THE IMAGE AS A TEMPLATE FOR POSING

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The Image as a Template for Posing

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Abstract

I almost constantly feel the nagging need to pick up my phone. To check it, to search on it and doomscroll. My for-camera video and photographic self-portraits are a response to what I see. In my home, using my iPhone, I recreate other people's selfie gestures, follow selfie-making tutorials, I 'smize', 'finger-mouth' and pronounce "prune" with a speech coach. Prior to this study, I wasn't much of a selfie-maker, I didn't have a grasp of the conventions, whilst I was aware of the 'duck-face pout', I did not know saying the word "prune" to my camera-phone would help me master it. In this sense, I am learning through doing by following a particular prosumer-image practice.

Combining methods of self-portraiture, reenactment, image-appropriation, and humour, I re-perform the image, for the next image, drawing upon a specific body of imagery sourced from online marketplaces, which I make analogue, repeat bodily, and return to the digital as a new model for being – a process and concept I refer to as: 'the image as a template for posing'. I also follow verbal templates for being, to augment, transgress and deconstruct posing templates, to make other ways of being imaginable. My embodied remixing of image-templates, selfie-images and selfie-gestures allows me to rethink the manipulation of images and the desire to perform, become or be image, in the digital age.

The artworks created during this research are the foundations for the chapters of the thesis. Chapter One is led by the photographic series *Modelling Selfies (In Paper Outfits)* it explores the merging of differently dimensioned bodies to consider some of the labour involved in producing and consuming digital images. Chapter Two begins with deconstructed words and leads to a body of video works in which I pronounce terms used in selfie-making with the support of a mentor. The focus of this chapter is less about representation and more about the informational exchange, which underscores the digital age. The third and final chapter of the thesis commences with a number of protracted video works that sit under the title *Gestures (for the selfie),* this chapter continues to look at the body's connections to the image, extending the discussion of labour, whilst examining the desire of living up to an image that is out of reach.

The Image as a Template for Posing contributes to, and expands, contemporary thinking about selfie-making, through a practice-led focus. Within my video and photographic self-portraits

other peoples' selfie-like images become vehicles for the study of present and ubiquitous digital image-making practices and how these intersect with new modes of subjectivity, representation, and the staging of everyday life. In my artworks I attempt to fit and follow the confines of selfies to examine image-consumption and production systems of exchange, spotlighting the connections and tensions between bodies and images, in the digital age. My project offers a new contribution to contemporary thinking about prosumer 'self-portraiture' at the intersections of photography, performance studies and labour.

Keywords: selfie, prosumer, embodiment, self-portraiture, subjectivity.

Authors Declaration

This thesis represents partial submission for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the Royal College of Art. I confirm that the work presented here is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

During the period of registered study in which this thesis was prepared the author has not been registered for any other academic award or qualification. The material included in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.

Signature: 

Date: 16 November 2024

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Finally, I dedicate this thesis to my children Francis and Stella, my great nieces Jasmine and Marnie and my great nephew Louie. I hope, in your digital futures, online platforms have been reformed and that you embrace the possibilities of the 'phygital' (the interface of the physical and digital) to create your own image-templates.

Introduction

An Occasion for Selfie-making

‘The Image as a Template Posing’ is the concept and method I devised through this research. It allows me, through my own embodiment, to hold and manifest dual and conflicting positions about our identities and our connections to images in the context of the productive and consumptive image circuits in which we are enmeshed daily. The following pages chart how my research came to embody a template-based approach. The model of ‘the template’ is my key contribution to the interlinking fields of photography, performance studies and labour.

Background to the Research

Appealing in their luminosity, proximity and presence, online images are my vice. Quickly, easily, and oh so regularly, I access them via my smartphone, using apps that seemingly hover on its highly polished, although sadly cracked, screen. I am particularly drawn towards images disseminated on platforms for buying and selling second-hand-clothing. Indeed, it is a body of images sourced from such marketplaces, and my subjective response to them, that is the catalyst for this research. These images, these part-selfies and part-adverts, show women whose bodies subscribe to particular schemas for posing, in front of domestic mirrors. The sellers are depicted wearing the outfits they are trading online.

I first encountered these images mid-2016 when I was browsing selling sites. I wanted to sell some unwanted items of my own, and ahead of photographing them, I decided to research how other people styled similar products. I also wanted to gauge my price point. When I searched e-commerce websites for ideas, some very banal images of objects laid out on work-surfaces were first brought to my attention. Generally, these were reasonably well-lit, with nothing in the frame to detract one's attention from what was for sale. After a while however, I was presented with an image of baby bottle lids stacked one on top of another, balanced on an interior door handle. This touchstone image marks a moment when algorithms - the calculations that machines make based on ones viewing habits - began to show me curious DIY product photos, in which door handles smiled back at me, cushions wore prom dresses and handbags appeared oddly sexualised.

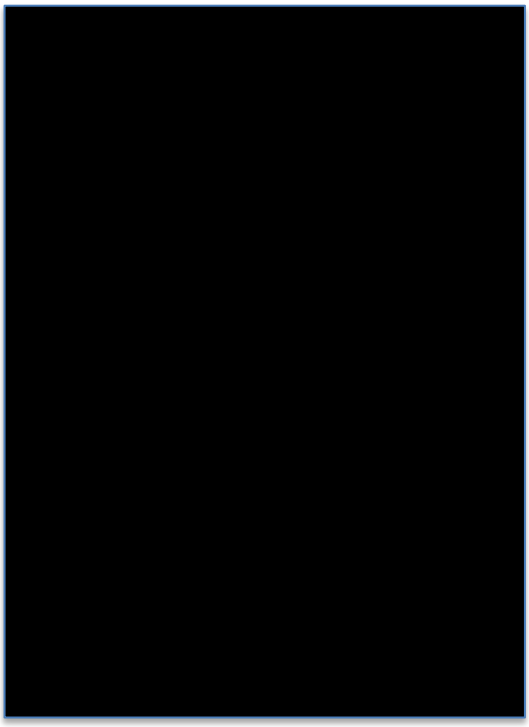
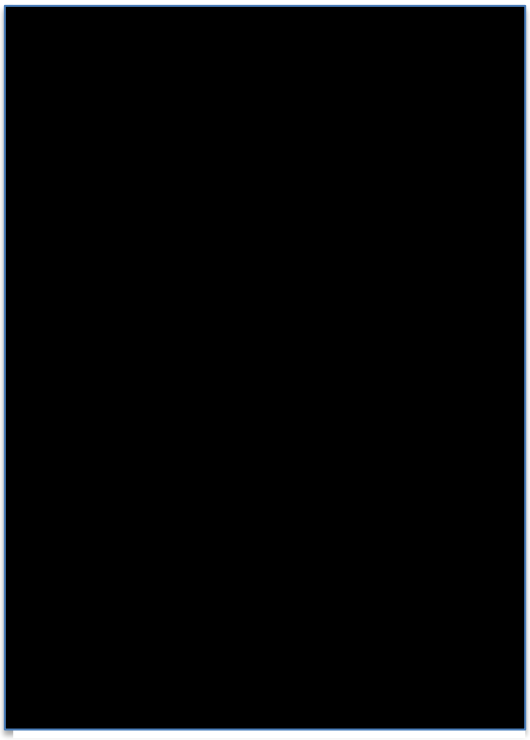


Figure i. Image of baby bottle lids stacked on top of each other and balanced on a door handle. Sourced from an online marketplace, circa 2016.



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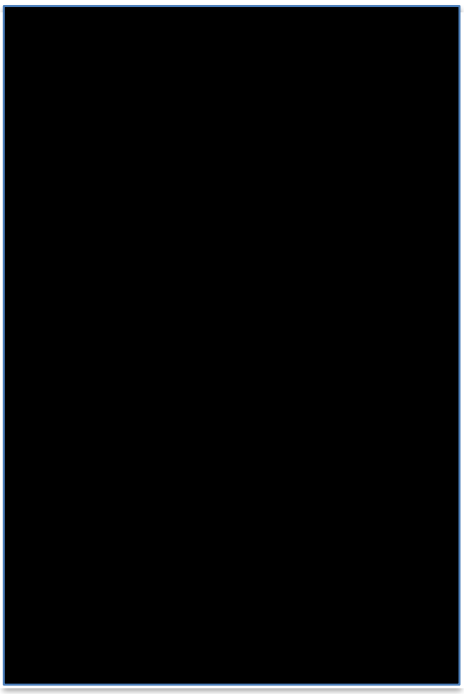

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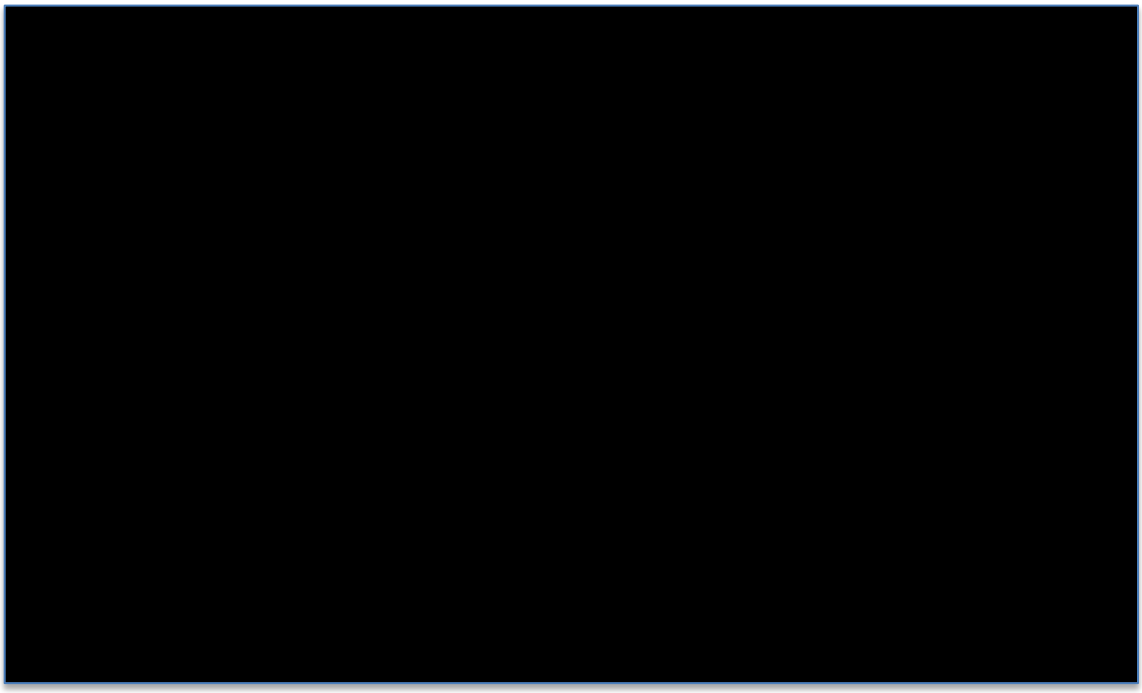

Figure iv. Image of a hand holding a handbag open to reveal its lining and pocket. Sourced from an online marketplace, circa 2016.

The resultant solutions to the problem of photographing the thing for sale are peculiar, playful and humorous. My curiosity to see how other items were being styled led me to the clothing section of marketplaces. Initially, and as I will discuss in Chapter One, the websites showed me images of clothes hung on coat hangers, presented on dressmaker's mannequins and draped across beds. With a shift of algorithms, a new approach to photographing clothing was brought into view. In these images, women, using their camera phones, photographed themselves modelling second-hand clothing, whilst performing sexualised poses.

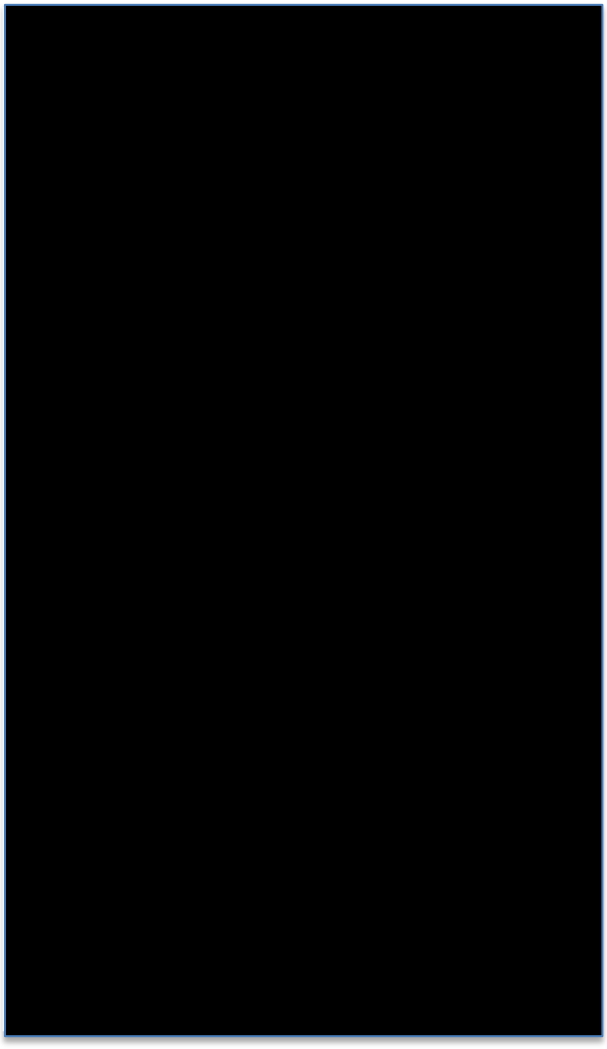

Figure v. Image of a woman wearing the clothing she is selling online. Sourced from an internet marketplace, circa 2016.

Some of the images present bodies close to the camera, with only a glimpse of the domestic setting. The photograph above is one such image, selected as an example of this kind of selfie-making, and for its relative anonymity. In this representation, we see a bedsheet, crumpled from the weight and positioning of the seated figure. The angle of view, taken from head height, looking down towards the body, indicates this is a selfie. This viewpoint, combined with her pose, which emphasises her breasts and hips, and reduces her waist, creates an hourglass silhouette to advertise the clothing she is selling.

As previously mentioned, the majority of the images featuring women wearing the clothing they are selling online, are taken through a domestic mirror, mostly positioned within bedrooms, but hallways and bathrooms are also chosen. As I will set out in Chapter One, a great deal of personal information is offered up via the representations: socks drying on radiators, framed family photographs, pictures of friends stuffed into the frames of mirrors, piles of clothing on beds or floors, fairy lights, plants in pots, beige carpets, grey curtains, neutral walls, ironing boards propped against walls, and in some cases the tools for beautifying oneself ahead of making a self-representation. It's a fascinating survey of British interiors, some of the commodities we keep in our homes, and the efforts we go to, to style the body, during the mid-2020's. Class readings can easily, and perhaps unfairly, be made.

I too sell clothing online, but I don't wear the outfits. I always present my attire in the same way, on a wooden coat hanger, attached to the top of my white Ikea two-door Pax wardrobe. The clothes can always be seen in full, with some of my bedroom appearing in the scene like a carefully constructed set for an advert. Three white Ikea Sortera storage boxes sit on top of the wardrobe, a sliver of green wall sits to the right of the photograph, and three small stacked vintage suitcases sit atop a wicker picnic basket positioned against the wall. I photograph the outfits from the front, the back and usually include some details such as labels, or the texture of the fabric. I take great care when constructing the images, I try to stage an aspirational lifestyle, whilst my home is small, I photograph it in a way that makes it seem bigger, stylish; middle-class. Whilst I construct a middle-class environment for the camera, I don't necessarily understand myself as middle class, but I see why I may appear this way to others. I find my class position unclear: I am the daughter of a coal miner; I was born and live in a working-class community in the North of England. Thanks to the widening participation agenda of the 1990s I have a university education and I have a job in the arts education

sector.[1] In my forties, I self-funded my doctoral studies.[2] My background and my education has, of course, shaped how I see and photograph the world, and without doubt informs my reading of the marketplace selfies, which I find familiar yet strange, interesting and uncomfortable - and sometimes funny. These images also elicit feelings of closeness and connection, they are addictive, and looking at them for extended periods fills me with an odd sense of ennui, a feeling that I get when I spend a lot of time looking at online content.

