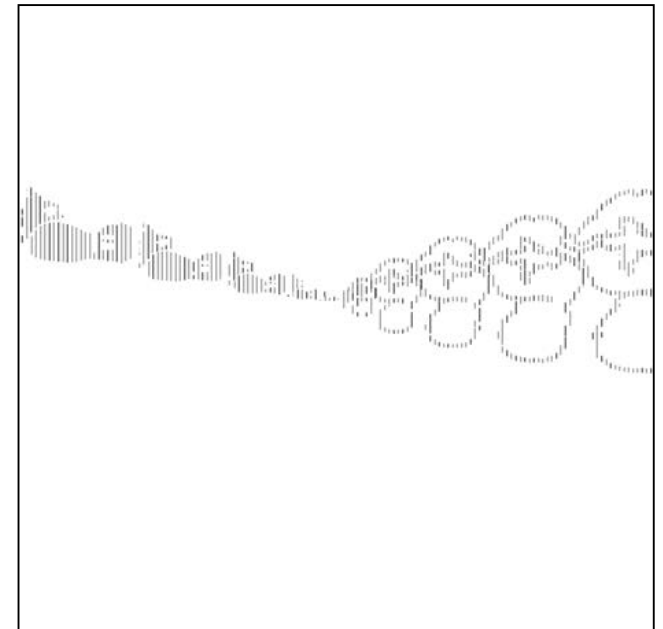
104. Outlines tests detail  
Refer to figure 103., same idea plus test with thickness of the outline, using outlines



101. Transparency on image 2  
Transparency was moved to the right, reveals another layer



103. Silhouettes tests lenticular effect  
Each test same image (always 10 images), test to explore types of movements (moved to the side, zoom in/ out, rotate etc.), using silhouettes



105. Testing sequential effect detail  
Creating sequence with flowing movement, silhouettes and outlines, refer to figure 106.



**106. Exploration video**  
Manually moving printed image under transparency, real time recording of manual creation 12:17 Min.  
Click on image to view



## Final work

The final work draws on the idea of capturing a trace of the self, which presents the aspects of the self. The traces used in the final work were my fingerprints and used teabags. Fingerprints, as fingers are parts of hands, are personal tools that the self uses in his/her daily life – leaving marks and traces behind. When showing a fingerprint to someone it is a recognisable and identifiable image, which is a form of a presentation of the authentic self. Teabags on the other hand are not directly connected to the body although once they are used there is a connection. Yet even items that people use leave traces behind that relate back to the self and can reflect the self as complex being. Both types of traces are individual and unique. By using traces of the body and items the body uses, the self, as a subject does not become literally objectified. Yet the self is still presented.

I produced fingerprint traces by applying face paint to my fingers and pressing these on paper, just as I did with my face in earlier experiments. Teabags were used (to make tea) and the moist teabag was pressed onto paper leaving a watermark. The finger imprints and the watermarks were scanned and run digitally using the lenticular effect technique. This involved simplifying the information of the imprints into lines, to then layering the images to make them more complex. To be a presentation of the self, the images needed to be more complex, referring back to the various facets of the self. As the layered images were black lined images on top of each other, looking like still images (referring to selfies), I distorted the images to evolve a moiré effect to create movement. The more I distorted and changed the scale of the individual images, the more abstract the original imprint became. Consequently, I decided not to include the animation with the lined transparency (see figures 108 – 112 and 116) because the images themselves showed enough complexity to be a presentation of the complex self. This also referred back to the realm of the selfie being a still image.

The visual language of the generated images remind one of the book 'mmm Skyscraper, I Love You' (1994) by the collective 'Tomato'. The collective focuses on the idea of mark-making and traces in a few of their works. "Tomato ... is organized around the idea of process. This means >making through doing< [sic] ... Mark-making and drawing allow us to engage with an idea in a physical way ... [It] is a process bound up between head and hand."<sup>82</sup> In their book the collective uses typography and samples of conversations that they overheard on the streets of New York. They mix these fragments of words and letters with their own observations to create images that look like skyscrapers built out of typography. Every little fragment of personal conversations leaves a mark on the images and only when brought together do they become the skyscrapers. Some traces of conversations are still visible, whereas others become blurry due to the over-layering of text.

