“Je est un autre” said Arthur Rimbaud, the poet who wrote *A Season in Hell* (1873) at age 19, right before he left behind literature and became a drug dealer. “Je est un autre” wrote Rimbaud because his Self was a poet, a lover, a visionary, an obscene, irreverent and middle-class man, a soldier, a father, a camels merchant, a dealer and, at age 37 he was already a corpse. Rimbaud’s sublime search of identity led him to embody numerous and consecutive “selves” ignoring the contradictions and free from any guilt. Because his “I” was the expansion of his own thinking.

In the Twentieth First century, the expanded thinking of each one of our identities materializes and diffuses in social media. Other “selves” come to life on *selfies*, *profiles*, and online journals, ranging from total artifice to sincere attempts to faithful self-representations. The same is true of contemporary art pieces that work with these sensitive materials. Using a diversity of performed confessions and online sharing practices, the artists in this show address the overexposure of intimate everyday life. Some of the artistic explorations of these intimate scenes are celebrations of how easy it is for people to offer their private lives to others; other artists in this exhibit denounce the individual and corporate acts of privacy violations. The diverse projects are aligned in a way that problematizes and forces a dialogue between two opposing but interdependent poles: (1) the individual control exerted on intimacy and privacy; (2) the inherent lack of control in the practice of online sharing.

**Je est un autre ... est je**

*Amalia Ulman* can be said to follow Rimbaud's aphorism to the limit. In her work *Excellences & Perfections* (2014) she became an Other, specifically one more “it girl.” Ulman, however, did not reveal it was a lie and during four months her Facebook friends and Instagram followers believed her progressive transformation was real. Ulman took on different poses in luxury hotel rooms with the latest fashion items she purchased; she showed her new look as a fragile blond woman; she posed pouting her lips, with sexy-nostalgic looks, with adorable stuffed animals, ice cream and cupcakes, until the final mutation occurred when she got breast implants and documented the post-surgery process with a series of photographs proving everything.

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Ulman, the great forger, posted selfies and updated her "cute & pretty" profile pictures; 475 posts and 88,906 followers later, she decided to break the “dream” of this constructed artificial, social media life. The moment of revelation peaked with the artist's apologies and remorse…not because of the deception, but rather because she had taken the wrong path and become a bitch. “The post in which I apologized received 240 likes and I received messages from people I had not heard of in nearly five years; people who had been following me in silence. In short, I succeeded in offering entertaining content: another human drama. Contrition, retraction and redemption; happy ending: the feminine stereotype had been accomplished.” If, with Rimbaud we admire his ability to change and search for the unknown, his absence of guilt, and his courage to live the fast life (embodying what later became the punk dictum "live fast and die young"), in Ulman we respect just opposite: her going back to normal. Closing the circle, the project ends with a sad lesson: the evidence of the surviving potential of female archetypes and their persistence in the online context.

Far from “fake” fantasies, we have Lea Castonguay’s photo series, where she gives the popular selfie interesting twists by projecting onto her photographs a "controlled authenticity", mixing fiction and documentary. In Journal (2015-2016), there is no invention of a new identity, only vaguely disturbing facets of the artist's intimate day-to-day life. “Au départ partagées sous forme de publications sur les réseaux sociaux, les images sont ici imprimées et exposées en tant qu’archive de mon passage. Les sous-titres révélant la date et l’heure de leur partage, ainsi que les réactions du public (nombre de j’aime, nombre de commentaires, partages, etc.)”. Outside their natural social media habitat, these photographs seem strange, since both format and context are decisive in how we perceive them. In these images, the transition from the small screen (mobile, tablet, computer) to the large print, from the intimate and fast-moving electronic device to the fixed walls of a gallery, disorienting the viewer by enhancing their status as a voyeur: intimacy displayed on a wall of printed images, is more disturbing than intimacy on a small screen.

Castonguay's self-portraits show a woman distanced from diverse everyday settings, and have the similar beautiful and mysterious crudeness of Cindy Sherman's early photo series, probably because the images by both artists are between two worlds: the real world and that of the conventions of representation (film or social media). The re-contextualization of these images in social media gives the actions a new perspective, but as was the case in Sherman's Untitled Film Stills (1977), the artificiality of the staging is defeated by the traces of truth that slip through in the gaze of the artist.