These conflicting and complex states, as well as the richness and completeness of the images, had a huge impact on me in the early days of my research. In truth, I didn't know how to, and also felt reluctant to, cut and reassemble them as suggested in my research proposal. I read the images in terms of women taking ownership of their bodies and performing for their own camera-phones to capitalise from the online sale of the clothes they were wearing, whilst also being restrictive and retrogressive in that they had semblance with the readers' wives photographs of the 1970s and 80s, and other objectifying depictions of women found in soft porn, advertising and fashion photographs.[3]

My hesitance to, and not knowing how to, make artworks that refer to the marketplace images led to a great deal of image-making during the first two years of my study.[4] I was searching

[1] I was born and raised in a former pit village in South Yorkshire, my dad and generations of men from both sides of my family were coal miners. From 1977, when I was born and until the late 1980s/early 1990s, I was part of a socialist and anti-capitalist community - I am proud and privileged to have experienced this. After the 1984/5 Miners' Strike, I witnessed the closure of the pits. My dad moved collieries until the pits had just about all closed. It's interesting to note, he had just completed his coal-mining career two years before I started university in 1996. In 2011 I permanently returned to living in the ex-coal mining village I grew up in. I work for a HE provider in Barnsley, I understand myself and my office-based colleagues, most of which are in non-academic roles, as working class, yet I am aware my education, creative practice and network of friends from across the arts and education sectors, positions me as middle-class. I live, as I say elsewhere in the footnotes of this thesis, in class conflict.

[2] In 2017 I applied for, and was accepted onto, a part-time PhD within the School of Arts and Humanities at the Royal College of Art.[#] I proposed a practice-led research project that refers to selfie-like images disseminated on internet marketplaces. My part-time research journey began in September 2017 and was completed in May 2024. This period included three terms of 'leave of absence' due to the COVID-19 global pandemic and the challenges of balancing study, work and family life including home-schooling children of primary school age, during national and local lockdown periods.

[3] In the 1970s and 1980s, adult magazines, such as Fiesta, featured a 'Readers' Wives' section within their publications. Across these pages, photographs of readers' wives or girlfriends appeared in various stages of undress, posing sexually for the camera, in domestic scenes. The photographs were apparently submitted by male readers, i.e. the boyfriends or husbands of the women who were depicted in the photographs, for publication.

[4] To work through the stuckness I felt at the start of my studies, I embarked on a great deal of image-making, trying out a myriad of approaches, from printing the source images small and then extremely large, to working in ways that seem in retrospect, more tangential. These early explorations, which took about two years of part-time study to work through, eventually led me to create the three series of works discussed within the thesis. Before embarking on any artmaking, I also tried to contact the sellers to see if

for an approach that enabled me to hold and display my peculiar and contradictory relationship with the images. Eventually, I found an image-appropriation process that involved physically inhabiting, bodily and imaginatively, other people's images, enabling me, through my own embodiment, to get closer to the screen-based image in its printed physical form, to create and experience myself in and out of the image, and to maintain and manifest dual and conflicting positions, as articulated above. This method, in which a fragment of a source-image becomes a pattern to guide my body for my own selfie-making, became known as 'The Image as a Template for Posing', which is also the title of this thesis and Chapter One as well as the key outcome of the research.

In my photographic series, *Modelling Selfies (In Paper Outfits),* which I discuss in detail in Chapter One, I re-enact the marketplace images. The backdrops depict my own home, which is carpeted, has green, grey and beige painted walls, and boxes of photographic paper and academic books can be seen. At other times they feature the space of a family member, who has a fully tiled bathroom and fitted wardrobes. I also utilise the home of a London based friend who has generous spaces, wooden floorboards, white walls and slate bathroom tiles. In the foreground of the photographs, I attempt to restage the seller's poses. Attached to my body, my normative, slim, white, cis-gendered woman's body, are paper-outfits containing the many and varied body shapes of the marketplace sellers. In the video-works, which I discuss at length in Chapter Two and Three, I use a range of backdrops. Sometimes the walls of my own home can be seen, other times I sit in front of the marketplace sellers' settings, I also use virtual backdrops and the domestic interior of a speech coach. I incorporate a variety of spaces as each marketplace image this research begins with, refers to, often co-opts, and extends out from, is set in a completely different home. The mix of body shapes, backdrops and class readings allows my artworks to not only occupy varied and conflicting positions as already noted but also present the strangeness and familiarity of the source-images.

The phrase 'The Image as a Template for Posing' nods to and is a reworking of an observation made by author Lynn Gumpert when writing about the photographs of artist

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I could photograph them, or just chat to them about their images, even though many of the women had statements on their pages stating only get in touch if it's a genuine inquiry about the sale of the clothes. Unsurprisingly, none of the sellers I contacted responded to my messages, and I didn't pursue this route for too long. I was concerned that making contact with the women, and discussing my line of inquiry with them, could change the way individuals photographed themselves. The appendix of this thesis charts the visual development of ideas, during the early stages of my research.

Cindy Sherman. In her analysis, Gumpert notes, 'pretending to be someone else provided a template for posing.'[5] Other scholarship exists that refers to the adherence of image-templates in photographic practice, such as in the writing of author and theorist of visual and material culture Annebella Pollen. Pollen uses the term 'image-template' to describe the uniformity, conformity and repetition in everyday and ubiquitous image-making. Similarly, writer and curator Ben Burbridge uses the term 'template' to describe how in our digital 'self-fashioning' we repeat images that have been presented to us through fashion, advertising and art photography. Whist art critic and art historian, Isobel Harbison, doesn't write about image-templates for posing per se, she does consider how, in the digital age, we perform images - 'those we share amongst ourselves; those we see and assimilate through mass and social media'.[6] My research draws upon and expands this knowledge through a practice-led approach, offering a new consideration of digital images. Indeed, my study proposes 'The Image as a Template for Posing', as a method for holding onto, and representing, differing positions about our ideas of self, our relations to images, and the prosumer image-circuits we operate within.

[5] Lynn Gumbert, 'Introduction', in Inverted Odysseys, ed. Shelly Rice (London: Grey Art Gallery, New York University, Museum of Contemporary Art, MIT Press, 1999), pp.ix-xi, (p.ix).
[6] Isobel Harbison, *Performing Image,* Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The MIT Press, 2019, p.1.

Research Aim

The aim of this research is to explore, through performance-for-camera video and photographic self-portraiture, the construction of selfies and how this construction shapes women's experience of their bodies and selfhoods, concentrating on the opportunities afforded by everyday and ubiquitous modes of digital image making. It focuses most specifically on a repertoire of poses that women repeat, internalise, and perform, over and over, to supposedly help transform themselves into a fantasy image for the self(ie)-representation.

The poses I perform are drawn, in the first instance, from selfie-like images distributed by women on internet selling sites (as already described). These images become occasions for my own selfie-making. In this sense I use other people's digital images as templates to fit, follow, re-perform, deconstruct, reconstruct and augment. I also follow other kinds of posing templates garnered from online and offline instructional tutorials and manuals for selfie-making. Recreating other people's images and responding to advice for improving one's image through repeated performances, enables me to behave like, and adapt to, an approximation of an idealised life. I therefore translate the everyday to learn about ubiquitous image-making practices. The resultant artworks draw a focus towards the absurdity of everyday rituals, requirements and repetitions.

As artist Jeremy Deller notes 'art is a way of staying engaged and in love with the world. It is also a form of magic, its alchemic power transforming reality, if only for a moment, making the mundane profound. It does things that are not logical and can trick us. It can be deeply absurd.'[7] Following Deller, this research enables me to engage with, take pleasure from, and magnify aspects of the world around me to closely observe the most ordinary of everyday situations. The artworks I create may also deceive the eye. In my photographic series *Modelling Selfies (In Paper Outfits)* I attach cut-outs from enlarged copies of selfie-like images sourced from online marketplaces to my own body, reenacting the duplicated photographs.[8] The results range from convincing to implausible. Absurdity is present within all my artworks through augmented and repeated actions, and in the case of my video-works

[7] Jeremy Deller, *Art is Magic*, London: Cheerio Publishing, 2023, p.5.
[8] See Chapter One.

Gestures (for the selfie) through the use and stretching of a specific set of words that are used in portrait photography to attain particular facial expressions.[9] As this thesis articulates, absurdity is important to my art practice as it offers a way of drawing attention to the ridiculousness of the situation we find ourselves in. This situation is capitalism.

My study draws a focus towards capitalism's spurious promises of transformation. It also places a spotlight on the patterns of ongoing labour that we undertake as we attempt to move towards the object of our dreams - our fantasy image - which appears tantalisingly within reach as it shimmers on the horizon.

For philosopher and cultural theorist Slavoj Žižek, capitalism is an economic system that not only makes a profit, it actively encourages and rewards greed.[10] Capitalism is, for cultural theorist Mark Fisher, a 'monstrous, infinitely plastic entity, capable of metabolising and absorbing anything with which it comes into contact.'[11] In the age of the internet, capitalism has mutated forming the digital economy.[12] This has resulted in the establishing of social media, marketplaces and other spaces for exchanging images, networking, advertising and shopping. It has also generated a monopoly of power for giant tech groups such as Amazon, Google, and Apple.[13] Users of social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and TikTok can create and receive information. For digital economy scholars Don Tapscott and Anthony D. Williams '- you could say the "consumers" are also the producers or "prosumers".'[14] Art critic and art historian Isobel Harbison writes about prosumer channels of image-circulation in her book *Performing Image*. Drawing upon the words of artist and self-proclaimed prosumer Mark Leckey, she describes the online consumptive - productive -

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[9] See Chapters Two and Three.

[10] Staff, 'Slavoj Zizek: The problem is capitalism', Truthdig, 25 April 2012 <https://www.truthdig.com/articles/slavoj-zizek-the-problem-is-capitalism> [accessed 6 July 2023].

[11] Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, Winchester UK and Washington USA: Zero Books, 2009, p.6.

[12] I nod here to Shoshana Zuboff who describes the digital economy as 'a rogue mutation of capitalism marked by a concentration of wealth.' Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism,* London: Profile Books Ltd, 2019, see page titled, 'The Definition.' For a comprehensive description of the digital economy please see Trebor Scholz, *Digital Labour,* New York: Routledge, 2013, p.35; Don Tapscott and Anthony D. Williams, *Wikinomics,* London: Atlantic Books, 2006, p.126; Don Tapscott, *The Digital Economy,* New York: McGraw-Hill Education, 1996; and Isobel Harbison, *Performing Image,* Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The MIT Press, 2019, p.96 -100.

[13] For more information on platform capitalism and digital labour please see section 'Labour' in this thesis's Contextual Review.

[14] Don Tapscott and Anthony D. Williams, *Wikinomics,* London: Atlantic Books, 2006, p.125. Please also see the Contextual Review and Chapter One of this thesis, for an overview of prosumerism.

consumptive processes as 'loops and cycles we are all in.'[15] Harbison's exploration of prosumer circuits is examined through the art practices of a number of artists, including Leckey, who, since the 1960s, have utilised and integrated performance and moving image to 'punctuate or pause circuits of image consumption and production […] evident in contemporary digital culture.'[16] Leckey's multimedia work is seemingly chosen by Harbison for its focus on transformation, that is, taking footage from one channel of consumption and placing it in another, producing something new, for a different audience, along the way. In his artworks, Leckey co-opts CCTV and amateur film footage of raves and dancehalls, the underneath of a motorway bridge, old TV adverts and figures from cartoons. In my study prosumer images, first disseminated on internet marketplaces, are transformed through their adoption and adaptation into artworks. When I upload my photographic and video works to Instagram, which I use to present my work-in-progress, they join the flow of data on social media websites. There is a further rerouting of their distribution when my artworks are published in art magazines and exhibited in art galleries, indeed they enter the artworld's consumptive circuits. With each shift of context, the image's status changes, and so does the audience's positionality to each new image iteration. On internet selling sites the image's purpose is to sell clothing, through them potential buyers can understand what the clothes look like, on or off the body. In my study, as in art magazines and galleries, they become objects of intellectual scrutiny for an art and academic audience. On social media they are viewed by a myriad of people, including my family and friends, friends of friends, fellow artists, arts professionals, people I attended school, college and university with, and others that I am aware and unaware of.[17] I am, like Leckey and Harbison, interested in transformation and the deliberate diverting of prosumer channels of image circulation; however, my rerouting is to examine some of what is at stake in prosumer selfie image-making practices.

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[15] Isobel Harbison, *Performing Image,* Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The MIT Press, 2019, p.12.

[16] Ibid, p.1.

[17] Throughout my studies I have placed my work-in-progress on Instagram. I came to realise how open to misinterpretation the work could become, when someone I went to school with, who I haven't seen since school, who lives in the same village as me, liked a post of mine very quickly after I uploaded it. It's likely they didn't engage with the long descriptive accompanying text, as such they perhaps do not realise my selfies are artworks and are being created as part of a research project.

The relationship between the offline and the online is central to my own inquiry. As a prosumer, I slip between two-dimensional and three-dimensional spheres. My body is pushed and pulled towards and away from screens hosting applications that, like portals, link to platforms that contain images, information and networks. This research is conceived at the interface of the screen, my iPhone, iPad and MacBook Pro, where offline meets online and the connection is sometimes unstable. It is the blending of the material and virtual, the ephemeral and tangible, along with the frozen moments, tears and disruptions, that opens up the space for me to question the self as physical and digital - or to borrow a term, 'phygital'.[18]

In offline spaces we pose for our selfies, with a few taps of the smartphone screen, our representations can be disseminated online. Like artist and writer Karen Ann Donnachie, my study positions the selfie as a new kind of photographic self-portrait. As Donnachie writes, 'the selfie consistently emerges as a contemporary manifestation, a discrete entity and/or activity, through its composition, technique, networked distribution, consumption and sheer ubiquity, it cannot be simply reduced to a digital remediation of the self-portrait.'[19] Cultural theorist Rosalind Gill has argued that looking at, and responding to, representations on screens has heightened levels of visibility 'intensifying and extensifying' a 'beauty industrial complex' - a process that, as Gill articulates, involves exploiting women's anxieties.[20] For Gill this renders the body as 'something to be worked on, and something which is thought to be our own individual capital.'[21] What Gill is describing here is the gendered neoliberal or postfeminist imperative for women to be accountable for the aesthetic configuration of their own bodies.

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[18] I adopt the term 'phygital' from the digital production company 'phygital' who can be found at <https://phygital.co.uk/> [accessed 30 September 2023] and also from the article Paul Prior, 'Council post: Phygital - what is it and why should I care?' *Forbes*, 30 June 2021 <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesbusinesscouncil/2021/06/30/phygital---what-is-it-and-why-should-i-care/> [accessed: 30 September 2023]. In my adoption I take 'phygital' as a portmanteau of the terms 'physical 'and 'digital', and to mean the space or interface where the physical meets the digital and is experienced as a blend or amalgamation of the two states.

[19] Karen Ann Donnachie, *Selfies, #me: Glimpses of Authenticity in the Narcissus' Pool of the Networked Amateur Self-Portrait,* 2015 <http://sakkyndig.com/psykologi/artvit/donnachie2015.pdf> [accessed 6 July 2023], p.3.

[20] I paraphrase Rosalind Gill here. In an interview with Ian Sinclair she uses the phrase, 'extensifying and intensifying a beauty industrial complex', she clarifies her use of these words when she says, 'because what is striking is how beauty pressures are also spreading out – across new domains.' For more please see: Ian Sinclair, 'Aesthetic labour, Beauty politics and neoliberalism: An interview with Rosalind Gill', *openDemocracy*, 24 July 2017 <https://neweconomics.opendemocracy.net/aesthetic-labour-beauty-politics-neoliberalism-interview-rosalind-gill/> [accessed 27 June 2023].

[21] Ibid.

This research project illuminates the neoliberal preoccupation with shaping one's fantasy-image, for the photographic image. Applying Isobel Harbison's words to my own study, my work 'draws out our strange relationships with images, our instincts to perform and capture' bringing into focus our dedication to get closer to, emulate and become the image.[22] Becoming an image, or in Harbison's terms, 'Performing Image' is an involved process. As this research articulates, it requires a sustained amount of effort. The purpose of this study is to participate in, and learn about, the ongoing labour of everyday and ubiquitous self(ie)-making practices, with a focus on its performances and patterns as well as its body/image and online/offline entanglements, in the pursuit of creating one's representation/selfhood in alignment with ever-shifting appearance norms.