<sup>82</sup> Simon Taylor, "Physicality and Perception," chap. Simon Taylor/ Tomato/ UK in *The Digital Turn: Design in the Era of Interactive Technologies*, edited by Barbara Junge, Zane Berzina, Walter Scheiffele, Wim Westerveld and Carola Zwick (Berlin, Germany: eLab, Weißensee Academy of Art, 2012), 110.



107. Used teabag imprints tests



108. Fingerprints imprints tests  
Manual face-paint on finger,  
pressed on paper



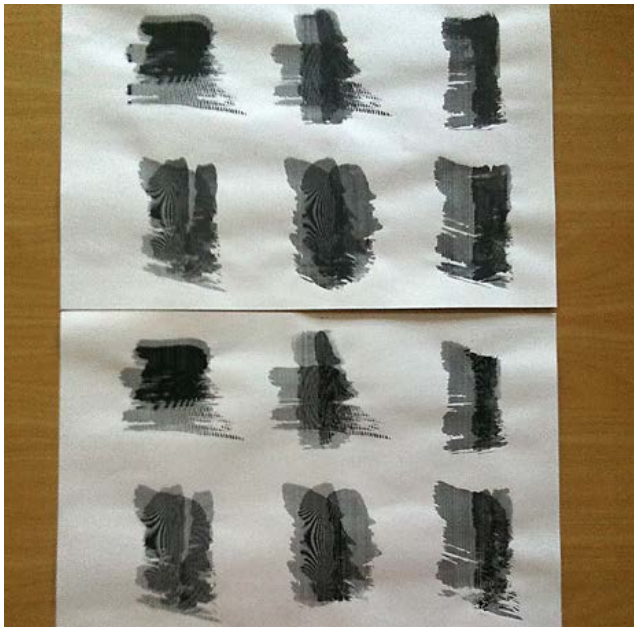
109. Fingerprints tests  
Manual imprint, digitally distorted,  
3 images layered, no transparency  
needed



110. Fingerprints movement tests  
Types of distortion, moiré effect



111. Screen-print on cotton tests  
Fingerprints, teabags, glass rim,  
loses detail on fabric, test for  
thickness of lines to be able to  
screen-print



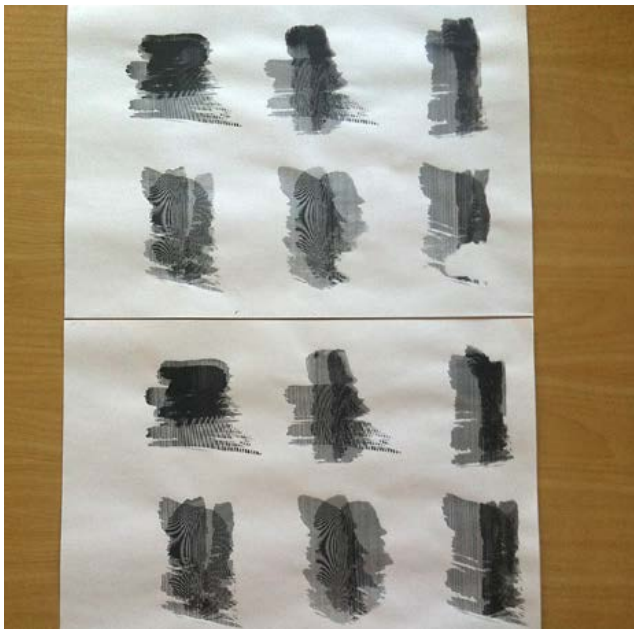
**112. Fingerprint screen-print tests 1**  
3 images layered, screen-print all in one print, top: ink 'Screeners', bottom: ink 'Aquasheen'



