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SELFIES AT HORROR SITES: DARK TOURISM, GHOULISH SOUVENIRS AND DIGITAL NARCISSISM

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ABSTRACT

Selfies at Horror Sites: Dark Tourism, Ghoulish Souvenirs and Digital Narcissism

Taking self-portraits at horror sites, like concentration camps, Ground Zero or disaster stricken areas, has become a growing trend on social networking sites. The paper aims to discuss the cultural phenomenon of macabre selfies in the light of dark tourism and digital narcissism. Horror covered in the media becomes an attractive background for the ultimate selfies which are a teenagers' way of celebrating life in places of death. These sometimes humorous self-portraits are ghoulish souvenirs providing emotional detachment, and at the same time a link to a greater media narrative. The interdisciplinary study is rooted in photography research, cultural and memory studies, and digital media research. The paper discusses the relationships of dark tourism and the media, kitschy souvenirs and digital memorialization of traumatic events.

Keywords: dark tourism, selfies, memory, consumption, trauma, digital narcissism

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Introduction

Places of sudden death, disasters, atrocities and trauma covered by the media, attract more and more tourists every year: sunbathing on the beaches destroyed by a tsunami; stealing pieces of barbed wire from the Nazi death camp Auschwitz; sightseeing war zones in Syria and Ukraine; buying tasteless souvenirs at Ground Zero; taking photos with the Costa Concordia shipwreck in the background; snapping pictures of themselves in Chernobyl, taking selfies in a gas chamber of a concentration camp. Dark tourism which involves travelling to horror sites, such as places of massacres, disasters, murders and tragedies, is a growing phenomenon in contemporary society (Stone 2006, p. 147). Dark tourists attracted by dark destinations and equipped with cameras, camera phones, tablets, and iPhones set out to discover „places in the headlines" (Gilad 2014).

„Wherever there has been a horrific event, there will be people taking pictures of themselves" (Miles 2011). Self-portrait photographs known as selfies are taken with smartphones or handheld digital cameras. The self-photos are usually shared on Social Networking Sites (SNS) and garner likes, shares and tweets of online friends and followers, because „selfie serves as a «real-time» performance of self, oriented towards an audience situated elsewhere" (Levin 2014). In 2012 *Time* counted ***selfie*** into the top ten buzzwords of the year, in 2013 the Oxford English Dictionary pronounced it the word of the year. Selfie seems to be „an ultimately trivial cultural phenomenon", but somehow it „defines our cultural moment" (White 2014). A wide variety of people take selfies, often innocent and meant as a simple reminder of important moments. But there is one type of self-portraits which uploaded on social media sites draw attention and cause outrage: provocative or simply tactless selfies taken at dark sites by teenagers who prevail on social networking sites where they post macabre selfies. This disturbing practice remains the focus of my study.

The article aims to describe a new trend, focusing on teenagers' selfies taken at horror sites, to explore and discuss the cultural factors which contribute to the latest macabre selfie fad. What drives young people to dark destinations and what makes them pull out their cameras and take smiling self-portraits with horror in the background or in a place where thousands were murdered? Is it a centuries-long fascination with death and macabre? A search for a thrill? Or maybe the need to impress their peers with selfies taken in most dangerous areas? The urge to follow journalists and see the places in the headlines, where horror, which is being reported live, might become a part of their own experience, when they put it in the background of their selfies? The desire to become a part of a bigger and more significant narrative? Or maybe it's just a sing of compassion fatigue resulting from excessive media coverage of death and disasters? Maybe emotional detachment working perfectly as a defence mechanism in the face of horror? Maybe selfie-takers are driven by the need to collect memories and ghoulish souvenirs to

come back in touch with their feelings? Is it insensitivity and the lack of empathy? Cultural narcissism and self-preoccupation which takes the form of „online self"-preoccupation on social media where the desire to show-off and garner more likes and shares pushes young selfie-takers to extremes? Maybe it's just a selfie competition that drives young people to the limits which they break, marking a significant cultural change.

There is a large number of photographs, taken at dark destinations, which respect the rules, however those which violate the unspoken norms remain the focus of my paper. The interdisciplinary study of a cultural and media phenomenon, i.e. the growing popularity of scandalous self-portraits, is rooted in dark tourism research (Foley, Lennon 1996; Seaton, Lennon 2004; Stone 2006; Sharpley, Stone 2009), photography research (Sontag 2004; Zelizer 2010), media studies (Moeller 1999), cultural and memory studies (Sturken 2007; Garde-Hansen 2011), digital media research concerning self-promotion 2.0 and narcissistic traits of the users of friend-networking sites (Bergman et al. 2011; Panek et al. 2013).