[22] Isobel Harbison, *Performing Image,* Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The MIT Press, 2019, p.3.

Research Questions

What does it mean for the offline and material body to be thought of as not separate to, but in close relation and entangled with, the online image?

How might an understanding of image-templates, through a practice of dressing as image or practising and performing facial gestures, contribute to contemporary thinking about prosumer 'self-portraiture' at the intersections of subjectivity, gender studies and performativity?

Additionally, I ask, what work is done by women for the self(ie)-image?

Methods and Methodology of Practice

This section outlines the key methodological approaches used within this research project as demonstrated within the body of practice and written thesis. These methods will be explored further in the Contextual Review and throughout the chapters.

'The Image as a Template for Posing' method, involves downloading images from an internet marketplace, enlarging to life-size and printing, before cutting out the clothing from the seller's bodies, and attaching them, one flat 2D form at a time, to my skin. I then attempt to fit my body into the image-construction. The cut-out and the original image provide a template to follow when I reenact the original image. I also follow other kinds of posing templates, both visual and verbal, for creating desirable poses for the self(ie)-image. As noted earlier in the Introduction, the template method allows me to hold, and my artworks to manifest, dual positions that conflict with one another.

My research is embodied research. Simply put, my research involves my body: my flesh, my gestures, my mouth, my voice, my smartphone, and sometimes my domestic arena.[23] This research project is the result of my relations to others: to people, to paper, to photographs, to the phygital and to prosumer activity. For scholars of reflexivity in research Paaige K. Turner and Kristen M. Norwood the embodied experience of research is the feel, sight, and sound of it.[24] Indeed, my research is the product of my touching, smelling, hearing, orating and seeing.

According to scholar of drama, theatre and performance, Ben Spatz, by creating work that focuses on the body as a site of performance, learning and discovery, researchers contribute to a broad question originally posed by 17th century philosopher Baruch Spinoza, which simply

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[23] In her PhD thesis as website, artist and researcher Helen Benigson writes, 'My research is my body – my mouth, my speculum over there, my stomach, my voice, my hair, my wifi extender, my knots, my sweat, my vulva, my continual checking, my tongue, my babies, my ultrasound, my dirt, my baby, my phone, my birth plan, my sweat, my heart, my kosher sausages, my epigenes, my bathroom, my anxiety, my maddening erupting cycle. My research tracks my fertility, my pregnancy, my birth and my post birth and could do it all over again.' The framing of this part of my text is a response to Benigson's writing on embodiment. Benigson's writing can be found at: Helen Benigson, 'Scroll', *FATTENED / FLATTENED TONGUE TIES: Performing Maternality Online and Offline*, 2019 <https://www.fattened.net/scroll> [accessed: 5 October 2023]. In my statement I follow Helen Benigson's phrasing and articulation of embodied research, adapting her words to my own experience.

[24] Paaige K. Turner and Kristen Norwood, 'Body of Research: Impetus, Instrument, and Impediment.' *Qualitative Inquiry*, 19(9), (2013), pp. 696-711, (p.696), doi:10.1177/1077800413500928.

asks: "what can a body do?"[25] Isobel Harbison also cites Spinoza, when she writes, 'nobody as yet has determined the limits of the body's capabilities: that is, nobody has yet learned from experience what the body can and cannot do.'[26] My research looks at what the body can do for the selfie-image - how it can be shaped into an image, by the image, for the image. Like the selfie-makers this research begins with, I use my own body to create self-representations. Following artist Andrea Fraser 'it is important for me as an artist, since the work is under my name, to be putting myself at stake - my body, not someone else.'[27] Yet, this work doesn't constitute a solely personal account, indeed I use myself as a mirror. As such my research aligns with autoethnographic methods. As performance studies scholar Ronald J. Pelias notes, '[this approach] lets you use yourself to get to culture.'[28] Or as Sarah Wall states 'write in a highly personalised style, drawing on […] experience to extend understanding on a societal phenomenon.'[29] Thereby, I use my personal encounters to gain an embodied understanding of image/body, offline/online, consumptive/productive relations in the digital age.

Making work around my subjective experiences of trying out and trying on, trying to fit, and trying to fit in with, contemporary and everyday modes of digital image-making, involves the adaptation of my body. Rote learning, which includes mimesis, practice, repetition, reenactment, performing image and image-appropriation, are utilised as methods for moulding my body into poses and facial expressions. In *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis* Jacques Lacan notes, 'the effects of mimicry is camouflage' he also notes 'to imitate is to produce an image.'[30] Mimicry for me is an aspiration to be assimilated into an image, for the next image. For feminist, philosopher, linguist, psychoanalyst and cultural theorist Luce Irigaray 'you mime whatever comes near you. You become whatever you touch.'[31] Mimesis in Irigaray's terms is to connect and replicate in order to call into question.

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[25] Ben Spatz, *What a Body can Do: Technique as Knowledge, Practice as Research,* Abingdon: Routledge, 2015, p.1.
[26] Ibid, p.18.
[27] Andrea Fraser, 'Group Dynamics', interview with Morgan Falconer, *Art Monthly,* no. 464, (March 2023), pp.1-4, (p.3).
[28] Ronald J. Pelias, 'The Academic Tourist: An Autoethnography', *Qualitative Inquiry*, 9(3), (2003), pp.369-373, (p.372), doi:10.1177/1077800403251759.
[29] Sarah Wall, 'An Autoethnography on Learning About Autoethnography', *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *5*(2), (2006), pp.146–160 (p.146), doi:10.1177/160940690600500205.
[30] Jacques Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis,* Middlesex England: Penguin Books, 1977 [orig. 1973], p.99 -100.
[31] Luce Irigaray, 'When Our Lips Speak Together'*, Signs, 6*(1), (1980), pp.69–79, (p.120) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3173966> [accessed 28 October 2023].

This strikes to the heart of my use of mimicry. I make contact with, and emulate, familiar feminine poses, to draw a focus towards, and probe, repeated patterns and norms.

As with the artists Isobel Harbison discusses, I combine performance and moving image to explore prosumer image choreographies, spotlighting, as Harbison puts it, 'our changing relations with images since the advent of smartphones and the spread of online prosumerism.'[32] In my artworks I respond to what Harbison describes as 'a new generalised social condition of living and performing, "under the image".[33] That is, I use my body to perform 'images in circulation' i.e. digital images that depict women posing in front of mirrors and screens, while digital tools - my smartphone, tablet or laptop and internet access – 'mobilise [the] images' I produce and consume.[34] Performing Image - always capitalised for Harbison - as a working method enables me to explore the image performances of prosumer self(ie)-portraiture. It also allows me to make "contact"[35] with the image, and 'encounter […] images, [as] differently dimensioned versions of [myself] interacting with others' different dimensions.'[36] Therefore, Performing Image is a method for analysing image/body relationships in the digital age, and a means of teasing out the labour involved in creating particular images/selves for online distribution.

In the photographic series *Modelling Selfies in Paper Outfits,* I reenact images of women captured in a process of selfie-making and I appropriate the very same images that I reenact. In my reenactments and other image-performances, I re-play and re-do in order to translate and create alternatives to an original. My inability to precisely replicate what has gone before, is partly down to my unruly body - I fail to hold shape, mispronounce words and often appear in excess. In her 1993 book *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, Peggy Phelan notes, 'representation follows two laws: it always conveys more than it intends; and it is never

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[32] Isobel Harbison, *Performing Image,* Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The MIT Press, 2019, see the front inside wrap of the dust jacket.
[33] Ibid, p.15. Harbison in her writing articulates that she is extending Hardt and Negri's concerns about the social pressures of living under capitalism in light of new communication systems. See Michael Hardt and Anthony Negri, *Multitude*: *War and Democracy in the Age of the Empire*. New York: Penguin, 2004, p.260-264.
[34] Harbison uses these phrases in Isobel Harbison, 'What the Instagram Age Learned from Robert Rauschenberg's Choreographic Pieces: Performed Images in Contemporary Art and Everyday Life', *Frieze,* issue 206, 24 September 2019 <https://www.frieze.com/article/what-instagram-age-learned-robert-rauschenbergs-choreographic-pieces> [accessed 23 January 2024].
[35] Isobel Harbison, *Performing Image,* Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The MIT Press, 2019, see Chapter Two which centres on a discussion of Robert Rauschenberg and how images make contact with him, impacting his 'senses, comportment and movement', p.39.
[36] Ibid, p.15.

totalising. The "excess" meaning conveyed by representation creates a supplement that makes multiple and resistant readings possible.'[37] Excess for me can appear as exaggeration, notably through overemphasised facial gestures or postures, which in turn produces humour. This comical aspect of my work is an 'irrational force which cannot be anticipated' - to draw upon the words of journalist Stefan Kanfer in his writing about comedy.[38] Indeed, I do not claim to be intentionally funny; I do not have complete control of how I deploy humour. Rather, humour is the product of the way I experience, interact with, and perceive the world. As I note in the Research Aims section above, I see the increasingly neoliberal capitalist world as absurd. In the words of artist Martin Creed, 'comedians seem to look for the absurd and ridiculous, for things that are silly, in the same way that artists do.'[39] Artists, like Creed, whose work can be very funny, as well as uneasy, recognise and share humour's potential for provocation, for challenging the status quo. Similarly, in her writing on the politics of parody or parodic repetition feminist theorist Rosi Braidotti notes how humour can trouble norms and point to the ridiculousness of being-in-the-world, often arriving at an uncomfortable place.[40] In this way, humour can be understood as a feminist strategy, that enables me to draw attention to, and disrupt, expectations put upon women, internalised by women, and perpetuated by women, in the pursuit of creating and maintaining certain images.

My research involves me, or rather various incarnations of me. My self-portraiture can be understood as a tool for exploring the performative aspects of the self. I work my body in relation to other people's representations, or images that women are advised to create. By referring to, and extending the work of others, the boundaries between me and my subject becomes unclear. I find myself mirroring, transitioning into and entangled with another body: a paper body, an image. This is a generative process, as ideas, questions and knowledge emerge through my body/image interactions.

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[37] Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance.* New York: Routledge, 1993, p.2.

[38] Stefan Kanfer, *Ball of Fire: The Tumultuous Life and Comic Art of Lucille Ball*. London: Faber and Faber, 2003 p.306-7.

[39] Martin Creed: 'I try to be true and honest. The truth is often ridiculous', *Independent,* 1 November 2008 <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/features/martin-creed-i-try-to-be-true-and-honest-the-truth-is-often-ridiculous-981769.html> [accessed 28 November 2020].

[40] Rosi Braidotti uses the phrase 'politics of parody or parodic repetition' which she also refers to as 'the philosophy of 'as if', in, 'Cyberfeminism with a Difference', in *Feminisms*, ed. Sandra Kemp and Judith Squires, (Oxford and New York: Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp.347-357, (p.353). Braidotti, drawing on Judith Butler and Luce Irigaray, argues that the practice of parody, that is successive repetitions and mimetic strategies, enable feminist agency, that is a subversion and critique of socially enforced expectations put upon women.

Contextual Review

This review provides a survey of literature and art practices that together draws a focus on contemporary photography, performance studies and labour to establish the critical framework used within my research. In this review I provide an overview of the relevant fields of inquiry, evaluating their usefulness in supporting my arguments or research more holistically. I also identify the gaps in literature and practice that my own research project addresses.

1.1 Contemporary Photography

As this thesis is concerned with everyday and ubiquitous image-making practices now photography has expanded, it is necessary to be aware of accounts of the medium in light of its shift to the algorithmic.

For Fred Ritchin and for Edgar Gómez Cruz and Eric T. Meyer alike, algorithmic photography can be considered as distanced from conventional photography because of its hybrid, interactive and networked nature.[41] By Daniel Rubinstein and Katrina Sluis's account, digital photography 'creates shifts in the ways bodies are imagined and perceived.'[42] Mindful of this entanglement of technology and people, Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylinska call for a rethinking of life through 'mediation'. For them 'mediation becomes a key trope for understanding and articulating being in, and becoming with, the technological world.'[43] Victor Burgin, who Joanna Zylinska also quotes, believes 'the most revolutionary event in the recent history of photography is not the arrival of digital cameras as such, but rather the broadband connection of these cameras to the internet.'[44] Photography in its digital form has, for Kamila Kuc and Joanna Zylinska, moved beyond an embalmed version of the past, as

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[41] Edgar Gómez Cruz and Eric T. Meyer, 'Creation and Control in the Photographic Process: iPhones and the Emerging Fifth Moment of Photography', *Photographies.* 5(2), (2012), pp. 203-22, (p.206), doi:10.1080/17540763.2012.702123; and Fred Ritchin, *After Photography,* New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010, p.70.

[42] Daniel Rubinstein and Katrina Sluis, 'A Life More Photographic; Mapping the Networked Image' in *Photographies*. 1:1, pp. 9-28, (p.9), (2008), doi:10.1080/17540760701785842.

[43] Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylinska, *Life After New Media: Mediation as a Vital Process,* Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2012, p.xv.

[44] Victor Burgin, 'Mutating Photography', in *Mutations: Perspectives on Photography*, ed. Chantal Pontbriand and Julien Frydman (Steidl, 2011), pp.143-145, (p.144).

Andre Bazin and Roland Barthes conceptualised it, to also include the present.[45] As Mette Sandebye notes, 'new digital practices on the Internet show 'what-is-going on', i.e., *presence.*[46] José Van Dijck argues there is less interest now in sharing photographs as objects than sharing them as experiences. Nathan Jurgenson compounds this when he writes 'the social photo encourages experience.'[47] Mark Lubell sees the social exchange of photographs online as bringing image-making and language closer together.[48] This is perhaps most evident on social media, where digital images created on camera-phones, show what we are up to, and who we are doing it with. With the emergence of camera-phones and their connection to internet platforms, the selfie has firmly established itself as a mode of self-presentation for a myriad of uses online.

Katrin Tiidenberg and Edgar Gómez Cruz suggest that a selfie is 'a self-portrait made in a reflective object or from arm's length.'[49] They also note that the term 'selfie' was selected as the word of the year by Oxford English Dictionary (OED) in 2013. The OED defines the selfie as, 'a photograph that one has taken of oneself, *esp.* one taken with a smartphone or webcam and shared via social media.'[50] For Alise Tifentale it's the selfie's networked nature that makes it so significantly different from its earlier photographic precursors.[51] Maarika Lüders et al in their writing on what they call 'emerging personal media genres' state that there is a perception that the selfie is easy to produce.[52] According to Jill Walker Rettberg, Aslaug Veum and Linda Moland Undrum the selfie is shaping how we see and construct

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[45] Kamila Kuc and Joanna Zylinska, *Photomediations: A Reader,* London: Open Humanities Press, 2016, p.13. For a discussion of photography as a means to preserve the past please see: Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, New York: Hill and Wang, 1981; and Andre Bazin, 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image', *Film Quarterly,* 13, no. 4 (Summer 1960).

[46] Mette Sandebye, 'It has Not Been – It Is. The Signaletic Transformation of Photography', in *Photomediations: A Reader,* ed. Kamila Kuc and Joanna Zylinska (Open Humanities Press, 2016). p.96.

[47] Nathan Jurgenson, *The Social Photo: On Photography and Social Media,* London & New York: Verso Books, 2019, p.38.

[48] Mark Lubell, 'Foreword', in *Public Private, Secret On Photography & the Configuration of Self,* ed. Charlotte Cotton (Aperture, 2018), p.6.

[49] Katrin Tiidenberg and Edgar Gómez Cruz, 'Selfies, Image and the Re-making of the Body', *Body & Society*, 21(4), (2015) pp.77-102, (p.78), doi:10.1177/1357034X15592465.

[50] 'Selfie', *The Oxford English Dictionary,* 2023 <https://www.oed.com/dictionary/selfie_n> [accessed 26 September 2023].

[51] Alise Tifentale, 'The selfie: Making sense of the "masturbation of self-image" and the "virtual mini-me"' (essay, *The Graduate Center, The City University of New York, 2014)* <https://d25rsf93iwlmgu.cloudfront.net/downloads/Tifentale_Alise_Selfiecity.pdf> [accessed 31 October 2023], p.3.