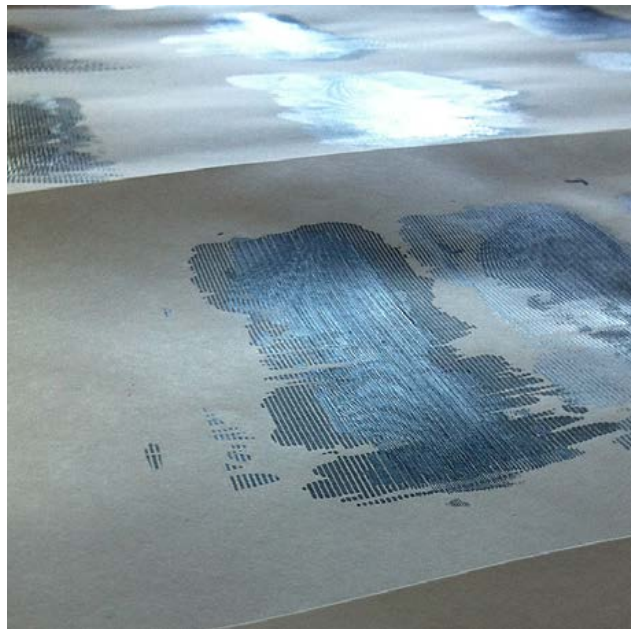
**114. Fingerprint screen-print tests 3**  
3 images layered, top: 2 screens - 'Screeners with clear extender' and 'Aquasheen', middle: 3 screens - 'Screener', 'Aquasheen' and 'Screener', bottom: 2 screens - 'Screener' and 'Aquasheen'



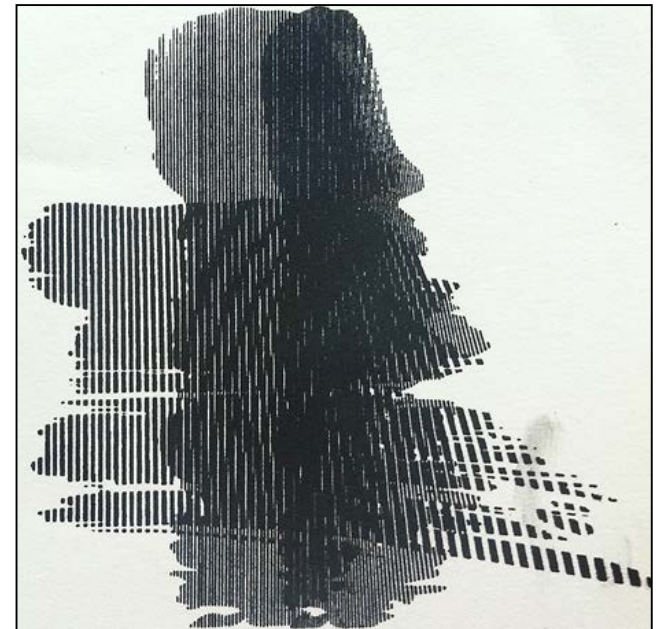
**116. Screen-print on cotton paper tests**  
Tests with colour (Black, White, Silver) 'Screener' ink, experiment drying techniques: heat gun, ironing, heat press



**113. Fingerprint screen-print tests 2**  
3 images layered, screen-print all in one print, top: ink 'Screeners' 50/50 Black and Silver, bottom: ink 'Screeners' 80/30 Black and Silver



**115. Fingerprint screen-print tests 3 detail**  
'Aquasheen' shiny, 'Screener' matt, 3 screens layered, decided to screen-print with one screen as multiple screens did not contribute any visible difference



**117. Screen-print on cotton paper tests final**  
Optimal and harmonic result between paper colour, texture and ink colour: 'Screener' 30/70 Black and White, heat gun to cure ink



Screen-printing was the technique used to print the series of traces of the self as a presentation of the complex self. As described earlier, screen-printing added personal mark-making of the self in the work and no one else's screen-printed traces would look like my traces. Therefore I manufactured a process of mark-making derived from the daily traces of fingerprints and teabags. The process included: manually making imprints (see figures 107/108), digitally changing these imprints into an adaptation of the lenticular effect (see figures 109/110) and manually screen-printing the images (see figures 111 – 117).