**Intimacy as name**

In line with Edgar Allan Poe’s axiom “if you want to hide something make it visible to everyone” in The Purloined Letter (1844), Intimidad Romero (Intimacy Romero), chose precisely the name, Intimacy, to conceal her privacy while at the same time, drawing attention to it. Pure paradox. Just as her choice of name is intentional, the reaction towards it is also predictable: “We cannot accept Intimacy as a name,” wrote the Facebook Team in 2012 after shutting down her profile, “In addition to a photograph without any distortion, we require a document showing your full name and date of birth.” In her Facebook profile image, Intimacy's face is always pixelated. The same is true of all her uploaded photographs of objects, pets, landscapes, or clouds, which become unrecognizable thick pixels. Intimacy has even created a photo album of stolen images that she updates periodically (Stolen
Facebook's "Friends"). What then is the point of showing images while hiding them? What is the objective of repeatedly showing in social media that you are actually hiding? For Intimidad Romero, it is an artistic and critical intervention focused on people's relationship with privacy in social media. The project interrogates the ease with which users provide their data and private life to those companies that manage social networks; in short, the point is to protect our right to control our own information and to retain our anonymity. And what better place to reclaim it than the "Heart of Empire" itself!

Immersion into extimacy

Across the mirror we find extimacy (extimité), a neologism Jacques Lacan formulated in his seminar The Ethics of Psychoanalysis (1958) to problematize that which is at once interior and exterior, interiority and exteriority; extimacy is not something opposed to intimacy but its reflection, because the “extime” is, essentially, the most intimate (of course, this is a paradoxical formulation characteristic of psychoanalytic discourse). The current meaning of extimacy as the tendency of people to disclose their intimacy, draws from the psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Serge Tisseron, who redefined the term as the exposure of the most intimate features of a subject in L’intimité surexposée (2001). The particularity of Tisseron's formulation is that the subject does not expose herself with the aim to share her experiences, but rather uses other subjects as a mirror of self-affirmation. Tisseron poses this reflection based on the study of a “Big Brother” group-type of French television, however, it quickly applied to the social media environment where it all seems to make sense.

Let us explore different degrees or levels of extimacy through the artist’s ability to over-expose themselves in today’s environment of connectivity, a context that some art pieces question critically, while others present as restorative therapy or as pleasurable performance.

EXTIMACY – FIRST LEVEL:
Surveillance Cameras (My Daily Life at Your Fingertips)

Artistic experimentation with television and video cameras was hatched in the 1970s, almost discreetly in stand-by for years, until the experimentation reached the golden years with the Internet. If, in the late 20th century, artists worked with real time images in galleries and museums, in the 21st century they expanded their field of action to networked audiences, that is, almost everyone.

The pioneer was Josh Harris who, shocked by Peter Weir’s film The Truman Show (1998) created Quiet (1999) and We Live in Public (2000), two new episodes of personal overexposure focusing on online sharing. In Quiet, a group of volunteers were locked together in a large New York basement adapted as a living space, where all their actions were recorded and shared live over the Internet. In We Live in Public, Harris and his partner shared their daily life from their apartment on-line, adding the possibility that online users could post any kind of comment in a chat. Both experiments ended earlier than expected, and both ended badly, but the seed had taken root. (The first Big Brother was launched on Dutch television the same year as Quiet).

These historical precedents have been followed by a series of actions in the art world, and although they have generally been oriented towards the everyday life spectacle, other peculiar scenes
have disrupted the patterns. This is the case of *Parent Folder* (2013-2016), where the artist *WhiteFeather* Hunter decides to share a particularly intimate episode in her life. In 1978, Hunter's father, with whom she has a distant relationship, flees to a South Pacific island and she loses track of him. Suddenly in 2012, her father grants Hunter online access to the surveillance camera of his private space so she can watch him. Since then, Hunter has downloaded all this material in a folder (a parent folder) and has created a video piece, as well as printed pillows showing these images, in order to build some kind of relationship with her father.