[52] Maarika Lüders, Lin Prøitz and Terje Rasmussen, 'Emerging personal media genres', *New Media & Society*, 12(6), (2010), pp.947-963, doi:10.1177/1416444809352203, p.959.

ourselves.[53] In the writings of Edgar Gómez Cruz and Cristina Miguel as well as Katrin Tiidenberg the selfie is articulated as being used, by some, to present the body as agentic and sexual.[54] Gomez-Cruz and Tiidenberg contend that selfies can be used as expressions of authenticity and reflexivity.[55] By Jodi Dean's account selfies are for communicating and are created as part of a mass communal practice.[56] For Amparo Lasén and Edgar Gómez Cruz selfies have shifted our understanding of privacy.[57] In Anne Jerslev's conceptualisation selfies have changed temporality through their dissemination on social networking platforms and video-sharing sites.[58] They have been employed, according to Alice E. Marwick to achieve 'micro-celebrity' i.e. a 'semi-professional selfie-producer, for whom taking selfies is a purposively commercial, thoughtful, and subversive endeavour' that generates financial return.[59] These vloggers for Tobias Raun claim a self-commodified identity with an intimate and self-confessional feel.[60] Some selfie scholars, such as Hille Koskela and Dawn Woolley argue that selfies allow women to take control of their representations, thus gaining agency and power.[61] In contrast, Anne Burns analyses the online discussion of women's selfies to

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[53] Jill Walker Rettberg *Seeing Ourselves Through Technology How We Use Selfies, Blogs and Wearable Devices to See and Shape Ourselves,* Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2014; and Aslaug Veum and Linda Moland Undrum, 'The Selfie as a Global Discourse', *Discourse & Society*, 29(1), (2018), pp.86 -103, doi: 10.1177/0957926517725979.

[54] Edgar Gómez Cruz and Cristina Miguel, 'I'm Doing This Right Now and It's for You. The Role of Images in Sexual Ambient Intimacy', in *Mobile Media Making in an Age of Smartphones,* ed. Marsha Berry and Max Schleser (New York: Palgrave Pivot, 2014), pp.139-147; and Katrin Tiidenberg, 'Bringing sexy back: Reclaiming the body aesthetic via self-shooting', *Cyberpsychology: Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace,* 8(1), article 3, (2014) <https://cyberpsychology.eu/article/view/4295/3342> [accessed 13 April 2021].

[55] Katrin Tiidenberg and Edgar Gómez Cruz, 'Selfies, Image and the Re-making of the Body', *Body & Society,* 21(4), (2015) pp. 77-102, (p.78), doi:10.1177/1357034X15592465.

[56] I paraphrase Jodi Dean here, her actual words on this are utilised in Chapter Two, for more also see: Jodi Dean, 'Images without Viewers: Selfie Communism', *Fotomuseum Winterthur*, February 2016 <https://www.fotomuseum.ch/en/2016/02/01/images-without-viewers-selfie-communism-2/> [accessed 24 January 2024].

[57] Amparo Lasén and Edgar Gómez Cruz, 'Digital photography and picture sharing: Redefining the public/private divide', *Knowledge, Technology & Policy,* 22(3), (2009), pp.205–215, doi:10.1007/s12130-009-9086-8.

[58] Anne Jerslev, 'In the Time of the Microcelebrity: Celebrification and the YouTuber Zoella', *International Journal of Communication,* 10, (2016), pp.5233-5251 <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/269279748.pdf> [accessed September 2023].

[59] Alice E. Marwick, 'Instafame: Luxury Selfies in the Attention Economy', *Public Culture,* 27,1, (75), (2015), pp.137-160, doi:10.1215/08992363-2798379.; and Crystal Abidin, '#In$tagLam: Instagram as a Repository of Taste, a Burgeoning Marketplace, a War of Eyeballs', in *Mobile Media Making in an Age of Smartphones*, ed. Marsha Berry and Max Schleser (Palgrave Pivot, 2014), pp.119 -128, (p.119).

[60] Tobias Raun, 'Capitalising Intimacy: New Subcultural Forms of Micro-Celebrity Strategies and Affective Labour on YouTube Convergence', *The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, 24(1), (2018), p.99-113, doi:10.1177/13548565177369.

[61] Hille Koskela, 'Webcams, TV shows and mobile phones: Empowering exhibitionism', *Surveillance & Society,* 2(2–3), (2004), pp.199–215, doi:10.24908/ss.v2i2/3.3374; and Dawn Woolley, 'The Iconography

demonstrate how popular criticism characterises online forms of gender violence, in which the humiliation of women becomes a form of entertainment.[62]

The selfie, with its various readings and potentials has become a site of investigation for a number of artists. Amalia Ulman, in her 2014 Instagram performance titled *Excellences & Perfections* presented herself, through soft focused and muted in tone selfies, as participating in online trends and undergoing cosmetic surgery. In her book *Glitch Feminism*, Legacy Russell critiqued Ulman's artworks as 'an unfortunate flaunting of privilege, haunted by a sort of socioeconomic "passing" that went unquestioned.'[63] Whilst Ulman's work, by Russell's account, did little to disrupt the status quo, photographer Hayley Morris-Cafiero in her 2019 series *The Bully Pulpit* takes on cyber bullies. In some of her photographic self-portraits she utilises the aesthetic of the selfie to restage herself as the online bully, who sent her hateful and targeted messages about her body; she incorporates their words into her photographs. Whilst Amalia Soto, also known as Molly Soda, published nude selfies that lay unsent, as messages, on her phone, to explore notions of intimacy, vulnerability and idealised feminine norms.

This growing field of scholarship and art practice, concerned with the algorithmic image more broadly, and selfies more specifically, provides a useful resource for understanding the ontological status of digital photography, and for documenting the social function of everyday image-making practices in relation to social media sites and communities. My research contributes to and expands this knowledge through a practice-led approach, it also addresses a specific gap. Indeed, what sets this study apart from other considerations of digital image-making, is that I, through my own embodiment, follow and disrupt 'image-templates' created from selfie-like images drawn from internet selling sites, a selfie-making manual and online tutorials for creating selfie-gestures.

As mentioned at the start of this thesis, literature exists that makes reference to the adherence of 'image-templates' in photographic practice, such as in the writing of Annebella Pollen and

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of Disruptive Bodies: Social Media and Medical Identities', in *Bodies in Flux*, ed. Hanan Muzaffar and Barbara Braid (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2019), pp.9-35.

[62] Anne Burns, 'Self(ie)-discipline: Social regulation as enacted through the discussion of photographic practice', *International Journal of Communication*, 9, (2015), pp.1716-1733, ISSN 1932-8036.

[63] Legacy Russell, *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto,* London and New York: Verso, 2020, p.105.

Ben Burbridge. In my thesis, I use Pollen's phrase 'image-template', to mean a pattern to repeat and follow.[64] Pollen in her scholarship writes with a focus on everyday mass photographic practices and analyses the artwork of Penelope Umbrico, who reuses other people's photographs to explore the continual production and consumption of digital images, spotlighting how similar photographs are repeated, uploaded and categorised online. Similarly, taking my cue from writer and curator Ben Burbridge, I use the term 'template' within my research to likewise mean a model, standard or prototype, that is, according to Burbridge, 'peddled across an image world.'[65] Whilst not discussing 'templates' specifically, but writing with a focus on recurrence, Daniel Rubenstein's conceptualisation of photographic repetition enables me to suggest that doing the same thing again will not necessarily produce identical results.[66] As I established earlier in the Background to the Research section, my study offers a new consideration to the field, by proposing the practice-led process and concept of 'The Image as a Template for Posing'.

'The Image as a Template for Posing' involves re-performing the image, for the next image, utilising a specific body of prosumer images sourced from online marketplaces, which I make analogue, repeat bodily, before returning to the digital in a compromised state, and as a new model for being. As I articulate in Chapter One, my working approach is inspired by Sadie Murdoch's 2015 artwork *Rrosebushwheels 2.* In this photograph Murdoch attaches to her body - which is painted shades of grey and positioned within a studio - a number of duplicated and appropriated images of women originally created during the modernist era, whilst holding a pose that seemingly refers to a photograph titled *Self-portrait as a Dancer* by

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[64] Annebella Pollen, 'When is Cliché not a cliché?', in *Photography Reframed*, ed. Ben Burbridge and Annebella Pollen (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2018), pp.74-81, (p.79).

[65] In his book *Photography After Capitalism,* Ben Burbridge, writes 'the regimes of advertising and the templates peddled across an image world replace the factory and state institutions as sites of dominant power.' His discussion is concerned with the figure of the teenage girl as a worker, whose labour is to look a certain way, and whose body is perceived as a commodity. See: Ben Burbridge, *Photography After Capitalism,* London: Goldsmiths Press, 2020, p.29. In the book *Photography Reframed*, Ben Burbridge, discussing the work of Nan Goldin, writes, 'the template provided by her work has the potential to operate in both directions: out towards the 'heroin chic' and prototype hipsterdom of the 1990s, but also in towards the lives of the people she represents, not least her own.' Please see: Ben Burbridge, 'Paradise Lost', in *Photography Reframed*, ed. Ben Burbridge and Annebella Pollen (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2018), pp.116-133, (p.127).

[66] Daniel Rubinstein, 'Photography as the Aesthetic Determination of Difference' (doctoral thesis, Birmingham City University, 2013) <https://ualresearchonline.arts.ac.uk/id/eprint/9493/1/590570.pdf> [accessed 26 March 2024].

Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, taken in 1920. In my artworks, rather than attaching multiple images to my body, and reenacting a photograph in a studio-space, I use part of a photograph made by another and re-create a version of the image I appropriate, in front of a mirror, in a domestic space. I do this repeatedly, with numerous different photographs, made by others. This way someone else's image, or more specifically a photograph of an item of clothing printed on inkjet paper still holding the body shapes of others, conceals part of my own body, and the domestic setting I position myself in, replaces the interiors and possessions featured in the source imagery. As previously noted, the resultant images are strange and articulate conflicting messages about my ideas of self, my relations to the marketplace-selfie-like images, and the on-and offline consumption and production loops we are part of.

My aim is not to add to a lineage of contemporary artists that includes Penelope Umbrico, Erik Kessels or Joachim Schmid who represent, in artists books and exhibitions, today's mass photographic activity. These artists, like me, draw upon photographs made by others, to explore image-templates. They spotlight the recycling of certain visual references in mass photographic practice – sunsets, airline meals and so on. Unlike me, they reproduce other people's images with little or no adaptation, as such I do not draw upon them in my own study. Neither do I align my practice with Richard Prince whose series *New Portraits* takes images from Instagram, adds comments to them, before enlarging and displaying them in a gallery context, to seemingly test the limits of 'Fair Use' within U.S. copyright law. Nor am I exploring the pixelated limits of the algorithmic image, as in the work of Thomas Ruff, who takes internet files and displays them in epic proportion. Unlike these artists I explore image-appropriation though my own embodiment, inhabiting physically, other people's images. My approach to image-appropriation is two-fold: it developed through an urge to feel connected with, and get closer to, another form; and it provides a template for posing for the next image.

This research follows Rebecca Coleman's conviction that 'bodies become known, understood and lived through their relations with images.'[67] I likewise find alignment with Steven Shaviro's formulation that 'images have an excessive capacity to seduce and mislead, to

[67] Rebecca Coleman, *The Becoming of Bodies Girls, Images, Experience,* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009, p.3.

affect the spectator unwarrantedly.'[68] My body is easily influenced and affected by its relations to images - and other things. This thesis is evidence of this fact. My research is led by my affective encounters with images and my impulses to repeat what I come into contact with.

There are a number of theorists who provide a useful resource for surveying the touching, affective and 'signaletic' capacity of images, such as Margaret Olin, Bodil Marie Stavning Thomsen and Mike Featherstone.[69] These perspectives provide useful insights but are not drawn upon in my writing, which is concerned with how bodies yield to, experience and become entangled with images, in the internet age. In Chapter One, I look towards Laura U. Marks' notion of 'haptic visuality'. Marks, in her writing on film, is concerned with the affects of screen-based images upon those looking and interacting with the surface. She writes in her 2002 book *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*: 'Haptic images do not invite identification with a figure so much as they encourage a bodily relationship between the viewer and the image. Thus, it is less appropriate to speak of the object of a haptic look than to speak of a dynamic subjectivity between looker and image.'[70] Marks really strikes to the heart of my experience of responding to image-templates, her theory of haptic visuality helps me comprehend the perceived sensation of contact with the image.

1.2 Performance Studies

As this study involves me, the artist, performing for the camera to create video and photographic self-portraits, and as I consider these portraits to be less about representing my likeness, and much more about exposing the performative aspects of the self as connected to, and entangled with, other bodies: fleshy and physical; flat and photographic, it is important

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[68] Steven Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body,* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota press, 1993, p.167.

[69] Margaret Olin, *Touching Photographs,* Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2012; Bodil Marie Stavning Thomsen, 'Signaletic, Haptic and Real-time Material', *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture*, 4(1), (2012), doi:10.3402/jac.v4i0.18148; Mike Featherstone, 'Body Image/Body without Image', *Theory Culture & Society,* 23 (2-3), (2006), pp.233 -236, doi:10.1177/02632764060230; and Mike Featherstone, 'Body Image and Affect in Consumer Culture', *Body & Society,* 16 (1), (2010), pp.193-221, doi:10.1177/1357034X09354357.

[70] Laura U. Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media,* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002, p.3.

that I align with scholarship and practice that likewise conceives the self, in the representation, as performative. Therefore, I take up Amelia Jones' concept of 'self/image' as set out in her book of the same title. Artist and writer Ignaz Cassar says in his review of Jones's book, the forward-slash sitting between the "self" and the "image" in Jones's title, simultaneously separates and binds the two words – it is the "and/or" of the slash that entwines the image and the self.[71] He goes on to write, 'the slash might also come to represent the paradox that inevitably manifests itself in our ongoing attempts to image ourselves and to give our bodily, desiring selves ultimate shape in the form of images.'[72] By drawing attention to the "and/or" between the "self" and "image" Jones discloses the self as performative. Jones, in her own words, 'focuses on artists' uses of technologies of representation from analogue photography to digital media to render or enact the subject through visual means.'[73] Thereby, her writing looks at how technology is deployed by artists to explore and express new and shifting modes of subjectivity.