The practical part of the research showed that the self can also be presented through its traces. The self is more than just a physical appearance of the face in a photograph; imprints of personal items can be a form of even presenting the intangible and complex self. I decided to combine the single prints to present them in a book format. The book form relates back to the idea of the flipbook, where movement is created by turning the pages. The viewer can explore and experience the complex non-static self, which refers back to the many selves an individual has and the facets of the self. The evolved work is sequential and also implies a narrative, which is predestined to be included in a hand bound book as it slowly, by turning the pages, reveals itself to the viewer. This decision is in line with Rettberg's statement "self-presentation ... is cumulative rather than presented as a definitive whole."<sup>83</sup> The book form is intimate and most often only one person (one self) looks at it at a time. The book of images explores the point prior to collapse where the presentation of the trace of the complex self is still visible just before becoming untraceable. The images become untraceable in the sense that the viewer might not see the original trace in the images and the self is only evident as a trace. Yet the self producing the work will always see the connection as a presentation of the self. Although the fingerprint might not look like a fingerprint anymore, the image is still produced by a fingerprint of the self and would not exist otherwise. As discussed by Jones earlier, these traces are 'stand-ins' for the physical existence of the self.

<sup>83</sup> Rettberg, *Seeing Ourselves Technology*, 35.



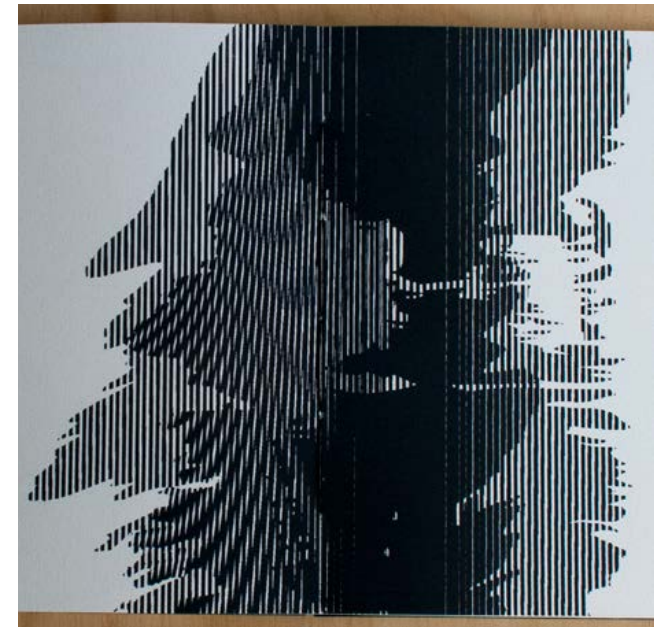
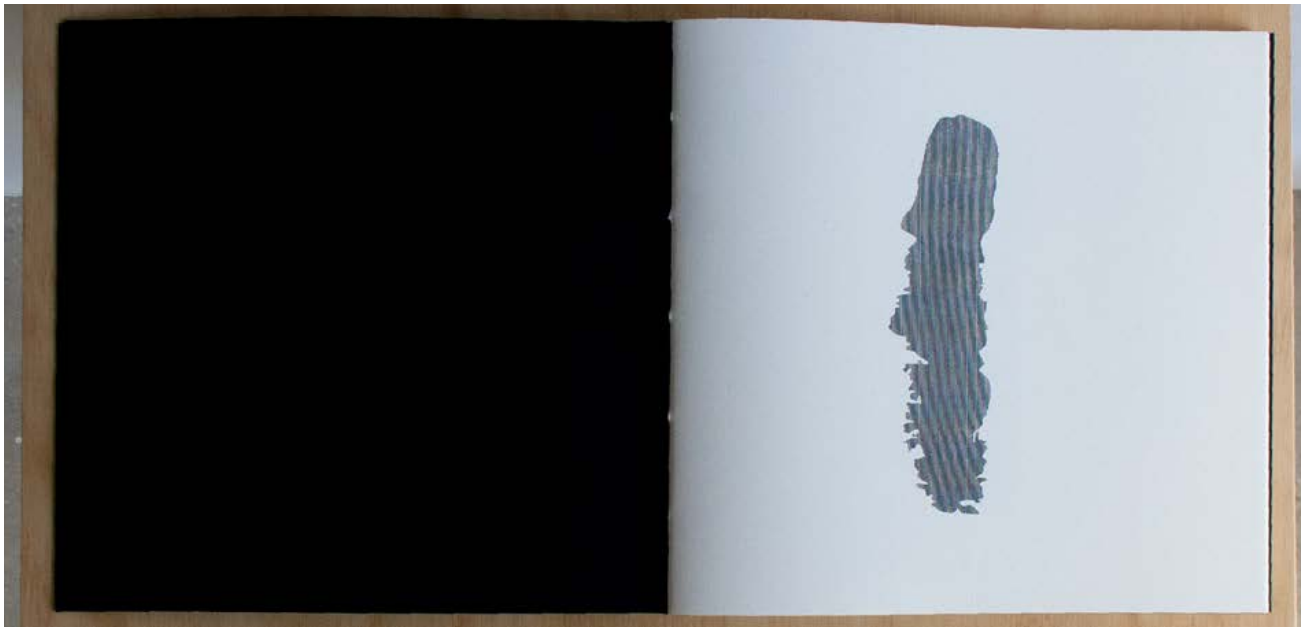
118. Final book cover  
Side view as lenticular effect, 'white' paper and 'black' lines



119. Table of content  
4 Sections



120. Spine  
Coptic, showing sections, able to open book and seeing in the spine



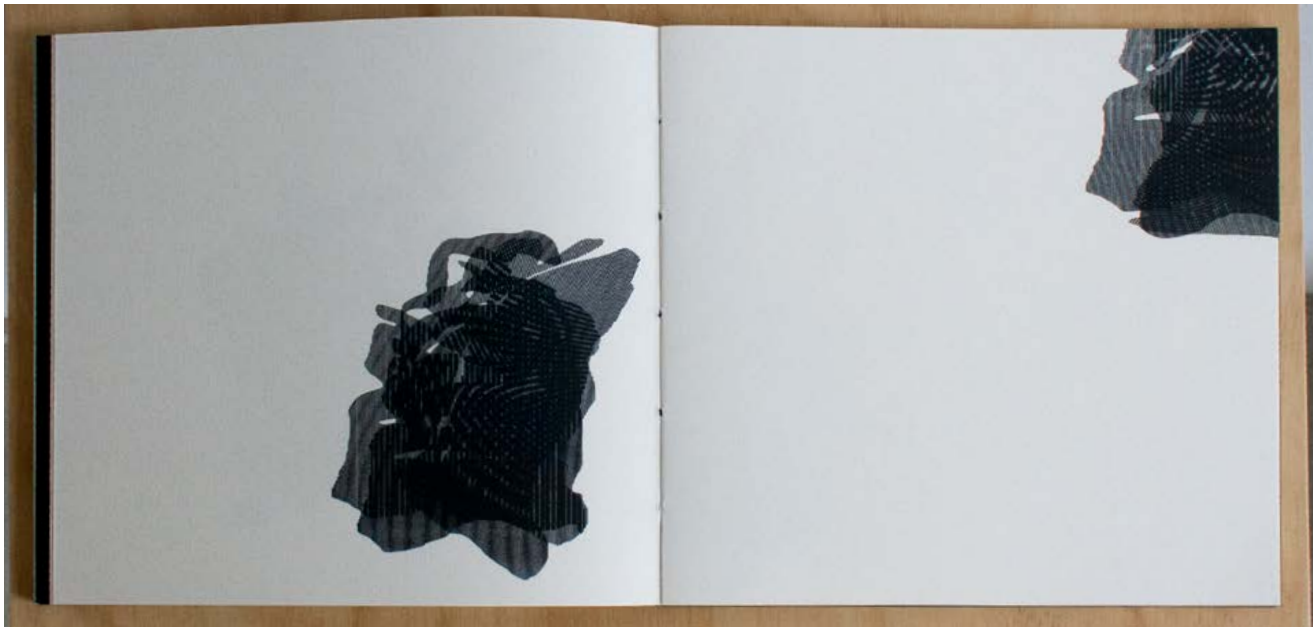
123. Fingerprint spread  
Section 2, scaled, distortion, middle  
of spread



