

Self-portraits and Selfies : Have We Become "Visual Dyslexics" ?

Introduction

Self-portraiture, an ancient and noble practice in Art History, is undergoing a profound transformation in the digital age. From canvas to smartphone, our relationship with our self-image has changed ¹, raising an unexpected question : *are we still able to distinguish a direct image from a reversed one, or do we now live in an "inverted world" without even realizing it ?*

Self-portraiture : From Mirror to Photography

For centuries, artists have engaged in the practice of self-portraiture, using the mirror, or anything that could serve as a substitute, as their main tool. ***This technique***, essential until the advent of photography, ***systematically produced a horizontally reversed image*** ². Thus, from Vincent van Gogh to Auguste Renoir or Pablo Picasso, many self-portraits display details that are systematically reversed compared to reality, such as the parting of the hair or, in Van Gogh's famous case, the bandage on the wrong side of the head.

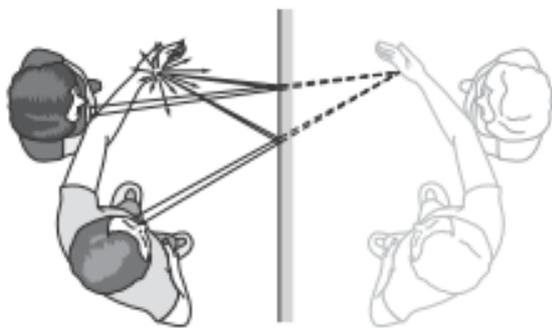
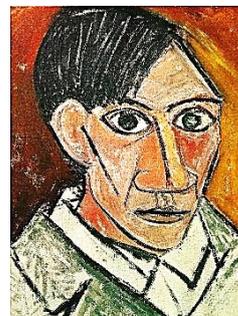


Image of an extended scene in a plane mirror
the horizontal inversion of the image appears clearly

Pablo Picasso (around 1900) – Realistic Period



self-portrait (1907)



photography (1900)

The Selfie Era : A Normalized Inversion

Today, the practice of self-portraiture has become widespread thanks to smartphones and the selfie function. In museums and tourist sites, it has become common to see visitors photographing themselves in front of artworks, often with their backs to them. Yet most people are unaware that the image recorded by their device is also often horizontally reversed, unless a correction function is used. Tools exist to correct this inversion, but one must be aware of it. How many users actually notice that their image and the artwork one are reversed in their selfie ?

Vincent van Gogh (1889)



self-portrait « with Bandaged Ear »

Mona Lisa – painted by L. de Vinci : 1503-1506 or 1513-1516



photography of the painting



selfie recorded at the Louvre Museum

A World of Reversed Images

Iconic examples, such as the Mona Lisa at the Louvre or the Grand Place in Brussels, illustrate this

phenomenon : millions of visitors leave with reversed images, without seeming to mind. ***This normalization of inversion questions our relationship to images and reality. Are we losing the ability to distinguish right from left in everyday imagery ?***

Conclusion

At a time when selfies are omnipresent, it would be desirable for all smartphones to include an automatic correction function as The Standart, and as an option the inverted image, as seen in the preview.

However the question remains : ***is our vision gradually becoming "dyslexic," indifferent to the distinction between direct and reversed images ?***

*Yvon Renotte, PhD. Physics, honorary prof - University of Liège
Past-invited prof, co-founder of HOLOLAB, Astrophysics Dept
y.renotte@uliege.be – <https://orbi.uliege.be/profile?uid=p041181>
www.linkedin.com/in/yvon-renotte-54a91a13*

1. Yvon Renotte, *Autoportraits et selfies : la révolution de l'image de soi . . . Sommes-nous devenus indifférents à l'inversion de notre image ?* , <https://hdl.handle.net/2268/338458>
2. Eugene Hecht, *Optics*, 5th ed – Pearson Education Limited (2017), Ch.5.4 : *Mirrors*, 188-190 ; § 5.7.6 : *The Camera*, 228-230 ; § 5.17 : *Erecting systems*, 233-235 and § 5.5.2 : *Reflecting Prisms*, 201-204