Throughout this thesis I use self/image and self-portraiture, along with self(ie)-portrait, self(ie)-representation, self(ie)-image and self-imaging, to describe one's self-representation, projected image, and performative identity, this may be physical, digital or imagined.[74]

In my study I use the digital tools of prosumers. In the photographic series *Modelling Selfies (In Paper Outfits)* I emphasise myself as a camera operator and subject, to explore the conventions by which the selfie is made. In *Modelling Selfies* and in the video works *Gestures (for the Selfie)*, I spotlight what scholar Eve Forrest calls the 'active process' of photography, which for her, and me alike, is the 'rehearsing of poses, thinking about composition, retaking

[71] Ignaz Cassar, 'Self/Image: Technology, Representation, and the Contemporary Subject: Amelia Jones', *Photography & Culture,* 2(1), (2009), pp.103-106, doi:10.2752/175145209X419453.
[72] Ibid, p.104.
[73] Amelia Jones, *Self/Image,* New York: Routledge, 2006, p.xiii.
[74] I take my cue here from fellow artist-researcher Kim Connerton who in her 2015 thesis *Exposure: Self-Portraiture, Performance, Self-inquiry* likewise interchanges self-portraiture with self/image to draw a focus towards performative selves. See: Kim Connerton, 'Exposure: Self-Portraiture, Performance, Self-inquiry', (doctoral thesis, Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney, 2015) <https://www.academia.edu/18469691/Exposure_Self_Portraiture_Performativity_Self_Inquiry> [accessed 30 March 2024], p.17.

the same image over and over again.'[75] This bodily self-fashioning, as my research demonstrates, is tethered to the transformational logic of neoliberal capitalism. Within this economic system, author Tara Isabella Burton argues, 'we can and indeed must, transform ourselves into the hottest commodities.'[76] She goes on, 'we are simultaneously free to reimagine ourselves as who we want to be and constrained by an economy that demands this constant reimagining.'[77] By cultural studies scholar Donald E. Hall's account, 'we live in an era in which we are commonly asked to rethink, express and explain our identities [we are] encouraged to test out different forms of self-expression by purchasing an expensive car, entering a weight-loss programme, or trying a new hair colour.'[78] Prosumer images therefore become vehicles for recording and sharing our lifestyle choices as self-expression. As writer and curator Ben Burbridge explains, 'as "prosumers" we […] reproduce lifestyle as image [...] "I" has become a commodity we spend most of our lives producing.'[79] Online, our selfies present different combinations of our experiences to build a narrative of our lives. This, for interdisciplinary researcher David A. Banks is why selfies are called selfies, as he writes 'selfies [...] are aptly named because just about every part of the photo contributes to the story of the self.'[80] Yet, in writer and curator of photography Susan Bright's formulation the self, in photographic self-portraiture 'splits, merges, fractures and becomes so performed and so constructed that nothing authentic remains.'[81] Following Bright's definition, this research considers the construction of identity as an unstable fictional assemblage that is continually worked on, and never fully realised or known. My thesis draws upon artworks by Cindy Sherman, Claude Cahun, Eisa Jocson, Gillian Wearing, Harold Offeh, 單Sin 慧Wai 乾Kin and Rachel Maclean who, in their for-camera performances, adopt personas, shapeshift and shape hold, and in this way, refer to, and explore, the multiplicity and plasticity of self. I also

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[75] Eve Forrest, 'Modelling Selfies', *Source Thinking Through Photography,* Autumn Issue #112, (October 2023), pp.50-60, (p.51), ISSN 1369-2224.
[76] Tara Isabella Burton, *Self-Made,* London: Sceptre, 2023, p.206.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Donald E. Hall, *Subjectivity,* New York and London: Routledge, 2004, p.1.
[79] Ben Burbridge, 'Photography in the Age of Communication Capitalism', in *Public Private, Secret On Photography & the Configuration of Self,* ed. Charlotte Cotton, (New York: Aperture, 2018), pp.52-55, (p.52).
[80] David A. Banks, 'Citizen Selfie', in *Public Private, Secret On Photography & the Configuration of Self*, ed. Charlotte Cotton, (New York: Aperture, 2018), pp.48-51, (p.49).
[81] Susan Bright, *AUTOFOCUS: The Self-Portrait in Contemporary Photography,* London: Thames & Hudson, 2010, p.9.

utilise the ideas of artist Pipilotti Riist who offers an account of subjectivity that is ever elusive, and philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel who positions the subject as simultaneously everything and nothing.

Since subjectivity is not explored by these theorists and artists through the motif of the template, my research provides a novel approach to selfhood in the digital age - a time when we can refresh our image, as often as our Instagram feeds. A period when our image can be created and recreated from the content we see online and offline, using the devices we carry in our pockets, a moment when we can share our performative selfhoods on internet platforms. 'The Image as a Template for Posing' involves working at the site of the phygital, putting new identities on, taking them off, and repeatedly replacing them with another construction of self. As such it is necessary to engage with theorists who approach digital subjectivities as not just performative but also prosthetic and as limitless. Thereby, I utilise the writing of curator and cyberfeminist Legacy Russell and philosopher and curator Paul B. Preciado. Although neither discuss online identity through the lens of the template, they do consider the possibilities and agency of prosthetic being i.e. identity that is performed, easily adapted and replaceable. Russell and Preciado, along with the performances of artist 單Sin 慧 Wai 乾Kin, enable me to conceive the push and pull of the 'liberating and limiting' in terms of online identities. What is emphasised here is the relational engagement between entities. In my consideration of material and digital relationality, and its impact on notions of selfhood, I engage with philosopher Edmund Gustav Albrecht Husserl's concept of 'intersubjectivity' and Catherine Malabou's scholarship on the plasticity of the brain. Through Husserl and Malabou I consider how we organise ourselves, and in turn how we are organised by our interactions in the world.

As this study involves reperforming other people's images to my camera-phone and performing image-ideals to other digital devices, it is important to understand how reenactment and works of 'performing image' have been conceptualised.

Reenactment, according to Rebecca Schneider, is 'the practice of re-playing or re-doing a precedent event, artwork, or act [...]. to try to bring that time – that prior moment – to the very

fingertips of the present.'[82] Offering, as Sven Lütticken points out, 'a space - a stage - for possible and as yet unthinkable performances.'[83] Inviting, in Robert Blackson's words, 'transformation' of an original.[84] For Cristina Baldacci the reperformance provides, in its translation, 'new values, meanings, and configurations.'[85] Reenactment by Catherine Grant's account is 'a form of embodied quotation that cannot be seen as simply a repetition, but instead altered through its processing, whether through speech, gesture, or writing.'[86] 'Performing Image' was conceptualised by Isobel Harbison in her 2019 book of the same name. Works of 'Performing Image', according to Harbison, 'scrutinise a certain image circuitry between the subject, the photographic apparatus, and the screen (or the coinciding of apparatus and screen that smartphones present) and the reciprocity of images and bodies during regular, multiple, and multisited encounters.'[87] My image performances are a response to the impulse for adaptation and transformation of one's physical or imagined self into an image, for the next image. The template, in my image-performances allow me to take shape, 'become or behave like something else'[88] In this way the template can be understood as an object, a paper form, that I use to help me mimic the poses of others.

Cultural studies scholar Rebecca Coleman, in her explanation of Celia Lury's work, describes mimesis as 'not the imitation of an original but a relation of being-like, of adapting to context.'[89] Therefore mimesis is similar to, but not an exact copy. Mimesis can be located in my reenactments and image-performances, which are never exact replicas of what has already

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[82] Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment,* New York: Routledge, 2011, p.2.
[83] Sven Lütticken, 'An Arena in Which to Reenact', in *Life, Once More: Forms of Reenactment in Contemporary Art,* ed. Sven Lütticken, Rotterdam, (Rotterdam: Witte de With, 2005), pp.17-69, (p.60).
[84] Robert Blackson, 'Once More … with Feeling: Reenactment in Contemporary Art and Culture', *Art Journal*, 66(1), (2007) pp.28-40, (p.29), doi:10.1080/00043249.2007.10791237.
[85] Cristina Baldacci, 'Reenactment: Errant Images in Contemporary Art', in *Re-: An Errant Glossary*, ed. Christoph F. E. Holzhey and Arnd Wedemeyer, Cultural Inquiry, 15 (Berlin: ICI Berlin, 2019), pp. 57–67, doi:10.25620/ci-15_07, p.58.
[86] Catherine Grant, *A Time of One's Own: Histories of Feminism in Contemporary Art,* Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2002, p.16.
[87] Isobel Harbison, *Performing Image,* Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The MIT Press, 2019, p.16.
[88] I draw upon the words of philosopher and cultural critic Walter Benjamin here through Celia Lury, whose work on 'prosthetic culture' draws upon Benjamin's notions of mimesis. Please see, Celia Lury, *Prosthetic Culture,* New York and London: Routledge, 1998, p.5.
[89] Rebecca Coleman, *The Becoming of Bodies: Girls, Images, Experience,* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009, p.18.

been done, rather they are interpretations and transformations that are never faithful to an original.

As I write earlier in the introduction, and return to in Chapter One, my working process enables me to interrupt, reroute and participate in prosumer loops. In my art practice, and in my writing, I directly utilise Harbison, Schneider and Luttiken, as well as Sadie Murdoch's artwork *Rrosebushwheels 2* (as discussed earlier) along with Harold Offeh's reenactments of black musicians' album covers, to consider not only how, and where, to 'strike a pose' but also to consider notions of authorship as collective and relational. My research specifically analyses how women configure and are reconfigured by their encounter with the digital image, to rethink the circuits of exchange bound up with prosumer image-making practices and how image-templates produce opportunities for selfie-portraiture and enable me to visualise conflicting states.

1.3 Labour

As this research explores the labour of everyday and ubiquitous self(ie)-image-making practices, which includes the act of prosuming, the aesthetic neoliberal labour undertaken on the body, and the ongoing nature of this work under capitalism, it is necessary to be aware of, select and extend, in a practice-led way, theory and art practice within this territory.

Isobel Harbison in her writing on art practice and prosumption links the conceptualisation of 'prosumerism' to American futurologist Alvin Toffler. In his 1980 book *The Third Wave,* Toffler, whose writing pre-dated the internet, predicted a future in which the average citizen, through technological advances, would become a 'proactive consumer'. By this he meant, they could proactively improve goods and services, modifying them for their own needs. As such, the role of the consumer would become merged with that of the producer. Toffler saw the 'productive consumer' as a positive and liberating practice.[90] Forty years later, in 1997, as

[90] I am indebted to Isobel Harbison here for introducing me to the history of prosumption. Please see, Isobel Harbison, *Performing Image,* Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The MIT Press, 2019, who

Harbison explains, business writer Don Tapscott utilised Toffler's ideas and applied them to the then nascent internet. In his book *The Digital Economy* Tapscott uses the term 'prosumer', meaning to produce and consume at the same time, to describe a new generation of internet users who, with their technical know-how, could be put to work, for free, by online business developers.[91] As Harbison notes, in 2008, Tapscott wrote about this subject again, this time in collaboration with Anothony D. Williams. In their book *Wikinomics* Second Life is given as an example of prosumerism in action. In this virtual world users create content, which other users adopt and adapt, in a continual process, from which the platform grows and grows. The prosumer is presented here as a creative labourer and a co-developer, their work is undertaken in their leisure time, for their enjoyment - and perhaps more crucially, for the entrepreneur to profit from.[92] Due to the exploitative nature of this process a number of scholars have critiqued prosumerism, and digital labour more broadly. Writer George Ritzer, who has also written in collaboration with Nathan Jurgenson, has proposed prosumerism as increasingly central to our lives, setting out different forms of prosumption off and online (including selfie-making), taking issue with capitalism's role in controlling and exploiting the unpaid labour of prosumers.[93]

The time we spend online has been conceptualised as a neoliberal model of twenty-first century labour or 'digital labour' by Jonathan Burston et al, Christian Fuchs and Sebastian Dyer-Witheford and Trebor Scholz.[94] The labourer is you and me, and billions of others

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on p.90-95 presents a comprehensive overview of the origins and development of prosumerism. A detailed discussion of Toffler as well as Tapscott and Williams's writing can also be found in her PhD thesis: Isobel Harbison, 'The Prosumer Complex', (doctoral thesis, Goldsmiths College, University of London, 2014) <https://research.gold.ac.uk/id/eprint/11457/1/ART_thesis_HarbisonI_2015.pdf> [accessed 27 April 2024], p.20-35; please also see: Alvin Toffler, *The Third Wave,* London: Pan in association with Collins, 1980.

[91] Don Tapscott, *The Digital Economy,* New York: McGraw-Hill Education, 1996.

[92] Don Tapscott and Anthony D. Williams, *Wikinomics,* London: Atlantic Books, 2006.

[93] George Ritzer, The "New" World of Prosumption: Evolution, "Return of the Same," or Revolution? in *Sociological Forum*, 30, (1) (2015), pp. 1-17, DOI: 10.1 1 1 1/socf. 12142; and George Ritzer and Nathan Jurgenson, "Production, Consumption, Prosumption, The Nature of capitalism in the age of the digital 'prosumer'" in *Journal of Consumer* Culture Vol. 10, (1) (March 2010):13Y36.

[94] Jonathan Burston, Nick Dyer-Witheford and Alison Hearn, 'Digital labour: Workers, authors, citizens', *ephemera theory & politics in organisations,* 10(3/4), (2010), pp.214-221, ISSN 1473-2866; Christian Fuchs and Sebastian Sevignani, 'What is Digital Labour? What is Digital Work? What's their Difference? And why do these Questions Matter for Understanding Social Media?' *tripleC,* 11(2), (2013), pp.237-293, doi:10.31269/triplec.v11i2.461; and Trebor Scholz, *Digital Labour: The Internet as Playground and Factory*, New York: Routledge, 2013.

worldwide, who produce and consume online content. Whilst our time online appears to be of our own choosing, we are actually at work, indeed as Trebor Scholz writes '[digital labour] doesn't feel, look, or smell like labor at all.'[95] I find myself mobilised by Instagram, Snapchat, Vinted and eBay. These platforms have simultaneously taken and become my leisure time. Julian Kücklich and Jamie Woodcock conceptualise this leisure time as 'playbour'[96] They each describe how playbour began within the games industry and 'gamification' i.e. the application of game-like elements into all forms of life, with the goal of making the things we do, notably work, fun. Hito Steyerl problematises this all-encompassing labour, she notes, 'If the factory is everywhere, then there is no longer a gate by which to leave it—there is no way to escape relentless productivity.'[97] Christian Fuchs and Sebastian Sevignani explain how our data is harvested - that is, we hand over our consent when we sign up to the platform's terms and conditions.[98] Nick Srnicek, who charts the development of online platform-based business models, describes data as a resource 'just like oil […] a material to be extracted, refined and used in a variety of ways.'[99] Shoshana Zuboff calls this process 'surveillance capitalism', which she describes as 'a parasitic economic logic in which the production of goods and services is subordinated to a new global architecture of behavioural modification.'[100] Jodi Dean conceptualises 'communicative capitalism' to describe the 'ideological formation' of capitalism with democracy via networked communication technologies.[101] James Muldoon calls for an alternative, he argues for a new 'organisation of the digital economy through the social ownership of digital assets and

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[95] Trebor Scholz, *Digital Labour,* New York: Routledge, 2013, p.2.

[96] Julian Kücklich, 'Precarious Playbour: Modders and the Digital Games Industry', *The Fibreculture Journal*, 5, (2005) <https://five.fibreculturejournal.org/fcj-025-precarious-playbour-modders-and-the-digital-games-industry/> [accessed 28 March 2024]; and Jamie Woodcock, 'The Work of Play: Marx and the video games industry in the United Kingdom', *Journal of Gaming and Virtual Worlds, 8(2),* (2016), pp.131-143, doi:10.1386/jgvw.8.2.131_1.

[97] Hito Steyerl, 'Is a Museum a Factory?' *e-Flux,* Journal 07, 2009 <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/07/61390/is-a-museum-a-factory/> [accessed 13 April 2021].

[98] Christian Fuchs and Sebastian Sevignani, 'What is Digital Labour? What is Digital Work? What's their Difference? And why do these Questions Matter for Understanding Social Media?' *tripleC,* 11(2), (2013), pp.237-293, (p.237), doi:10.31269/triplec.v11i2.461.

[99] Nick Srnicek, *Platform Capitalism,* Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016, p.40.

[100] Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism,* London: Profile Books Ltd, 2019, see page 'The Definition'.

[101] Jodi Dean, *The Communist Horizon,* London & New York: Verso, 2012, p.123.

democratic control over the infrastructure and systems that govern our digital lives.'[102] This body of knowledge concerned with digital labour is a helpful resource for understanding the exploitation that occurs in the creation and distribution of information using communication technologies.

Ben Burbridge's book *Photography After Capitalism* has been useful to my research. Burbridge draws upon artists who use photography and video to spotlight various forms of labour driving the digital age. He also highlights the hidden work involved in sustaining an art practice more generally. Isobel Harbison's publication *Performing Image* most closely aligns with my own research interests. Harbison's writing considers how art practice speaks to our changing relationship with images in the age of the internet. My research takes a practice-led approach to Harbison's text, and other discussion of digital labour. Indeed, I make a new contribution to this territory through the template method. By taking prosumer images from their online context and reworking them before returning them to the digital, I am able to actively participate in, slow down and redirect image circuits. My approach is important as it allows me to consider and convey how consumptive and productive exchanges of images are shaping our experiences of self as connected to the image. At the beginning of her book, Harbison discusses how our information is co-opted by vast online corporations. Likewise, artist Tony Oursler explores data use. In my writing it is his facial recognition installations, which refer to how our information is used by a whole host of organisations from Apple to banks, enables me, along with the writing of Burbridge, Dean, Harbison, Muldoon, Scholz, Srnicek and Zuboff, to articulate how our data is used. Their explanations of how information is tracked and made use of leads me to think about the ridiculousness of our digital situation under capitalism.