“I was able to pan the landscape and become a voyeur of his daily life. There was a simultaneous extension of trust in his act of allowing me access to his private life, and a bizarre enactment of reverse hierarchy, with him becoming the subject of my watchful (protective?) gaze.”

This exposure of privacy, reformulated in the artist's overexposure of her father, allows her to address and somehow, repair the emotional connection with him and everything he represents to her. In this way, the whole process is part of a restorative therapy which is completed in the piece's exposure to the audience.

**EXTIMACY – SECOND LEVEL:**
**Online Intimate Journals (Witnesses Wanted!)**

The implicit contradiction in the concept "online intimate journal" is symptomatic of a shift in society's system of values regarding the notion of intimacy. Intimacy is no longer precious and secret, on the contrary, to expose it is the best way to assert the existence of the Self: I over-expose myself, therefore I am. In an interview, Argentinian anthropologist Paula Sibilia explains how the way we shaped ourselves as subjects, the way we define ourselves, has changed: "Introspection is weaker. More and more we define ourselves through what we can show and others can see. Intimacy is so important to define who we are that we have to show it. This confirms we exist" (Pérez-Lanzac & Rincón, 2009). Users' posts on social media and blogs are essential to confirm the existence of the subject and, above all, her visibility; we are talking about digital reputation.

In *The Annals of Private History*, *Amalia Ulman* retakes her interests on the gender role analyzing this "female practice" with a thoughtful essay. The video goes over the history of the private diary from the very first layouts to the current online ones and in this way unveiling its expressive universe as well as the evolution of women's relation with these objects. Actually, these online confessional practices are renewed expressions of a traditional literary genre, autobiography, except that in contemporary practices new variables ridiculously shift the stories. Locked and hidden under their beds, in the darkness of their dorms, women hid, or maybe protected, their most private secrets on those pages, "Diaries are swallowed by the beds from which girls write their journals".² They hid what was not possible to say, or should not be said. When the Internet revolution began, these secrets were unveiled, but the writers have kept on writing it in the same way, as if their blog is still a private context,... or as if they were looking for the recognition of an audience, and as such the restatement of

their own existence? “And mistakes, same mistakes again, always the same mistakes for ever - says the female voice in the video - For ever-ever? Forever ever.” However, once more Ulman goes beyond the critical to the paradoxical exhibition of intimacy; the change of the private diaries to the public space not only disrupts the conception of privacy, but also suggests a challenge to a patriarchal society that has repressively kept in the shadows “the matters related to women”: these female ideas, feelings and thoughts that should never be expressed openly.

EXTIMACY - LEVEL 3
Share Therapy (digital identity and dependence)

My name is Diana Laurel Caramat and I believe I have a sharing and digital media addiction, I think I’m not the only one… can I share something with you? This is how the artist introduces her piece Share Therapy (2016), an interactive setting of iPads that contain 10 months of psychological therapy that she has done on an application (paid) named Talkspace; there is no personal contact; the relationship with her therapist is completely mediated by technology. Laurel Caramat skips the network and presents the different traits of her personality that she had been discovering throughout this experiment about digital identity and life.

“But through the drama, I believe I will be able to address my own issues with loss related to the foreign national identity concerns of an immigrant, to be under scrutiny both from my birth country and living country. Is this a Diaspora identity issue commonly associated with being Southeast Asian Filipino immigrant or one of an individual that feels the Internet is the only country everyone shares?”

One of the main qualities of the project is that it addresses the problem of digital dependence, that need for communicating through a technological device rather than interacting directly with people. Moreover, her addiction to digital media has pushed her over the limits that she had set, until she broke her own pact: the artist has broken her contract with the therapist of Talkspace intentionally sharing their private conversations in the exhibition. The artist practices what large companies operating social media networks do when they use private information from their users; there is not the personal and free decision of when user might want to share their privacy, their intimacy, the company does what they want. Theft coexists in the same territory of the daily online life.