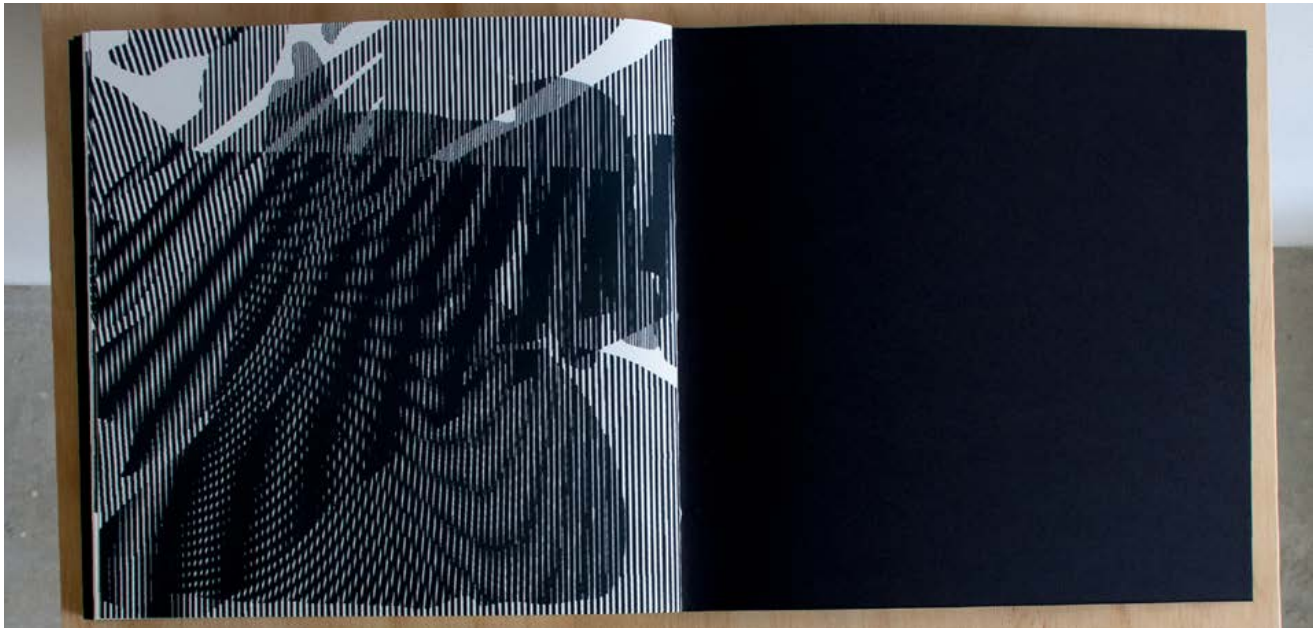
121. Fingerprint page 1 (top left)  
Section 1, introducing screen-print-  
ed, lenticular effect fingerprint