Taking selfies at horror sites, like concentration camps, Ground Zero or disaster stricken areas, has become a growing trend on social media websites, however quantitative analysis is not the purpose of this study which aims to focus on particular cases to explore the reasons behind macabre self-portraits taken with the horror in the background. The following sections will discuss teenagers' gruesome selfies in the light of dark tourism and digital narcissism, recognized as „sharing the self-love", as Thomas Chamorro-Premuzic (2014) nicely put it.

The first part of the paper discusses the relationship of dark tourism and media coverage, the rise of the *selfie generation*, emotional detachment of *tourists of horror* (be they professional or amateur), dark destinations and money, kitschy souvenirs, and compassion fatigue as a response to drama no one can do anything about, whereas the second part investigates the selfies in the internet environment, considering self-presentation rules and narcissistic tendencies of social media users.

Tactless and goofy selfies might be treated as provocative exceptions, but these exceptions are a signal of a meaningful shift and a proof of empathy decline, together with the growth of digital narcissism, which combined with other factors may lead to a significant cultural change.

From „Spectators of Calamities" to Selfie Takers

For years people have been travelling to horror sites and taking photos of dark tourist attractions. What has changed in the last decade is the focus of the pictures taken. The „selfie generation" travels to dark places to take photos of themselves in locations known from the media. According to Susan Sontag (2004, p. 16),

> being a spectator of calamities taking place in another country is a quintessential modern experience […]. Wars are now also living room sights and sounds. Information about what is happening elsewhere, called "news", features conflict and

> violence […] to which the response is compassion, or indignation, or titillation, or approval, as each misery heaves into view.

Turned into spectators, we watch „disaster marathons" (Liebes 1998) on twenty-four-hour TV, which often reports the horror in details making horror sites even more famous. Places in the headlines attract dark tourists who follow journalists to see the reported atrocities with their own eyes and to witness the horrors of others, as long as it is far-away and they can safely return home with their camera's memory cards filled with gruesome pics that prove they were there and saw this.

Selfie-takers want to get to the same place where journalists and their broadcasting cars are. Many reporters can tell their own stories about spectators armed with cameras, asking for assistance in getting closer to the site of the dramatic event only to have a better frame.

Tablets and camera phones that enable spectators to take the selfies, have become convenient tools for emotional detachment, which makes it possible for the spectators to cope with fear that lurks in the background. After all, photography is a „defence against anxiety", as S. Sontag (1977, p. 8) pointed out, discussing the way „tourists feel compelled to put the camera between themselves and whatever is remarkable that they encounter" (1977, pp. 9–10). If what they encounter is too scary, then photographs are like a screen to shield them from the horror they see through the lenses of their cameras. Taking pictures gives shape to experience and serves as a defense mechanism in the face of horror.

The words of a war reporter working in a conflict zone and wondering: „Is this in focus? Do I have the right light? Is my battery going to run out?" (Thompson 1998) illustrate how the fact of being totally involved in picture making allows photojournalists to do their job properly. Psychological costs of war reporting (Feinstein 2006; Hodalska 2016) go far beyond the scope of this article, however one must remember that journalists are not dark tourists and their motivation is different.

War reporters are sometimes labelled „tourists of horror" (Pérez-Reverte 2009, p. 12). Their experience well illustrates S. Sontag's idea of photography as a „defense against anxiety", at this point, however, similarities between journalists reporting horror and dark tourists who just want to see it, end. Nonetheless, reporters and dark tourists sometimes meet at the site of disaster and death.

Disaster tourists take photos of „your trauma, effort, and fear. And then they take that photo back to their cosy, dry home and show it to their friends, who *ooh* and *aah* about how cool it was that they got to see the aftermath of the flood" (Wade 2014). In other words: „What a spectacle!" (Sontag 2004, p. 72).

Dark Destinations

People visiting horror sites, such as places of massacres, disasters, murders and tourist attractions associated with death and the macabre is a growing phenom-

enon in contemporary society. Philip Stone (2006, p. 147), for instance, quotes Marcel who observed that „death makes a holiday" and called it the „dirty little secret of the tourism industry". Disturbing practices and morbid products within the tourism domain have entered academic discourse labelled as *dark tourism* (Foley, Lennon 1996) or *thanatourism* (Seaton 1996; Lennon, Foley 2000). While *thanatourism* refers mostly to violent death, *disaster tourism* focuses on sudden death, *dark tourism* covers all sorts of calamities that turn places of horror into dark destinations. That is why the term *dark tourism* is used in this interdisciplinary study, conducted in the footsteps of Stone (2006) who argues that fascination with death, „real or fictional, media inspired or otherwise" is driving the dark tourism phenomenon.