EXTIMACY - LEVEL 4
A guide to share private pictures (safe sex)

The sharing of private pictures leads to a series of risks, especially if these are sex-related. In most cases of privacy violation and widespread dissemination of pictures pro-sex (sexual harassment, "porn" vengeance, doxxing) the most common reaction is disapproval, for this practice is usually considered irresponsible and dangerous. Working against this idea, and in trying to make image-

3 ibid.
sharing safer, Natasha Felizi and Fernanda Shirakawa, from Coding Rights, have come up with a guide/fanzine oriented to those who are more easily exposed to online sexual harassment due to gender or sexuality. Sexy guide to Digital Security is a funny and provocative proposal that uses the slogan "send nudes!" to entice women and sexual minorities to disseminate and standardize these kinds of pictures.

"More than protection, we need to spread knowledge about daily practices and actions that can work towards shifting perspectives about gender roles and digital rights".

For the artists, privacy and security are as important as freedom of speech and the right to express any kind of sexuality through self-representation; in this way, the project confronts two things at once: digital safety and post-porn strategy.

From controlled authenticity to decontrol: stolen pictures

Any kind of self-representation is a calculated construction because the author always sets, implicitly or explicitly, some boundaries. In this way, in all of these works we could talk about self-controlled exhibition, for the authors apply some kind of control in different levels and intensities.

In the first piece, Amalia Ulman controls the fake until its very last consequences, creating a crescendo which bursts into a final remorse. Her essay builds a precise story on how the online private diaries have been measured and calculated.

Intimidad Romero and Natasha Felizi and Fernanda Shirakawa also apply absolute control, but in different ways: while the first one prevents her face from being displayed on her Facebook profile, the Natasha and Fernanda teach us how to share images of our own nudity. In fact, both projects talk about the same thing, the controlled and safe display of personal images.

Lea Castonguay and Diana Laurel Caramet show themselves - body and mind respectively - displaying a controlled representation of their privacy, the first one emphasizing the interesting belief of "controlled authenticity", and the second one, on the verge of decontrol.

Control is at risk when WhiteFeather Hunter discovers the intimacy from the overexposure of her father. Here, it is relevant to make a distinction, by Serge Tisseron, between three concepts that could appear similar: what is private, intimacy and private life? For the author, what is private represents what is not shared with anyone, while intimacy is shared with some, encouraged by the desire of extimacy (for example, we can share intimacies in social networks unknown to our families). Finally, private life is the intimacy that we share with family, but not necessarily with the Internet (Yanke, 2014). In the projects of these three artists, control -or the illusion of control- is what determines the level of extimacy, the part of the Real Self that they are willing to reveal of their personalities, keeping in mind that their intimacy will always continue to exist beyond the dose of extimacy that each one decides to share.

The problem arises when you cannot apply any kind of control over your own image, when our more private pictures or more sex-related ones are stolen or displayed without our consent. Now we are going to analyze three cases that address the problem from perspectives that imply different moral positions.
Photo Album with no photos

In the world of celebrities, it is very common to have leaks of nudes and cases of pro-revenge; the process is basically extracting the photos from storing services of data to release them later on the Internet and in porn sites creating a voyeuristic ascent. This situation, which happened to Jennifer Lawrence in 2014 (and some other famous females as well), was the starting point from the artist Daniela Müller to create Jennifer (2015-2016). It is a pink book with a collection of texts from women who describe the stolen images from Jennifer Lawrence and a big drawing of a “selfie stick/dildo” in the center of the book as a foldout. The women who got the pictures of the actress wrote without remorse of where they were coming from and the book only shows the comments, not the pictures they are based on. As Daniela Müller writes: “The texts I received were quite different in their approaches and styles but shared a form of empathy that would not have been possible by looking at the photos collectively and having the background information”.

And in reading the descriptions, we can see that there is no trace of the celebrity, just texts that could be directed to our own selfies, to the private images of any anonymous person. The drawing of the selfie stick/dildo refers to a hacked device created to capture the instant of the female orgasm and whose image went viral in 2015 because, somehow, it displayed a mainly male fantasy. The problem was that the device never existed. Müller has proposed to convey the meaning in the drawing of the look of a man and in the book the look of a woman, while taking us to the pages of Dildoselfiestick where it is written: “It’s time for us to stop sharing every detail of our lives.”