I draw upon the art practices of Mika Rottenberg, Laresa Kosloff, Hannah Wilke, Marina Abramović. Mika Rottenberg's humorous 2004 video work, *Mary's Cherries*, in which an all-female cast labour on their bodies to create maraschino cherries from their fingernails in a make-shift factory setting, is useful to my study. Rottenberg's work highlights the bizarre

[102] James Muldoon, *Platform Socialism: How to Reclaim our Digital Future from Big Tech,* London: Pluto Press, 2022, p.3.

nature of neoliberal capital's requirements which puts a huge emphasis on women to labour on their bodies, moulding and shaping their flesh into idealised forms. Laresa Kosloff's video works *Spirit & Muscle,* in which the artist can be seen as only a pair of legs inhabiting a geometric form that refers to section of an artwork from art history and the clownish antics of early cinema, allows me to consider not just the fantasy images that women attempt to fit but also how bodies negotiate technological developments. Through the video works of Hannah Wilke and Marina Abramović I am able to further discuss the absurdity of women's beauty work. By looking at these videos, which were made during a different encounter with feminism in the 1970s, I can underscore the persistent labour of working on one's image for particular value systems.

As my research is concerned with neoliberal capitalism and its false promises of transformation into an ideal image, in the digital age, I draw upon theorists and artists who analyse appearance, in light of technological change, and capitalism's online presence. As such, I employ Rosalind Gill's 'postfeminist sensibility' with its 'emphasis on the body as the locus of womanhood and the core site of women's value.'[103] By Gill's account, postfeminism has 'tightened its grip upon contemporary life.'[104] Gill addresses the intensification of appearance pressures since the advent of camera-phones and the ability to look at ourselves, and others, on small handheld devices. Similarly, Emma Dabiri discusses the impact of new visualising technologies upon modern beauty practices, she also wants to untangle feminine beauty work from capitalism and consumerism.[105] The amplification of visual attention, for both scholars, is leading to a greater obsession with physical perfection, which as Dabiri argues, creates anxiety, shame, control and competition amongst women. Dabiri and Gill acknowledge that these issues don't only affect women. Like me, they focus on women as the

[103] Ian Sinclair, 'Aesthetic labour, beauty politics and neoliberalism: An interview with Rosalind Gill', *openDemocracy,* 24 July 2017 <https://neweconomics.opendemocracy.net/aesthetic-labour-beauty-politics-neoliberalism-interview-rosalind-gill/> [accessed 14 February 2024].
[104] Rosalind Gill, 'The Affective, Cultural and Psychic Life of Postfeminism: A Postfeminist Sensibility 10 Years On', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 20(6), (2017), pp.606-626, doi:10.1177/1367549417733003.
[105] Emma Dabiri, *Disobedient Bodies,* London: Wellcome Collection, 2023.

pressure and scrutiny that women are under has a long history, greater significance and centrality in women's lives.[106]

Through Dabiri and Gill as well as the work of artists Rachel Maclean, 單Sin 慧Wai 乾Kin, Gillian Wearing and Eisa Jocson, I can explore and respond to different forms of bodily labour undertaken by women for their online representations. Via Maclean and using the writing of Sarah Neeley and Sarah Smith, who themselves draw upon scholars of aesthetic labour Elizabeth Wissinger and Ana Sofia Elias et al, I look at how Maclean's practice speaks the 'extreme endurances' i.e. cosmetic surgeries and beauty procedures, that women subject themselves to in the name of self-transformation.[107] By looking at the Instagram presence of 單Sin 慧Wai 乾Kin, and through the writing of artist and researcher Dawn Woolley, I offer an account of bodily labour that considers the illusion of feminine bodily-work and how this is brought to the viewers attention.[108] An analysis of artworks by Gillian Wearing and Eisa Jocson, both of whom shapeshift into new forms, offers a vantage point for considering smartphone applications that reconfigure the face.

Ragnar Kjartansson and the American rock band The National's 2013 repeated performance of the same song, offer a way of thinking about ongoing and repetitive routines of capitalism as an endurance test. I use the shifts in their performance and their struggle to maintain composure to speak to the persistent need to live up an idea of oneself that is out of reach. In my discussion I draw upon Peter Osborne's conceptualisation of 'the horizon of expectation' to think about hope and accumulation in relation to capitalism.[109] Through Osborne, as well as Ragnar Kjartansson and The National, I discuss how doing the same thing over and over can expose the illusion of the horizon, or capitalist transformation, exposing the ridiculousness of following the status quo i.e. particular appearance norms. The template allows me to repeat, over and over, again and once more, image-ideals, which I know I can never fully arrive at, or

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[106] Ibid.

[107] Sarah Neely and Sarah Smith, 'The Art of Maximal Ventriloquy: Femininity as Labour in the Films of Rachel Maclean', in *Women Artists, Feminism and the Moving Image: Contexts and Practices,* ed. Lucy Reynolds (London: IB. Tauris, 2019); Elizabeth Wessinger, 'Glamour Labour in the age of Kardashian in Critical Studies', *Fashion and Beauty*, 7(2), (2016), doi:10.1386/csfb.7.2.141_1; and Ana Sofia Elias, Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff, *Aesthetic Labour: Rethinking Beauty Politics in Neoliberalism,* London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

[108] Dawn Woolley, 'The Iconography of Disruptive Bodies: Social Media and Medical Identities', in *Bodies in Flux*, ed. Hanan Muzaffar and Barbara Braid (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2019), pp.9-35.

[109] For a discussion of the 'the horizon of expectation' by Osborne, please see: Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art*, London: Verso Books, 2013, p.182.

maintain, yet, despite my awareness of this fact, I keep chasing fantasy images. As previously noted, through the template method, I hold and present contradictions. Indeed, it is this embracing and manifesting of states that are at odds with one another that offers a consideration of absurdity and sets my work apart from this field of art practice and scholarship.

* * * * * *

As this Contextual Review shows, my practice-led research combines and expands a body of knowledge drawn from the fields of contemporary photography, performance studies and labour to support an examination of how performance and performing-images can determine how women compose their selfies and are in turn shaped by their encounters with, and experiences of, digital images. The literature and art practices outlined within the Contextual Review, offer both a vocabulary and framework for articulating how art practice can foreground the ways the body is being modified by the image, in the digital age. Through art practice and writing, I announce and perform some of the ways everyday image making practices enable contemporary modes of subjectivity drawing attention to the work involved in the process of becoming, being and dressing in the image. What sets my study apart from other discussions of digital images, particularly self(ie)-portraiture, is that the subject of my inquiry is reinterpreted through a creative process that involves drawing upon a particular body of online prosumer imagery, which I sample, make analogue, enact, and send back to the digital in a transformed and compromised state. I refer to this process as 'The Image as a Template for Posing'. I also follow other kinds of posing-templates for selfie-making, performing and transforming them for the future image. My template method enables me to participate in prosumer selfie-making practices, whilst simultaneously problematising the ridiculousness of all the work attached to creating idealised images for online display.

Overview of Chapters

This thesis is divided into three chapters. The text structure, for each chapter, follows a template for writing. The template design is in three parts: it begins with a series of artworks, which provide the catalyst for the thinking within the text, followed by a body of descriptive writing that articulates the artmaking process, and thirdly an analytical discussion. Chapter two, in a mirror of my artmaking, is where I disrupt the template. Artworks no longer sit at the start of the chapter, rather they are woven into the analytical discussion, and the body of descriptive text is omitted. Early on in the chapter a number of words, which are used in selfie-making and self-portraiture more generally, are broken down phonetically and type-set across several pages. The reader may wish to use these deconstructed words as prompts to help pronounce, through their reconstruction, the words 'prune', 'prawn', 'cheese' and 'sausage'. The template is reformed and followed again by Chapter Three.

The first chapter, eponymously titled *The Image as a Template for Posing*, begins with a body of photographic work titled *Modelling Selfies (In Paper Outfits)*. In these photographs I put into dialogue, with my body, a series of compromised duplicated image cut-outs, which I use as image-templates for fitting, imagining, posing and following, the self(ie)-image. I articulate how I encounter image-templates and how they are produced and consumed. I discuss some of the pressures, uncertainties and issues that arise when the offline body is understood as connected to, and entangled with, the online image rather than experienced as set apart from it.[110] When I speak of the offline body, I mean a physical body: fleshy, fatty and three-dimensional, occupying 'real' space, rather than the online body, which I define as two-dimensional and seen on screen, although very much impressing itself on the offline body in an embodied way.

Exploring the ways differently dimensioned bodies connect and amalgamate allows me to consider how images as templates for posing enable people to explore new possibilities of what bodies and images can do together. That is to say, we can see and feel ourselves

[110] Rebecca Coleman, *The Becoming of Bodies Girls, Images, Experience,* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009, has been useful in shaping how I understand the relationship between bodies and images. My phrasing, in this chapter outline, draws from her feminist Deleuzian perspective on the relations between bodies and images. Coleman, in her writing on images that saturate popular culture - billboards, magazines and television - considers bodies and images as not separable entities but rather in a process of entwined becoming.

transformed, find definition, and take ownership of our representations, even if fleetingly. That said, the bodies I attempt to fit traverse the hard edges of the status quo, they present the 'visual inheritance' of women, subscribing to a familiar template of femininity.[111] Yet, through the act of trying on and trying out these well-known but albeit exaggerated feminine forms, I gain a sense of a tear in the fabric of the digital. The glitches and failure to function, as I suggest, reveal the precarious relationship between the body and the image, exposing the cycle of labour and desire involved in producing and consuming digital images.

Within Chapter One I draw upon the artwork of Cindy Sherman, Sadie Murdoch, Rachel Maclean, Dawn Woolley, 單Sin 慧Wai 乾Kin, and Harold Offeh. I also discuss the children's play figure Bunty's Cut Out Wardrobe, 1960's paper dress fashion and the phantasmic lenses and filters offered via the multimedia messaging application Snapchat, as well as make-up and cosmetic procedures that claim to bring the body and the image into closer alignment.

The second chapter, titled *Learning as a Template for Being,* is less about representation and more concerned with pedagogical and informational exchange. A video-artwork, in which I, the artist, can be seen for 3 minutes 22 seconds (looped) performing an educational encounter with a speech coach, frames this chapter's discussion. I also refer to a number of recorded Zoom sessions with the speech coach during the COVID-19 pandemic. These works form part of my working process. On Zoom, or not, the videos are set within domestic spaces. Throughout the work I am gently encouraged by my instructor to say "prune", "prawn", "cheese" and "sausage" using phonics, words and verses. These terms are utilised as they are drawn upon in portrait photography to enable those in front of the camera to fashion their face into apparently aesthetically desirable expressions. However, rather than say these words to my phone-camera for the selfie, I perform them for my tutor, ahead of the portrait. As such the original context and meaning of the words shift. What is depicted is an absurd use of language, a transgression and a deconstruction of the posing-template, which opens up the possibility of its reconstruction, making other poses and ways of being imaginable.

[111] I use Ellie Howards term 'visual inheritance' here taken from her writing on Depop sellers. Ellie Howard, 'Depop Worker' *Source Thinking Through Photography,* Autumn Issue #112, (October 2023), pp.24-25, ISSN 1369-2224.

Rethinking the posing-template enables the reshaping, moulding, and reforming of our self/image. Ultimately what I propose is that what is reflected in the mirror, or made visible on my mobile phone screen, is a collaged subjectivity: a fragmented depiction in which my off-and online worlds collide. Through this, I am able to glimpse or imagine myself, but can never fully see, understand, or hold on to who I am.

In Chapter Two I discuss the artworks of Eva Stenram, Hannah Höch, Eleanor Antin, Eva Rothschild, Annette Krauss, Moyra Davey, Carolyn Lazard, Claude Cahun and Tony Oursler. I look at small units of language, online machine learning, the harvesting of data, capitalism's voracious appetite and instruction manuals.

The third and final chapter of the thesis begins with a series of video works or velfies that sit under the umbrella title of: *Gestures (for the selfie)*, in which I practise a series of facial expressions garnered from a number of online selfie tutorials and an offline influencer guidebook. The instructions that I follow, and the gestures that I repeat, will ostensibly help me attain a set of 'acceptable' feminine poses for the selfie-image.

The chapter title, *The Image as an Object on the Horizon*, refers to a practice and process of embodied ongoing work on the fantasy image that is never quite 'right' and never quite finished. Attaching us to an ongoing routine of aspiration, repetition and accumulation for a future version of ourselves that, even if momentarily achieved, soon shifts out of grasp as new discourses and standards of aesthetic perfection and technical developments come to the fore. As such we find ourselves caught in a loop of pursuing the ideal self-representation, or, more technically, trapped in an ongoing cycle of honing our image-literacy through our image productivity. I propose that our image-ideal is an unattainable aspiration that sits just out of reach and on the horizon. I look at the impetus to do, and do again, in relation to influencer guidebooks and selfie tutorials, which provide women with a set of image templates for posing, thereby perpetuating a certain kind of image performativity put to work online via prosumerism. I analyse the use of exaggeration within my for-camera performances, arguing that the augmentation of the posing templates makes the gestures appear comic and absurd. For me, this overinflation exposes the impossibility of the promise of the horizon, rather than reinforcing it.

Chapter Three features' artworks by Barbara Kruger, Mika Rottenberg, Laresa Kosloff, Hannah Wilke, Marina Abramović, Ragnar Kjartansson's collaboration with the American rock band The National, Martin Creed, Gillian Wearing and Eisa Jocson. I discuss Kim Kardashian's online image, Comme des Garçons 1997 Spring/Summer collection *Body Meets Dress, Dress Meets Body,* Leigh Bowery's amplified body parts and the multimedia messaging application Reface, which lets you merge your face with a celebrity.

Original contribution to the field

This research offers an original contribution to contemporary thinking about prosumer 'self-portraiture' at the intersections of photography, performance studies and labour. My practice-led and embodied approach recasts the manipulation of images and the desire to become image, in the digital age. What differentiates this study from other discussions of digital images, specifically the selfie-representation, is that the subject is translated through a process of mining a particular body of prosumer imagery, which I take offline, refer to, exaggerate and compromise, before returning to the digital - a process and concept I refer to as, 'The Image as a Template for Posing'. I also follow verbal templates for being, to augment, transgress and deconstruct posing templates, to make other ways of being imaginable.

Discussions of image-templates can be found in photographic theory in the writing of Annebella Pollen and Ben Burbridge. For Pollen, image-templates are the recurring themes found in everyday photographs, such as pictures of sunset, which people repeat to be part of a communal practice.[112] While in Burbridge's use the template means a prototype or pattern, provided by fashion, advertising, and art photography, that is internalised and repeated in our own self-fashioning.[113] In my study the template becomes a critical method, and through this method I hold, and the artworks manifest, dual and conflicting positions about our understanding of self, our relations with photographs, and the circulation of images both offline and online. Partly this is because the originals are everyday photographs in a communal setting that are often attempts to emulate fashion or advertising imagery. The artworks themselves appear, due to the templates I create, somewhat out-of-joint, and as such, speak to a choreography that occurs within the prosumer 'self-portraiture' cycle. In the field of prosumer-studies research has been done to conceptualise the selfie as a form of prosumption by George Ritzer.[114] Scholarship also exists to illuminate how prosumerism is redefining our relationships to images, in the internet age, framed through discussions of performance

[112] Annebella Pollen, 'When is Cliché not a cliché?', in *Photography Reframed*, ed. Ben Burbridge and Annebella Pollen (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2018), pp.74-81, (p.79).
[113] Ben Burbridge, *Photography After Capitalism,* London: Goldsmiths Press, 2020, p.29; and Ben Burbridge, 'Paradise Lost', in *Photography Reframed*, ed. Ben Burbridge and Annebella Pollen (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2018), pp.116-133, (p.127).
[114] George Ritzer , 'The Seflie as a Form of Prosumption'*, George Ritzer,* 12 August 2015 <https://georgeritzer.wordpress.com/2015/08/12/the-selfie-as-a-form-of-prosumption/> [accessed 21 September 2024].

and moving image art practices by Isobel Harbison.[115] My research makes a new offering to knowledge through a practice of following and disrupting image-templates for posing, to support an analysis of how women construct their self(ie)-images and how in turn images shape women's experience of their bodies, using photography and video.

[115] Isobel Harbison, *Performing Image,* Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The MIT Press, 2019.

Chapter One

The Image as a Template for Posing

The photographic series:

Modelling Selfies (In Paper Outfits)

Figure 1.1. Moira Lovell.
Animal Print Wrap Dress Short, 2020.
Digital photograph.

Figure 1.2. Moira Lovell.
Strapless Bandeau Short Dress, 2019.
Digital photograph.

Figure 1.3. Moira Lovell.
Check Top Fitted, 2023.
Digital photograph.