The term *dark tourism* was first coined by Malcolm Foley and John Lennon (1996) in their study on tourists' interest in J.F. Kennedy's assassination. The attraction of death and the macabre was mentioned earlier by Chris Rojek (1993, p. 136) who introduced the concept of „Black Spots" and wrote about crowds of holidaymakers at the sites of disasters, such as Lockerbie in Scotland, where Pan Am Flight 103 exploded and crashed in 1988.

Dark tourism has a long history, dating back to the ancient times of the Roman Empire and medieval religious pilgrimages. In this context, Stone (2006, p. 147), for example, states that „with death and suffering at the core of the gladiatorial product, […] the Colosseum may be considered one of the first dark tourist attractions. Other precursors to dark tourism may be seen in the public executions of the medieval period up until the nineteenth century". Anthony Seaton (1996, p. 15) defines dark tourism as „travel to a location wholly, or partially, motivated by the desire for actual or symbolic encounters with death, particularly, but not exclusively, violent death" and describes five categories of dark travel activities:

1. Travelling to witness public enactments of death. Maritime disasters, plane crashes, railroad accidents have always attracted the spectators and the excessive media coverage of disasters fuels the desire of dark tourists to „see the place" shown on television.
2. Travelling to the sites of individual or mass deaths, like battlefields, death camps and sites of genocide, but also places where celebrities died and the sites of publicized murders or the homes of infamous murderers. Gruesome crimes that hit the headlines attract sensation-greedy media consumers and dark tourists enjoying a shiver.
3. Travelling to memorials, graveyards, and resting places of the (in)famous.
4. Travelling to see evidence or symbolic representations of death at unconnected sites, such as exhibitions or morbid museums.
5. Travelling for re-enactments or simulation of death.

The diversity of visitor experiences encountered at dark destinations worldwide must be acknowledged, although goes beyond the scope of the paper which focuses on disturbing practices of dark tourists who have been travelling to horror sites for centuries, only in the last decade their odd behaviour, including tak-

ing smiley selfies, have raised concerns about the decreased level of empathy and understanding. For years tourists have been taking, stealing or buying souvenirs from the sites of death, but today selfies have become the innovative way to demonstrate their presence in the places where others perished (Hodalska 2015, p. 605).

Various manifestations of dark tourism, such as visits to graveyards (Seaton 2002) and celebrity death sites, holocaust tourism or prison tourism have generated media and academic interest (Stone 2006, p. 146). Researchers focused on specific destinations or motivations of tourists who desire to visit dark places. Tim Cole (1999) believes that voyeurism leads dark tourists to horror sites. According to Richard Sharpley and Philip Stone (2009), it is the *Schadenfreude*, that turns tourists to rubberneckers who stare at the tragedy of others. Stone (2006, p. 148) suggests that the motives vary from a morbid curiosity, through *Schadenfreude*, to a collective sense of identity or survival „in the face of violent disruptions of collective life routines" (Rojek 1997, p. 110). Dark tourists can be motivated by the quest for an adventure, a new experience or to get a feel for the sensitive area and an „understanding of the situations they see on the television news" (Gilad 2014). Sharpley, Stone (2009, p. 8) believe that at horror sites dark tourists are given the ability to „write or rewrite the history of people's lives and deaths, or to provide particular (political) interpretations of past events". Morbid tourism can teach history, additionally providing its devoted students with a good thrill. Discussing the disturbing practices of dark tourists, one must also acknowledge the educational value of historical sites that attract visitors not only because of the death toll related to them, but because of their historical meaning or media exposure.

Dark Tourism and the Media

„The scale and scope of the tourism product are likely to be driven by the media" (Lennon, Foley 2000, p. 119). Researchers state that the media play the most significant role in the growth of dark tourism, through „global communication technology that televises events almost as they happen into people's living rooms around the world" (Seaton, Lennon 2004; Stone 2006, p. 150). Media coverage „help us to place ourselves at the heart of the action", noted Alice Miles (2011) who also pointed out that media consumers want a link to that action:

> When disaster strikes, it seems natural to some people to seek a personal connection. […] After 11 September 2001, it was all about "having a friend who knew someone who was in the World Trade Center" – or, as one of my colleagues at the time put it: "I nearly went to New York this week. Just think".

Media consumers need a link to the reported tragedy, „no event is so distant today that you cannot be a part of its drama" (Miles 2011). This is what encourages selfie-takers to pull out their mobile cameras and shoot a photo with the drama (which is simultaneously being reported in the media) in the background.