Creepshots

The risk of suffering harassment for the dissemination of sexual selfies also affects teenagers and one of the most common ones that teachers and parents tend to say is: “If you never take the selfie, you will never be able to disseminate it”. But this is not entirely true. Because even though a person does not take a selfie, it is possible that another person takes a compromising picture secretly, without the person knowing, and then shares it without consent. Sexual pictures taken secretly with phones and then shared on specific websites are called creepshots. Naturally, the most common victims are women who will never know that millions of people will see, vote and rate, their asses and cleavage. The artist Sarah Faraday addresses this matter of no protection by presenting a large panel of real creepshots under the title Creepshot Disaster (2015). Every picture represents the voyeur moment of an anonymous person who posts pictures of their equally anonymous victims, with no story, context or identity.

“Anonymity on the web leads to a freedom from personal responsibility - the act of photographing women without their consent for sexual purposes, or as part of a risky game, becomes an aggressive, fetishized sexual act. People become depersonalized, objectified and commodified. Sexualizing the absence of consent perpetuates rape culture.”

What is the responsibility of the author of the pictures then? When someone disseminates the picture that was sent by another person, it creates a transgression of trust, and when someone
spreads the picture taken without the other person knowing it is a transgression of intimacy. Yet as
criminal as it may seem, these perverted pictures are not illegal, different from the ones in which girls
are displayed with their undergarment (upskirt), or women who are in private spaces (for example,
women sunbathing in the backyard). It may be twisted and immoral, but if the victim is in public then
this rule does not apply. These are the sick concepts of Internet privacy and digital ethics, a real
contradiction.

Talking about ethics

In 2014, Richard Prince disrupted the art world with his series *New Portraits*. But it was brief,
because the stolen pictures, taken from different Instagram users and displayed large scale in London
and New York galleries, were quickly identified as stolen. The self-portraits of young people -and also
celebrities- keep the original layout and “likes”, even though he took them without consent Prince
slightly modified the comments that were also in the picture. Without consent, guilt or shame, but with
a price of up to $100,000 per piece - new portraits, old practice - It is obvious then to wonder about the
reaction of those who were looted. Some were outraged, but most were thrilled, they considered it an
honor because, besides getting free advertising in their fields and becoming more famous, this display
allowed them to "become a work of art", some of them even took selfies in the gallery posing next to
their own stolen picture... What's the problem then?

This work has a big impact in the most challenging piece of this selection, made by Franco
and Eva Mattes in 2011. *The Others* is a series of slides of 10,000 randomly stolen photographs from
personal computers. In this case, the pictures were not even online; the artists got access to
computers due to a common setting mistakes made by people when they install peer-to-peer software
and they took all the private pictures (and music) that users kept on their desktop and folders. The
victims were never aware of it, and different from the creepshots, these items have nothing to do with
sexual pictures, for they are just simple in-the-moment personal and family pictures taken whose value
is only meaningful to their owners. The typical selfie and common pictures of pets - the classic ones -
and people sleeping, nights out drinking, street settings, road trips, dances.... insignificant
ordinariness.

As with what happened in *New Portraits*, there is neither harassment nor humiliation, so the
question of whether the action is a problem for the people who had their personal items stolen, is
posed. The critic Domenico Quaranta, had the opportunity to some answers directly from some of the
victims of Franco and Eva Mattes, among them Debra, a woman who went to the opening of *The
Others* in Sheffield, England, confronted pictures of her own pregnancy. Her testimony is a very
instructive:

“When I realized the person in the photos was me, I was shocked. It was extremely
embarrassing; these photos were not meant to be seen by anybody other than me and my
family. But I've got to admit that after viewing the whole work several times, my feelings started
changing: I realized the victims of these thefts were not the subjects of derision; there is some
kind of celebration in the amateurish way they are projected, maybe it’s the music. I was
watching the other visitors carefully and I sensed they had the same feeling. Then I realized that anyone’s life nowadays can be part of an artwork, willingly or unwillingly.”

