



# REARVIEW

By Shelley Wood

# Selfie- reflection

When Shelley heads to Paris on a mission of self-assessment, she finds herself ruminating on "self" in an unexpected way

An ever-growing number of museums, monuments, and amusement parks have announced that visitors must leave their selfie-sticks at home. I, for one, am applauding the decision with the free hand I'm not using to take a picture of myself with my cell phone.

I took a solo trip to Paris this spring, partly to take French classes and partly for some solitude and earnest self-reflection. At the Louvre, Notre Dame, the Luxembourg Gardens: I couldn't go anywhere without stubbing my face on someone else's selfie-stick.

Who, truly, is going to look at all these selfies? Returning from far-flung adventures back in my twenties, I could scarcely convince my roommates to look at my slides of ancient temples and tribal ceremonies without first cooking them dinner and hiding their shoes so they couldn't sneak away when I dimmed the lights. Now we're bombarding everyone we purport to care about with pictures of ourselves partially obscuring whatever it is that might actually be remarkable in the background. What a rare and wonderful thing it was in days gone by to simply drift apart from old friends because I never got a chance to see them, not because I'm fed up with looking at them every day on Instagram, crows feet artfully smoothed out with the Rise filter.

The fact is, it's no longer enough to merely take a picture of the Arc de Triomphe. All of us have already seen it on TV, or on a fridge magnet, or Googled it when we read *The Divinci Code*. Now we need photos of ourselves in front of the Arc de Triomphe. Ten or twenty

photos, ideally, so we can squint at them rather than at the world around us, take a few more, crop and optimize, then share them as soon as we can find free Wi-Fi. I am here, do you see me? I am HERE RIGHT NOW.

It's not lost on me, the irony. For all the reasons I went travelling on my own, chief among them was the hope that I'd return with a better sense of myself at this precise time in my life: to reconnect, to see myself more clearly. I was taking a metaphorical selfie. Maybe that's why I snapped so few pictures. I figured, the more time I spent on photographic documentation, the less I'd spend on the key and gritty task

of introspection: warts and all. No filters, no touch-ups.

That didn't stop me from trying to position myself in as many other peoples' selfies as possible. This will be a social option on Facebook any day now, I'm sure of it — 113 of your connections share the same haphazardly dressed photobomber.

And the truth is, I took the odd selfie in Paris (although I got by without the stick).

I took one of myself on a rented bicycle in the middle of an intersection beneath the Eiffel Tower, cars and buses flooding past in every direction. An elderly woman stranded with me on our island in the rushing tide of traffic was watching my contortions, smiling. I was struggling to get the tower, the bike, and me in the picture. "Est-ce que je peux vous aider?" the woman asked, stretching a tentative hand towards my smart phone. I looked at her, dumbfounded, as if she was asking me to dance. "No, no," I said, then thanked her, feeling both reassured and inexplicably uplifted. Imagine! There are a few people left on earth, rare as a public toilet in Paris, who don't know that the whole point of a selfie is to take it yourself. [a1](#)

I couldn't go anywhere without stubbing my face on someone else's selfie-stick. Who is going to look at all these selfies?