Through its mass appeal to the audience, contemporary media can bring horror to public consciousness and can have a great „influence over public interpretation of the landscape, including sites of dark tourism" (Yuill 2003, p. 137). The number of visitors in Dallas increased after the release of Oliver Stone's movie „JFK". The same thing happened in 1997 when James Cameron's disaster film „Titanic" attracted tourists and movie fans, who visited J. Dawson's grave at Fairview Cemetery, „believing that he was Jack Dawson of the movie fame" (Yuill 2003, p. 141). Steven Spielberg's movie „Schindler's List" contributed to the development of *Schindler tourism* (Lennon, Foley 2000, p. 64) in 1993–1994, with crowds of tourist visiting Krakow and cemeteries and other popular and photogenic settings that occurred in the film.

Dark Tourism and the Money

„Contemporary society increasingly consumes, willingly or unwillingly, both real and commodified death and suffering through audio-visual representations, popular culture and the media" (Stone, Sharpley 2008, p. 580). The „packaged horror" we see in the news will eventually turn into leisure experiences for tourism consumption (Sharpley, Stone 2009). Guidebooks show the way to the dark sites. Locals earn money for directing visitors to the places portrayed on TV. A farmer from Pennsylvania, for instance, charged 65 dollars per person for a „Flight 93 Tour", to the crash site of United Airlines 93, hijacked on 9/11 (Stone 2006, p. 152). At Ground Zero tour guides charge $15 a head to point out the spot where the firefighters raised the flag (Stone 2006, p. 156). In New Orleans, which was destroyed by Hurricane Katrina in 2005, curious spectators with cameras joined guided tours in their crowded buses and travelled around the devastated district. Such notions have been met with resistance and tourists had to stumble upon a homemade sign: „Tourist Shame on you! Driving by without stopping. Paying to see my pain. 1,600+ died here" (Wade 2014).

In 2014 tour operators started offering trips to the Ukrainian war zones. Advertisements contain phrases like „see where the fighting is actually taking place" or „impress your friends with the ultimate selfies" (*Telegraph* 2014).

The amount of media attention makes the horror reported on TV more visible, increasing the viewer's anxiety or empathy for those who suffer, but at the same time excessive media coverage of dramatic events leads to compassion fatigue (Moeller 1999) that sets in when people are exposed to media reports of wars, famine, disasters, diseases and dramatic events which they can do nothing about. „Compassion is an unstable emotion. It needs to be translated into action, or it withers", notes S. Sontag (2004, p. 90–91), stating that if one feels that there is nothing that can be done, one starts to get bored, apathetic and cynical. Maybe this is one of the keys to understand the *ultimate selfies* fad.

Insensitivity, numbness, detachment is somehow portrayed in self-portraits taken with the horror in the background, which is captured in the frame together with the smiling faces of selfie-takers who literally turn their back on the drama they want to establish a link to. In December 2014, when a gunman took hostages in Sydney, tourists took photos of themselves outside the Lindt café where 15 people where fearing for their lives. *Sydney Selfie* takers were condemned on social media sites, labelled „insensitive" and „sick" for taking selfies on the site of the drama (Sabin 2014) which was being reported live and worldwide.

Compassion Fatigue and Giggles at Death Camp

Susan D. Moeller (1999, p. 1) who coined the term „compassion fatigue" wrote: „The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse – War, Disease, Famine and Death – gallop… leaving behind scenes of unspeakable horror which occasionally burst onto our TV screens or momentarily claim our attention", but when the viewers feel there is nothing they can do to help those in horror, compassion fatigue sets in and they say: „Rwanda. I don't listen, […] What can you do? You listen and there's nothing you can do" or: „I try never to […] watch the news at 11, because that really makes you an insomniac" (Moeller 1999, p. 235). We can argue whether it's compassion fatigue or compassion avoidance, but many reports from horror sites are „beyond such a mild emotion as compassion" (Moeller 1999, p. 236) and those who cannot do anything about the reported terror, can simply get bored or cynical.

At Ground Zero *Portraits of Grief* have been replaced with *hangover selfies*. In front of the gates of Auschwitz death camp, teenagers joyfully play with poses, nicely captured under the ill-famed slogan, to post their selfies later on Instagram or Facebook with light-hearted captions, like: „Arbeit Macht Freiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii" (Uni 2014). Girls make duck faces, boys have a giggle at the front gate of the death camp or pose with funny things, like a block of ice a young selfie-taker was biting in Majdanek. Only further contextualisation can bring meaning to these morbid photos. Context (= background) influences the perception of the digital self-portraits showing pretty girls, handsome boys, young and carefree, relaxed and having fun, looking straight into the camera with eyes that have seen no horror and ears that have heard no cries. Their smiley selfies posted on Twitter and Facebook generate thousands of tweets and retweets, likes and shares.