Again, the pride of "being part of a work of art", a key aspect that diminishes the possibility of taking offense. Franco and Eva Mattes dare to describe their work as a celebration: "The Internet runs on voyeurism and exhibitionism. We are all members of this spectacle of daily life".

Epilogue. "The show of the self"

They say it’s for themselves, to feel good.
But why would you put it online then?
Because everything is online.
(Parkinson, 2015)

Eccentricity or megalomania was considered a problem, an imbalances or a pathology in past centuries, but those ideas do not have the same meaning for digital natives. People show their scars and plastic surgery, their ultrasounds and homemade porn, express their fears and most private secrets, sympathies and phobias, their forbidden desires. It is the great show of the online body and soul.

Paula Sibilia considers the Internet as a more suitable space to upload what she calls "the show of the self", a situation that happens when someone displays their intimacy, assuming at the same time, the role of the author, narrator and character. The “15 minutes of fame” mentioned by Warhol are no longer enough, now we are in the era of never-ending connectivity: all the time with everybody.5 “There is in the air a lot of "compounded narcissism" - that derives from societies that give privileges to "looks" over "essences". In this way, the being and seeming to be are (con)fused/ (Sibilia, 2008). Life in social networks has turned into an eternal show which is possible to make or measure out at will because it is not reality that is displayed, but the construction of an identity, an appealing character that we want people to see.

“Everything is centered around myself as the single figure and my relationship with the Internet” states Diana Laurel Caramat. And we assume that they are her real stories because they express her real feelings and private experiences, but what is the dose of reality and fiction that goes through it? And what is the veracity of the online private diaries or the Facebook profiles made with a dedicated "controlled authenticity"? If every story is a construction, then the limits between the real and fictional are not clear in the narration of real experiences. Social networks offer the possibility to

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4 Quaranta, 201.

5 "In the future, everyone will be famous for fifteen minutes" stated Andy Warhol; British street artist Banksy reformulates it: "In the future, everyone will be anonymous for fifteen minutes."
get public recognition for an identity that does not necessarily need to be physically exist, a fable is
enough. Anyone can choose a character, act it out and change to another one, alternatively or
simultaneously.

And in the end, does that even matter? Those who live online know well its main rule: "what
you see is not necessarily what I am". In this way, researcher Vanni Brusadin reflects on the implicit
agreement that we have to learn to accept when we get connected with other people through
networks: "Everybody builds a character, makes it prettier, exaggerates, shows off, selects. That is
why we users know that everything that goes around it is potentially of our interest, but that it is also
the result of a construction that is, ironically, based on trying to seem as authentic as possible in
generalized fictions." (Brusadin, 2016). It is important to note the precision of this approach, because it
does not say "the minimum fiction is a generalized authenticity", but the contrary. And this celebration
of exhibitionism and voyeurism, in this festival of private lives, producers and consumers are much
more interested in the game of looks than in veracity.

Finally, and after having analyzed this wide spectrum of me-ism, we reach the conclusion that the
spectacularization of the self is created at some point in the territory without borders of extimacy and
exhibitionism, so our last thought comes from the distinction that Tisseron establishes between both
concepts. "The exhibitionist just shows what will amaze his audience, it is a repetitive sham. The
desire of extimacy, on the other hand, is based on showing some parts of oneself that up to that point,
were kept hidden, in order for other people to approve it". (Yanke, 2014). Tisseron has already pointed
out that when it comes to extimacy, the intention of the subject is not to share experiences, but to use
the others as a mirror to reassure her/himself. It seems that deep inside, everything was much simpler
before internet; it was not a matter of being offline or online, of being a digital native or tourist, but of
approval, of self-esteem, of acknowledgment. We then go back to the same starting point of every
human impulse, I want you to like me!

Laura Baigorri Ballarín, July 2016
HTMiles 12: Terms of Privacy | Studio XX
Montreal
FEATURED ARTWORKS


[Intimidad Romero](#) (2011-2016)


Daniela Müller, *Jennifer* (2015-2016)


Franco y Eva Mattes, *The Others* (2011)

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