Figure 1.4. Moira Lovell.
Lilac Bodycon Dress Long Sleeve, 2023.
Digital photograph.

Figure 1.5. Moira Lovell.
Red Ribbed Knitted Pencil Mini Dress, 2020.
Digital photograph.

Figure 1.6. Moira Lovell.
Sheer Jewelled Back with Pleated Skirt Dress, 2020.
Digital photograph.

Figure 1.7. Moira Lovell.
Pink Bodycon Dress, 2022.
Digital photograph.

Figure 1.8. Moira Lovell.
Strappy Cowl Neck Midi Dress, 2019.
Digital photograph.

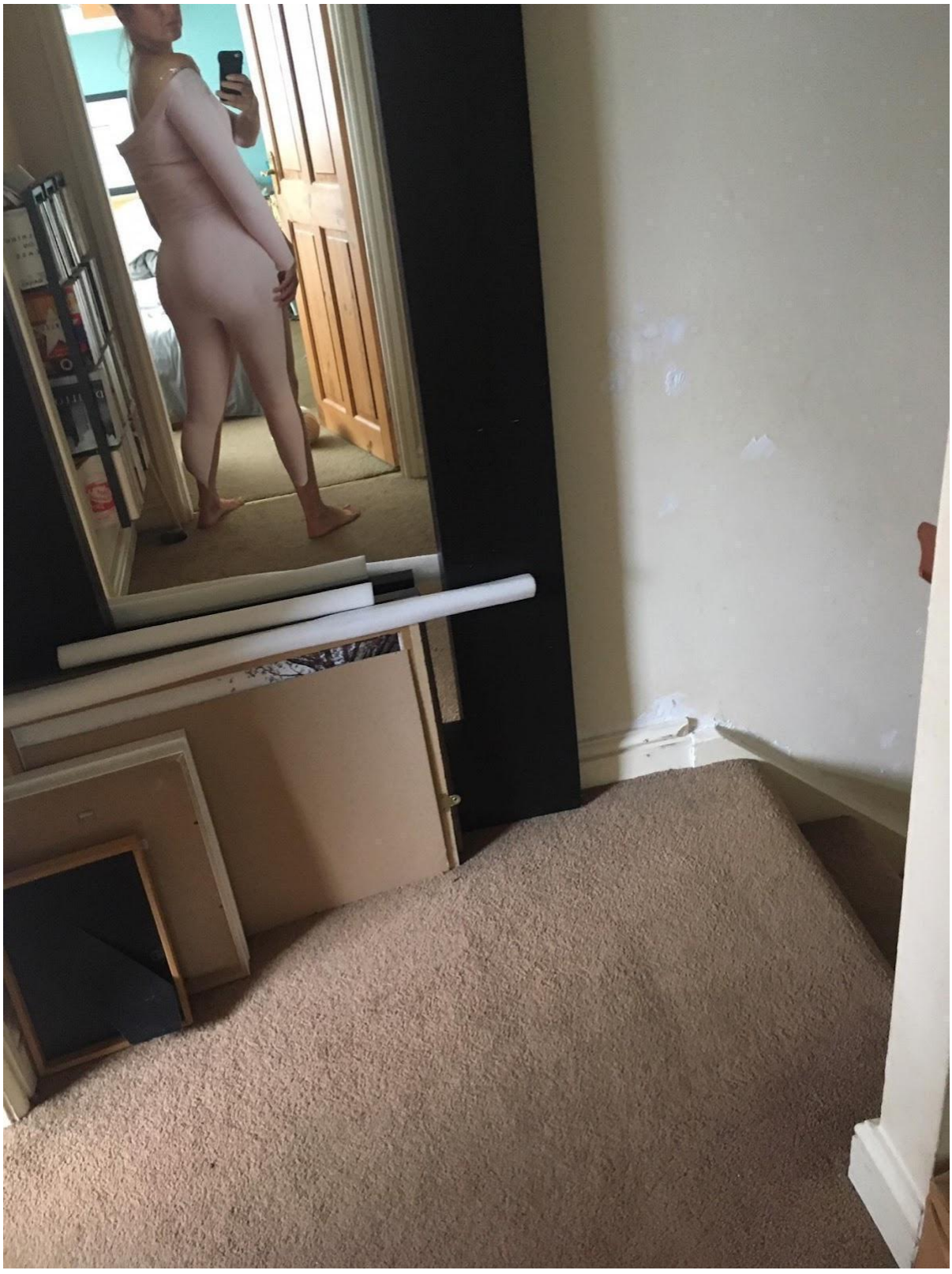


Figure 1.9. Moira Lovell.
Pink Stretch Jumpsuit Playsuit, 2020.
Digital photograph.

Figure 1.10. Moira Lovell.
Playsuit Shorts Top All in One, 2019.
Digital photograph.

Figure 1.11. Moira Lovell.
Red Halter High Neck Dress, 2020.
Digital photograph.

Figure 1.12. Moira Lovell.
Red Short Mini Dress, Deep Cleavage, 2019.
Digital photograph.

Figure 1.13. Moira Lovell.
Red Wide Leg Trousers, 2020.
Digital photograph.

Figure 1.14. Moira Lovell.
Striped Jumper Dress, 2022.
Digital photograph.

Figure 1.15. Moira Lovell.
Yellow Strappy Camisole Dress, 2019.
Digital photograph.

Figure 1.16. Moira Lovell.
Green One Shoulder Wrap Hem Velvet Dress, 2023.
Digital photograph.

Figure 1.17. Moira Lovell.
Green Top Ruffle Arm, 2022.
Digital photograph.

Figure 1.18. Moira Lovell.
Blue Sleeveless Dress, 2020.
Digital photograph.

Figure 1.19. Moira Lovell.
Blue Front Side Split Dress, 2019.
Digital photograph.

Figure 1.20. Moira Lovell.
Blue Halter Neck Low Front Dress, 2020.
Digital photograph.

Figure 1.21. Moira Lovell.
Shorts Playsuit Stripy Blue and White, 2020.
Digital photograph.

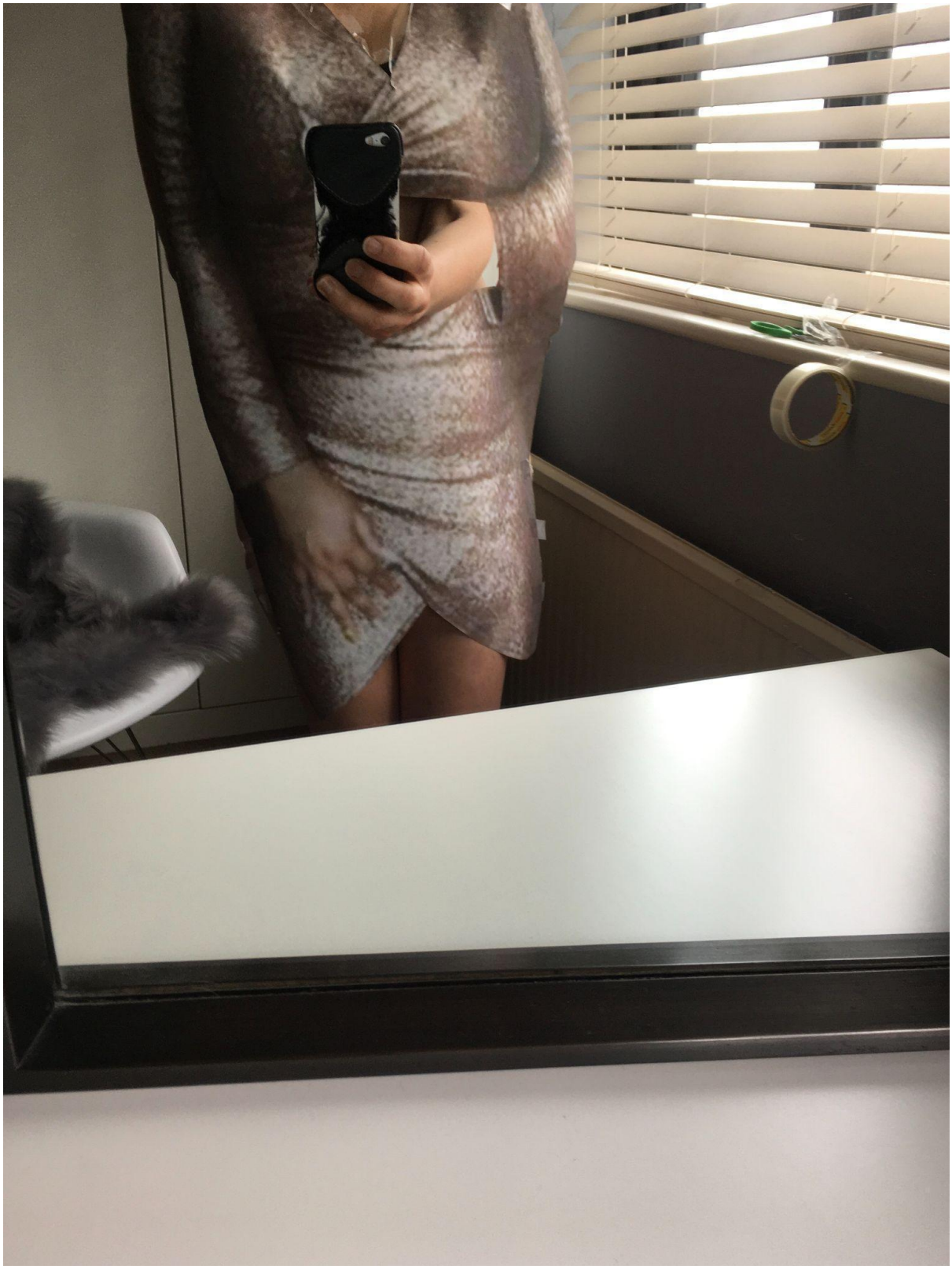


Figure 1.22. Moira Lovell.
Metallic Wrap Dress, 2022.
Digital photograph.

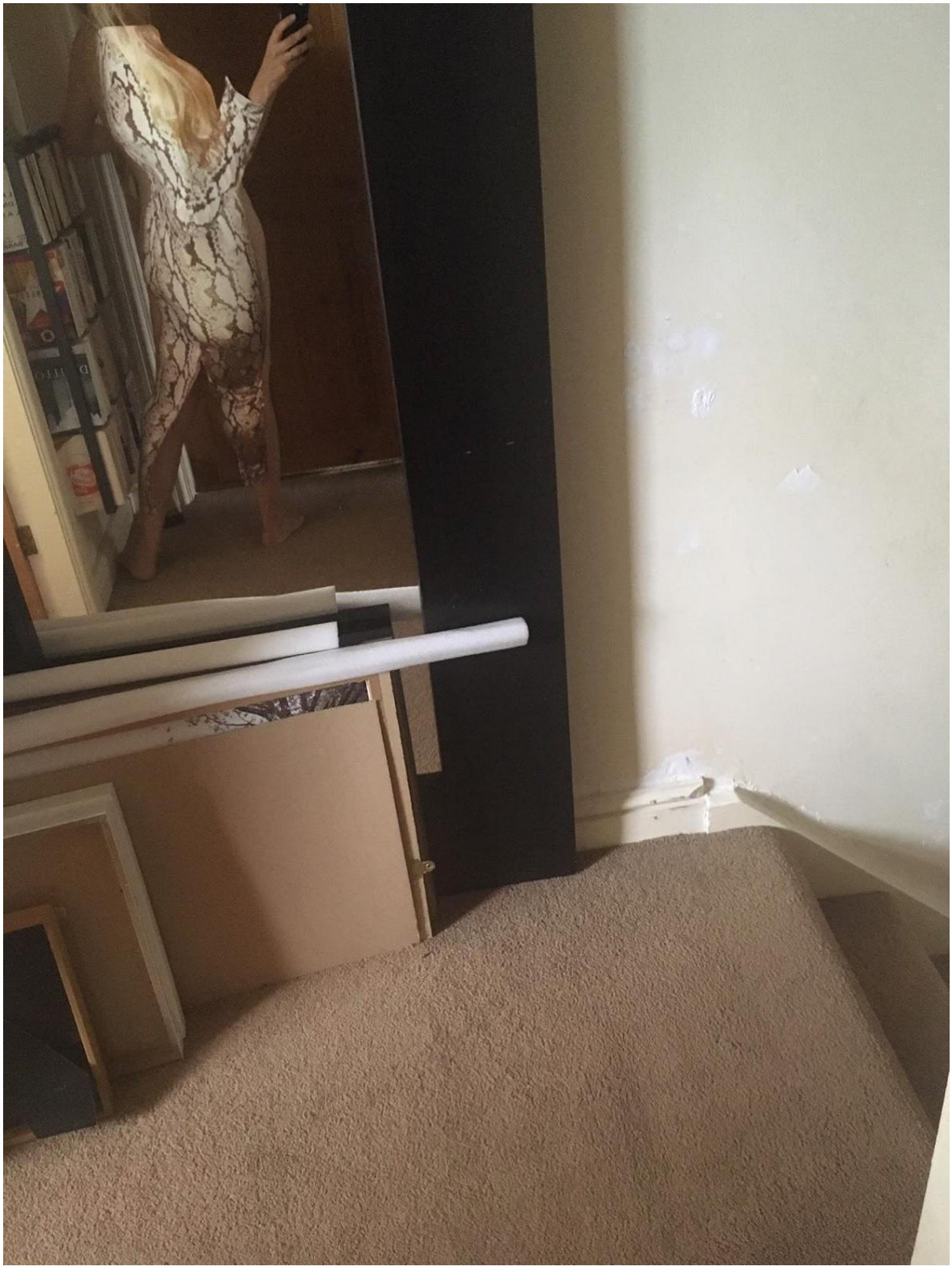


Figure 1.23. Moira Lovell.
Snake Print Slinky Plunge Jumpsuit, 2020.
Digital photograph.

Figure 1.24. Moira Lovell.
Coco Night Beige Tweed Blazer, 2022.
Digital photograph.