Up until recently, photographs taken at concentration camps and images associated with the Holocaust have evoked similar feelings as those expressed by S. Sontag (1977, p. 20), when, shortly after the war, she saw the photos of Dachau:

> When I looked at those photos, something broke. Some limit had been reached, and not only that of horror. I felt irrevocably grieved, wounded, but a part of my feelings started to tighten; something went dead; something is still crying.

Today, in Dachau, teenage girls take duck-faced selfies with crematorium ovens in the background.

In her splendid essay „On photography" Sontag (1977, p. 9) admitted that

> photographs give people an imaginary possession of a past that is unreal, they also help people to take possession of space in which they are insecure. Thus photography develops in tandem with one of the most characteristic of modern times activities: tourism.

Travelling to distant, often horrific places,

> becomes a strategy for accumulating photos. The very activity of taking pictures is soothing, and assuages general feelings of disorientation that are likely to be exacerbated by travel (1977, p. 10).

Dark tourists put the camera between themselves and whatever they encounter, because taking a picture „gives shape to experience" (Sontag 1977, p. 10). Tourists take photos which will offer „evidence that the trip was made, that the program was carried out, that fun was had" (Sontag 1977, p. 9). Teenagers posing for humorous selfies at mass murder sites, apparently have fun. Their jolly portraits gathered from social media sites, were exhibited on a Facebook page titled „With my pretty girls in Auschwitz" (Uni 2014), also translated as „With my babes at Auschwitz" or „With my Besties at Auschwitz" which had generated more than 12,000 likes within just two days (!), before it was taken off the site. The page presented photos gathered at Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and other SNS, showing teens at the Nazi concentration camps. „Pictures of high school sweethearts kissing in front of the gates of Birkenau or girls pursing their lips against the backdrop of a human ash mound" (Uni 2014) have caused confusion and raised many questions about the motivations of young tourists. Maybe the youngsters are demonstrating rebellion against mandatory school trips to memorial sites, they act out and use technology as a platform to express their feelings? Maybe in places of death teenagers feel the urge to celebrate life in, what seems to them, the most „creative" way: posing by the railway tracks leading to the camp, with their thumbs raised, almost asking for a fun ride.

Many of the selfie-takers in concentration camps act as if they were on a film set of another Spielberg blockbuster. S. Sontag (1977, p. 9) notes that taking photos is a way of certifying experience, but also it is a way of refusing it: „by limiting the experience to a search for the photogenic, by converting experience into an image, a souvenir". Taking pictures is

> one of the most universal and central activities of tourism. Tourism is also defined by the activity of taking things away from the place we have visited, not only photographs but also commodities such as curios, souvenirs, and artefacts (Sturken 2007, p. 12).

Ghoulish Souvenirs

In 2014 an Italian tourist stole a piece of barbed wire from Auschwitz-Birkenau camp and wanted to „keep it as a souvenir". He did so, because other visitors did the same thing (TVN24 2014). Ghoulish souvenirs, as well as goofy selfies are the striking examples of the way tourism commodifies horror (Lennon, Foley 2000). Marita Sturken (2007, p. 12) studied contemporary practices of consumerism in sites of collective trauma, where „history is understood to be something that is consumed and experienced through images, memory is thought to reside in commodities such as teddy bears, and memorials are accompanied by gift shops".

In a gift shop in Dallas, tourists can buy „mugs emblazoned with crosshair gunsights" (Barton 2001). In Westerplatte, Poland, where the first cannonballs of the Second World War fell on September 1, 1939, tourists can buy toy guns and gas masks (Buczkowska, Malchrowicz-Mośko 2012, p. 49). In the 9/11 Memorial Museum gift shop tourists can buy FDNY vests for dogs, a USA-shaped cheese platter (with heart symbols marking the spots where the hijacked planes crashed), a cuddly Search and Rescue Plush Dog (*Telegraph* 2014) or toy fire trucks (Monahan 2010, p. 146).

> The proud can buy twin tower T-shirts, the angry can buy toilet paper bearing the face of Osama bin Laden, and the curious can climb up the fence to take the perfect picture of what is now just a big hole (Blair cited in Stone 2006, p. 156).

In his essay „The Kitchification of Sept. 11" Daniel Harris (2002) asks:

> Does an event as catastrophic as this one require the rhetoric of kitsch to make it less horrendous? Do we need the overkill of ribbons and commemorative quilts, haloed seraphim perched on top of the burning towers and teddy bears in firefighter helmets waving flags, in order to forget the final minutes of bond traders, restaurant workers and secretaries screaming in elevators filling with smoke […]. Through kitsch, we avert our eyes from tragedy.