122. Fingerprint disappearing (left)  
Section 2, 3 images and layers on  
each side, visible moiré effect





126. Teabags middle of page  
Section 4



124. Teabags disappearing (top left)  
Section 3

125. Teabags explosion (left)  
Section 4, image spread over full  
page

## 4. Conclusion

This research project began with an examination of contemporary selfies in order to understand the methods and statements of the makers. The researcher's tacit knowledge in this project was an important part of the process and led to experiments that another researcher probably would not have done this way. Expressing thoughts and ideas was a way to find the medium most suitable for me to show a possible shift in the presentation of the self. By being a practitioner as well as a researcher, tensions arose "... in the apparent duality of the role – subjectivity versus objectivity, internal versus external, doing versus thinking and writing, intuition versus logic."<sup>84</sup> It was essential, even if sometimes difficult to put thoughts and intuition into words and onto paper for me to comprehend.

This project aimed to understand how a selfie can be more than an image of the physical appearance of a face and then to investigate the presentation of the self via traces. The process of experimenting and discovering was key for the outcome. Having a presentation of the self displayed through traces and mark-making, the images aim to create "new connections of something that is familiar but displayed in a ... different light."<sup>85</sup> The developed moiré effect attained by the layering lenticular effect generated images that showed a visual language of movement, rhythm and time. In the final work the initial imprints are transformed almost at a cellular level. It was important to use screen-printing as the printing technique as it supports the idea of personal mark-making, at the same time being reproducible as an artistic process. Screen-printing and layering also helped to explore the moment of failure to represent the trace but at the same time to actualize the original imprint. In Walter Benjamin's words: "By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence. And in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation, it reactivates the object reproduced,"<sup>86</sup> in this case, the self as subject.

Whereas Barthes stated that self-portraits within photography involve the self becoming 'a spectre', the generated images are not literally objectifying the self. The imprints are subjects made from objects that the subject (the self) presses on paper. The new generated subjects are frozen in time yet become alive through the lenticular effect as well as the moiré effect, their visual language and the book form. The traces that the 'objects' left on the paper are a presentation of the self. They relate to the pressure and amount of colour an individual uses when screen-printing and the gestural process supports the relevance of mark-making. In addition, used 'objects' have a personal significance to the individual. Every individual leaves traces in time, which through a personal process can be transformed into presentations of the self. Through the sampling of these traces, new structures evolve and the relationship between the subject and the self is re-modified.<sup>87</sup> As a result, these new traces are samples of traces that can be seen as new individual subjects within new structures and patterns, a new presentation of the self.

The final work shifted from the purely external look on the self into an internal look and shows the connection of the being, its movement and its existence to present the self as more intangible. The book shows that the self as a complex being can be presented via its traces rather than by selfies. Selfies fail in presenting the self as a multifaceted authentic being as they are rehearsed and only concentrate on the physical appearance of the self in an image. Traces on the other hand show a relationship between the complex being and its surrounding and are authentic in existence. The book presents the self in which the self is only evident as a trace.

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<sup>84</sup> Gray, "Inquiry through Practice," 7.

<sup>85</sup> Troika, "On the Invention of the First Wheel, Gutenberg, Moholy-Nagy, and the Internet," chap. Troika/ UK in *The Digital Turn: Design in the Era of Interactive Technologies*, edited by Barbara Junge, Zane Berzina, Walter Scheiffele, Wim Westerveld and Carola Zwick (Berlin, Germany: eLab, Weißensee Academy of Art, 2012), 52.

<sup>86</sup> Benjamin, "Work of Art," 219.

<sup>87</sup> S. Bildner and T. Feuerstein, *Sample Minds, Materials on Sampling Culture* (Köln, Germany: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2004).

## 5. Supplementary material

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