Very often kitsch is hidden under the cover of Commemoration, Tribute and Remembrance. Tacky souvenirs are an invitation to tacky self-portraits in places of horror turned into tourist products. According to Stone and Sharpley (2008, p. 590), the consumption of tourist attractions rests on „media induced emotional invigilation" and *schadenfreude*, but also on conspicuous compassion (West 2004) and narcissism, which leads to the self(ie)-preoccupation.

Selfies with Horror in the Background

Taking selfies at horror sites, like concentration camps, Ground Zero or disaster stricken areas, has become a growing trend on social networking sites, where one can find: teenage girls taking duck-face selfies in Dachau, with the crematorium ovens in the background (Christian Forums 2014), teenage boys joyfully posing

at the gates of Auschwitz. Young adults standing on the railway track leading to Birkenau with their thumbs up as if on a hitchhiking tour. Keith Durkin (2003, p. 47) says that „by rendering death into humour and entertainment, we effectively neutralize it; it becomes innocuous, and thus less threatening".

In August 2012 Phoebe McWilliams took a photo of herself at Ground Zero and posted it on Twitter with a hashtag *#hangover*. In July 2013 John Quirke posted a selfie from a gas chamber in Auschwitz. In June 2014 Breanna Mitchell who called herself „Princess Breanna" posted a smiling *Selfie in the Auschwitz Concentration Camp* accompanied by emoticon of a blushing smiley face. Her photo attracted thousands of tweets and retweets. Many of them were dismissive, however her smiling selfie attracted large audience and made her face visible and recognisable to others.

In March 2015 seven smiling women used a selfie stick to take a smiling photo of themselves admits the rubble from an explosion in New York building. Others took pictures with rescuers who were searching for survivors in the background. *New York Post* published that group selfie on the cover, with a title „Village Idiots" (Tatler 2015).

Many selfies are collective acts. The issue discussed in the paper, however, is focused on the background of macabre selfies, not on the number of people in the foreground but rather on the horror behind their back, because this is exactly what made the dramatic selfies worth taking.

Selfies could be considered as „acts of memory" like home videos (van Dijk 2007, p. 127), only they have more in common with SIM card memory than the shared collective experience, although selfie takers do „share" them. Images from digital phones can be uploaded on social media sites in matter of seconds and the immediate feedback or the attention of large audience contributes to the rise of the discussed phenomenon. The role of technology is crucial.

Displayed on social media websites selfies are shared as a „record of a life lived" (Garde-Hansen 2011, p. 85), or even more: as „a newsworthy version of one's life" (Garde-Hansen 2011, p. 85), because images exhibited on social networking sites are carefully selected in a constant process of managing impressions (Garde-Hansen 2011, p. 139; Mehdizadeh 2010) which are to construct the „best self" (Boyle, Johnson 2010, p. 1398) of the profile owner in the eyes of other Internet users. Andrew Mendelson and Zizi Papacharissi (2010) argue that the manner in which people portray themselves and tag others through Facebook photographs is a contemporary means of introducing the self and (per)forming one's identity.

Self-Performance, Self-Promotion, Self-Portrait

Jose van Dijk (2013, p. 213) claims that „social media are not neutral stages of self-performance, they are the very tools for shaping identities". Sometimes peo-

ple create different versions of their profiles for different audiences (Mendselson, Papacharissi 2010), in an attempt to sell or promote „an online self" (Panek et al. 2013, p. 2005). Christine Rosen stated that Facebook users „have a tendency to describe themselves like products" (Hum et al. 2011, p. 1829). The idealized self-presentation is easily accomplished via friend-networking sites as users have complete control of their profile content" (Bergman et al. 2011, p. 707). Their online identities are constructed according to social and cultural norms, the information posted is cautiously selected, and their photos seem to be their „visual avatars" (Hum et al. 2011, p. 1829–1830) that can change appearance.

Friend-networking sites offer „an ideal setting for impression management" (Mehdizadeh 2010, p. 357), a safe space where people are able to „control others" perceptions of them" (Panek et al. 2013, p. 2010) and „remain highly selective of the images they produce and share" (Garde-Hansen 2011, p. 139) with millions of Internet users, engaged in the same activities.

Selfies taken at places of horror are ghoulish souvenirs, mobile memories. Anna Reading (cited in Garde-Hansen 2011, p. 139) would call them *memobilia*:

> Mobile digital phone memories or memobilia are wearable, shareable multimedia data records of events or communications […] which are deeply personal and yet instantly collective through being linked to a global memoryscape of the World Wide web.

That virtual space is filled with digital memories of millions of dedicated residents, who go on Facebook, when they wake up, uploading to the site an average of 300 million photos each day (Facebook Statistics 2015). Many of them are self-portraits and personal photographs. Joanna Garde-Hansen (2011, p. 74) quotes Thomas Elsaesser:

> In our mobility we are *tour'ists* of life: we use the camcoder in our hand or often merely in our head, to reassure ourselves that this is "me, now, here". Our experience of the present is always already (media) memory, and this memory represents the recaptured attempt at self-presence: possessing the experience in order to possess the memory, in order to possess the self.

In her research on mediated memory J. Garde-Hansen (2011, p. 73) stated that media audience are „active producers of meaning" who creatively use mediated archives to understand themselves in relation to multiple worlds.

Selfie and Friends

Taking a selfie may be considered an attempt to understand the self in relation to the world: culture, history, society, community, family, „friends" and „followers". For 80% of Internet users the social networking sites (SNS) have turned out to be the main settings where individuals interact with one another, construct their identities and influence peers (Panek et al. 2013, p. 2004). It is no wonder that social

media have attracted academic attention and contributed to a growing number of publications about self-presentation, the content of FB profiles, and the relationships between the use of SNS sites and psychological traits (Michikyan et al. 2014). Scholars focus on how social networking site use is related to narcissism. Although researchers never state that „everyone who uses SNSs is a narcissist", nevertheless they agree that „the medium appears to provide the narcissistic individual an ideal opportunity to display vanity […], manipulate his/her public image, and gain approval and attention" (Bergman et al. 2011, p. 709).

Self-Love Sharing

Narcissists have a tendency to consider themselves better than others, „to constantly seek veneration from others, and to engage in self-centred thinking and behaviour" (Panek et al. 2013, p. 2005). Studies show that the Millennials, or the so called „selfie generation" (Blow 2014), those in college from the early 2000s to late 2010s, are more narcissistic than previous generations (Bergman et al. 2011, p. 706). Along with a steep decline in altruism and empathy the levels of narcissism soared (Panek et al. 2013, p. 2004). This increase in self-admiration has been noticed along with the increased usage of social networking sites (Bergman et al. 2011, pp. 706–707), which may reinforce narcissistic tendencies because they offer a convenient channel to display vanity and accumulate large numbers of superficial friendships. Narcissists „proudly claim high numbers of SNS friends" as the friend count affirms their grandiosity and creates a large online audience for their posts and tweets. Christopher Carpenter (2012) found that heavy Facebook users scored high in the „Grandiose Exhibitionism" aspect of narcissism, and gaining more friends than others can be regarded as a form of competition. According to Shawn Bergman et al. (2011, p. 707), the Millennials

> want their SNS friends to know what they are doing, believe that their SNS friends are truly interested in what they are doing, and will work to keep the focus of their profile on themselves by posting pictures that feature only themselves and not others.

Online profiles are filled with self-portraits, presenting exaggerated and attractive images. „Showing-off has never been easier and, ironically, more celebrated" (Chamorro-Premuzic 2014). Studies show that self-promotion through frequent descriptions of one's self, and photo posts (Bergman et al. 2011; Mehdizadeh 2010) is correlated with higher levels of narcissism (Panek et al. 2013, p. 2005). Friend-networking sites „allow users to become the producers and stars of their productions" (Pempek et al. 2009, p. 237). Bergman et al. stated that SNS users can also be the „stars" of their profiles who want others to know what they are doing and thinking by constantly updating their status and posting pictures (Bergman et al. 2011, p. 707). „We are now more connected than ever, but also less interested in other people, except when it comes to finding out what they think about

us" (Chamorro-Premuzic 2014). These are the most significant traits of digital narcissism (Szpunar 2016), which seems to be a sign of our age.

To sell their online self, to get more likes, shares, tweets and retweets , the selfie generation is constantly seeking a more attractive or controversial background for their self-portraits. A fourteen year-old girl lost her balance while taking a selfie near a staircase and fell to death (Felongco 2014). A fifteen year-old boy accidentally shot himself while taking a selfie, he was holding a gun pointed at his chin in one hand and a phone in another, and he pulled the trigger instead of pressing the camera button (Manio 2014).

As a form of competition, kids are searching for a selfie triumph, along the lines of war tourism ads: „impress your friends with the ultimate selfies" (*Telegraph* 2014). Disaster and horror sites provide the best and the darkest setting for a bright and smiley selfie. Like the one in a concentration camp. In the Rules for Visiting the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum tourist read that „they should behave with the appropriate solemnity and respect". Maybe the rules should be more precise for teens „missing a cultural sensitivity chip" (Dean 2014) and specify: „Please, DO NOT take selfies in a gas chamber", „Do not take selfies at the front gate under the Arbeit Macht Frei slogan", „Do not take selfies with crematorium ovens in the background", „Do not take selfies on the railway tracks leading to the camp".

On one of the forums (Forum 2014) discussing selfies at death camps, a girl recalled her experience as follows: „I went to Auschwitz-Birkenau alone and this thought never even crossed my mind. I took a selfie in my hostel in Krakow later that day just to see how my face looked after visiting the camps". Her last words exemplify that she primarily took a selfie to see how her face looked after visiting the camps. This implies that she was out of touch with her emotions and could only get to her inner self through a self-portrait photo, as if a selfie was indeed a mirror of the soul. She had to see how her face looked, to learn what she felt, to understand her feelings and experiences. „Like the doomed figure of an ancient myth, we cannot stop gazing at our own reflection" (Meagher 2014). Or maybe, just maybe, she was concerned that others around her might not see her feelings. As if a selfie was the best currency of her communication of her feelings. The girl's story remains a wonderfully tragic example of the complicated cultural phenomenon.

Conclusion

There are several cultural factors leading to the latest macabre selfie fad which may be considered as a forerunner of a significant cultural change. Selfies are taken offline to be seen online, when uploaded on social media sites. Respectively, the push factors are found in real world (dark tourism, media coverage, compassion fatigue, emotional detachment, lack of empathy, teenage rebellion,

ghoulish souvenirs quest, commodification of experience) and the virtual world of SNS where self-portraits are shared (in a selfie competition, as a form of self--promotion 2.0 in the culture of digital narcissism) to garner more likes, tweets, shares and to draw the attention of large audience to online performance. Selfie has become a modern currency of the communication of feelings.

For years people have been travelling to places of death and taking photos of dark tourist attractions. What has changed in the last decade is the focus of the pictures taken. The „Selfie generation" travels to dark places to take photos of themselves in horror sites known from history textbooks or the media. The drama reported live on television becomes the background for scandalous self-portraits and the same drama makes them newsworthy.

When ambulances and TV cameras leave the spot, tourists start coming. Reporters move to another place, time passes, memory fades and a place of disaster, massacre or trauma becomes a tourist attraction. Media report on tragedy; dark tourism commodifies it.

Self-portraits taken at horror sites are photographs which no longer capture the „story telling moment" (A. Eisenstadt, cited in Zelizer 2010, p. 2), nor do they „tell the story" of horror. If there is a story behind the selfies at horrible places, it bears a chilling resemblance to that of Dorian Gray.

Long before smartphones and tablets were invented, O.W. Holmes said a photograph is a „mirror with the memory" (Zelizer 2010, p. 2). How meaningful this description is in respect of self-portraits: reflecting the image of a selfie-taker and storing that image in SIM card memory.

Self-portraits at horror sites are a link selfie-takers are trying to make to the media coverage of dramatic events, maybe in an attempt to become a part of a bigger narrative, a more important narrative than the stories they produce and show off on friend-networking sites every day. This is the way in which they want to participate in the (hi)Story, they cry: „Here I am! I am just as important as the things in the background!", and they want their cries to be heard among the louder cries of other selfie-takers.

In the 19th century Stéphane Mallarmé said that everything in the world existed in order to end up in a book. In the 20th century S. Sontag (1977, p. 24) wrote that everything existed to end up in a photograph. Today, sadly, everything exists to end up in the background of a selfie.

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STRESZCZENIE

Amatorzy mrocznej turystyki zbierają makabryczne pamiątki, a wśród nich własne fotografie zrobione w miejscach, które znają z telewizji albo podręczników historii. W obozach koncentracyjnych komory gazowe i piece krematoryjne stają się potwornym tłem dla pozujących na pierwszym planie młodych ludzi. Artykuł prezentuje interdyscyplinarne studium fenomenu kulturowego, rozpatrując makabryczne *selfie* z perspektywy mrocznej turystyki, studiów kulturowych poświęconych fotografii i roli mediów w kształtowaniu pamięci o dramatycznych wydarzeniach oraz konfrontując wnioski z najnowszymi badaniami cyfrowego narcyzmu i autopromocji na profilach społecznościowych. Moda na makabryczne *selfie* jest zwiastunem ważnej kulturowej zmiany, dlatego warto się zastanowić nad czynnikami, które do niej prowadzą.

Słowa kluczowe: mroczni turyści, *selfies*, konsumpcja, trauma, cyfrowy narcyzm