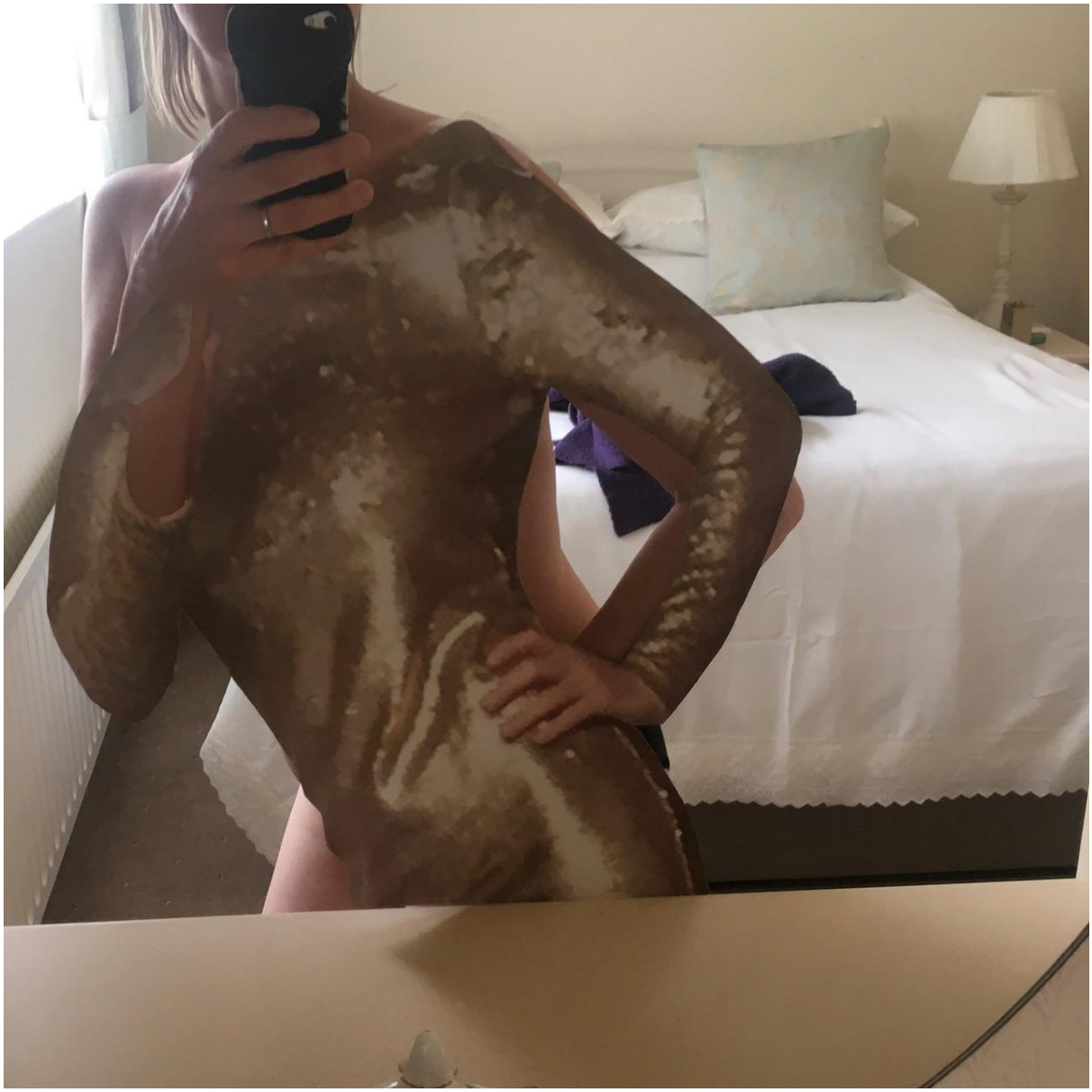
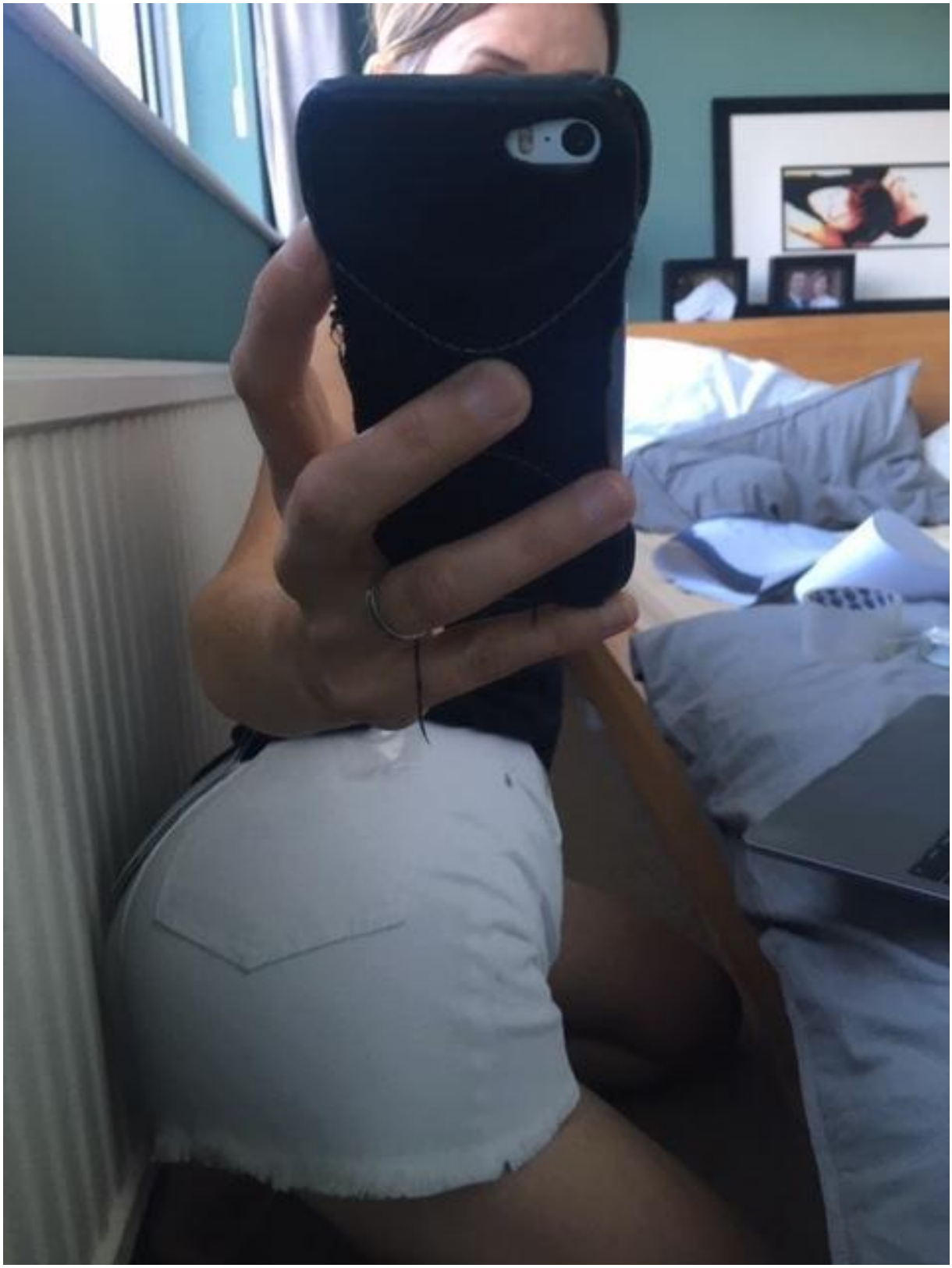


Figure 1.25. Moira Lovell.
Gold Sequin Mini Dress, 2022.
Digital photograph.

Figure 1.26. Moira Lovell.
White Off the Shoulder Bodycon Dress, 2019.
Digital photograph.



1.27. Moira Lovell.
White Denim Shorts Hotpants, 2020.
Digital photograph.

Figure 1.28. Moira Lovell.
Pretty Little Thing White Dress Detail, 2022.
Digital photograph.

Figure 1.29. Moira Lovell.
Polka Dot Chiffon Blouse, 2023.
Digital photograph.

Figure 1.30. Moira Lovell.
Black Jumper Dress Belt Not Included, 2019.
Digital photograph.

Figure 1.31. Moira Lovell.
Sexy Black Sheer See Through Dress, 2019.
Digital photograph.

Figure 1.32. Moira Lovell.
Charcoal Jumper Dress, 2020.
Digital photograph.

Figure 1.33. Moira Lovell.
Sparkly Backless Dress, 2020.
Digital photograph.

Figure 1.34. Moira Lovell.
Lacy Black Slip, 2020.
Digital photograph.

Figure 1.35. Moira Lovell.
Black Zip Back Dress, 2019.
Digital photograph.

Figure 1.36. Moira Lovell.
Faux Leather Jacket, 2020.
Digital photograph.

Figure 1.37. Moira Lovell.
Leopard Crisscross Open-Back Mini Dress, 2022.
Digital photograph.

Figure 1.38. Moira Lovell.
Bodycon Mini Dress, 2023.
Digital photograph.

Using search terms such as 'Boohoo sized 10' and 'Misguided bodycon', I scroll through online marketplaces looking for selfie-like images featuring women, modelling clothing. When I do this, I am usually presented with the following listings of images: outfits hung on coat hangers attached to the fronts of wardrobes or dangling from the architraves of bedroom doorways, garments fitted to dressmakers' mannequins and items laid on surfaces such as beds, tabletops and floors. Amongst these are some self-representations made by women, wearing outfits they are selling. Clicking on the amateur clothing adverts leads me to more images of women using their own bodies to market used clothing.

From here, I can make my image selections: I am searching for photographs that are DIY - that is to say, seemingly made by the seller, with a mobile device. I look out for images that depict selfie-makers positioned within the domestic site of the home. I am also seeking poses that appear to embody an idea or fantasy. These selfie-like images, in which bodies and other information appear in excess, vie for my attention, firmly assert themselves amongst numerous other images presenting pre-owned goods on internet marketplaces.

Once I have found a digital photograph that fits my criteria, I take an image grab and enlarge it to life-size. I then print it onto proofing paper using a large format inkjet printer. Following this I lay the print on my living room floor, before cutting around the paper garment, removing it from the printed body of the wearer and the backdrop. Once I have removed the two-dimensional outfit from the rest of the print, I fit the paper apparel to my body, securing it with sticky tape. The tape is a precarious choice, it easily comes unstuck and once it has peeled off it refuses to stick to my body as effectively as before. But the tape's transparent nature is useful as it doesn't block out the point at which the print touches and fixes to my skin. Proofing paper is also useful here, not only because of its relative cheapness in monetary terms, but because it is malleable, enabling me to fit it (although crudely) to the contours of my body.

In bedrooms, in my home or my friends' houses, and in front of a mirror, to echo the framing and contexts featured in the original marketplace image, I photograph myself modelling the online seller's outfits (albeit in photographic paper form) using my iPhone and often surrounded by the tools of the cutting and sticking involved in the reconstruction. The selling site photographs inform my reenactment – kept on a nearby computer screen or my phone screen as a reference point. In this sense, the on-screen image becomes an uncanny fantasy

mirror, with the offline self-attempting to model the figure on the screen. A selfie that is at once me and not me - that is to say, whilst the representation literally features me, it does not reflect my body per se, rather what I perceive on screen is my body merged with that of another body - and I see and experience myself as I have never seen or experienced myself before.

The promise of contact

Modelling Selfies (In Paper Outfits) was initiated out of the desire for contact with the image, mediated by my uber-sleek mobile phone screen. In his 1936 book *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Walter Benjamin similarly craved closeness to a visual entity. Benjamin writes, 'every day the urge grows stronger to get hold of an object at close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction.'[116] For scholar Rebecca Coleman, whose writing spans sociology, media, cultural studies and feminist theory, Benjamin's words demonstrate how bodies 'relate to' or 'yield into' an image, dissolving or blurring subject/object and body/image distinctions.[117] In relation to online images and prosumer activity, art critic and art historian Isobel Harbison, claims Benjaminian urges have intensified over the last ninety years, through our changing relations with technology.[118] Yet the online image, with all of its allure and immediacy, remains inaccessible, encased behind the back-lit screen. As philosopher and cultural critic Steven Shaviro notes in his writing about the body and the screen-based image, 'I always find it shimmering just beyond my grasp'.[119] It's the images' shimmering and intangible quality that elicits not just Shaviro's interest, but my own. I take hold of the need for closeness when I deconstruct and reconstruct the online image, translating it materially, temporally and spatially, putting it into direct relation with my own offline body. When the smooth cold surface of the paper presses against my skin, I become acutely aware of the sensation of contact. Indeed, my body acts in response to it, internalising, transforming and reperforming a version of the original. In this sense, someone else's image

[116] Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,* London: Penguin, 2008 [orig. 1936], p.217.
[117] Rebecca Coleman, *The Becoming of Bodies Girls, Images, Experience,* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009, p.18.
[118] Isobel Harbison, *Performing Image,* Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The MIT Press, 2019, p.2.
[119] Steven Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body,* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota press, 1993, p.60.

becomes my template for posing. Harbison most eloquently articulates how the body is affected by the image in the digital age, when she writes:

> This potential proximity to an image, of an image, the process of assimilating it this momentum through which picture becomes posture, embodied, performed, and captured is […] a cycle we're all in.[120]

Harbison's description of the process of images passing through, and registering on, the body, is also a description of, and I paraphrase from Harbison's book, how we produce images and how images also produce us.[121] In other words, we make technical choices, lighting, framing and so on, to construct images, and in turn, photographs construct us – shaping not just how we experience and understand our bodies, but also impacting our imaginations and how we would ideally like to see ourselves. Rebecca Coleman writes about the 'imperative of transformation.'[122] According to Coleman, an 'imperative of transformation' is an 'impulse for self-improvement.'[123] She also notes 'transformation is an affective condition of living in present times.'[124] In her writing she discusses the affective pull of the desired-image, she refers to this as 'the idea(l) or fantasy.'[125] Her exploration looks at how images that hold the promise of transformation are organised via screen such as tv make-over programmes, advertising campaigns, and so on, to, in her words, 'bring particular bodies to life.'[126]

I enjoy seeing and experiencing myself transformed. When I create a self-portrait for the series *Modelling Selfies*, for the duration of the image-making, and perhaps a little longer beyond this (until I see my reflection in a mirror), I get carried away with the fantasy of the image, I am immersed in it. It is no longer distant but in close proximity to me, not just physically but also affectively. My body and the image become similarly reconfigured, entangled and affected by the social media messaging application Snapchat. After Snapchat maps my face and adjusts my features to align with current Western beauty standards: enlarging my eyes, reducing my nose and polishing my skin - blepharoplasty, rhinoplasty and

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[120] Isobel Harbison, *Performing Image,* Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The MIT Press, 2019, p.18.
[121] Ibid, please see both the dust jacket of the hardback version and p.3.
[122] Rebecca Coleman, *The Becoming of Bodies Girls, Images, Experience,* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009, p.2.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Ibid.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Ibid.

microdermabrasion without the cost or pain of such beauty procedures, I am presented with a range of captivating image templates, known as filters and lenses: dancing hotdog, human-pug hybrid, cat hat, dog with long licky tongue, my face puking a rainbow. Once I've made my choice, the cat hat, for example, I experience myself as a blend of the 2D and 3D; as multidimensional, as the border between what I see on screen and what I experience off screen connect. There is a relation here with the ideas of cultural theorist Meredith Jones who has written about the ways depictions of skin on TV make-over shows reshape, for some viewers, the boundaries between representation and reality.[127] For her, as for me, screen-images are immersive, sensed and endured or in Rebecca Coleman's terms 'felt and lived out' as concrete experience, even if momentarily.[128]

With my eyes locked to the phone-screen, I move my head around, checking out my new image from varied angles, the cat poised on my head, sways with the movement of my body. I perceive a sensation of contact with the cat, to be precise, I don't feel the cat's physical weight upon my person, but I do feel its presence. I have observed both my children reach up to their heads to feel for the virtual cat (I have resisted this urge, but only because I held myself back). Here I agree with Rebecca Coleman's formulation that 'such a mode of viewing constitutes a form of "haptic visuality".'[129] Coleman, in her writing on screens, bodies and affect, cites Laura U. Marks. She describes Marks' ideas in the following terms, 'writing about film, Marks defines haptic visuality in distinction to "optic visuality", a mode of perception that 'depends on a separation between the viewing subject and the object.'[130] In Marks' own words, 'whilst optical perception privileges the representational power of the image, haptic perception privileges the material presence of the image. Drawing from other forms of sense experience, primarily touch and kinesthetics, haptic visuality involves the body

[127] Here I take-up Meredith Jones' conceptualisation of the ways flesh and media can combine and feel immediate. When describing the intense reveal scenes of make-over programmes, Jones, on p.515-516, writes, '"media-bodies" come about via "screen-births". They traverse the boundaries between representation and reality, between skin and screen'. On p.518 she notes how media-bodies 'step out into the world' by turns, media, television or virtual bodies become physical, real and actual. Extending and reframing Jones ultimately helps me develop a vocabulary concerning the embodied experience of haptic visuality. For more see: Meredith Jones, 'Media-bodies and screen-births: cosmetic surgery reality television', *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies,* 22(4), (2008), pp.515-524.
[128] Rebecca Coleman, *The Becoming of Bodies Girls, Images, Experience,* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009, p.1.
[129] Rebecca Coleman, *Transforming Image, Screens Affect, Futures.* London & New York: Routledge, 2013, p.84.
[130] Ibid.

more than is the case with optical visuality.'[131] As such the phantasmagorical cat balanced on my head can be understood as a proprioceptive and an embodied experience of an image.
My children's inclination to reach for the cat, and my conscious restraint to do the same, foregrounds the increasing difficulty of conceptualising one's body as separate to the representation. The confusion, embarrassment and unease that registers across my kids' faces when they realise that the cat does not belong to the three-dimensional realm (and my own disappointment when I see my actual face on screen, or in a mirror, rather than the face-tuned version presented on Snapchat) speaks to Isobel Harbison's declaration that 'affective imagery produces desires whilst never quite satisfying them'.[132] Once I launch Snapchat and see and experience myself in various incarnations, I find it difficult to stop - that is to say, my appetite for Snapchat's images is rarely sated. Harbison argues that the advent of the smartphone and the internet has accelerated image consumption-production-consumption cycles.[133] As a prosumer of online digital images, my gluttonous devouring eye feasts on online information. But as a consumer of and artists' work on gallery walls and in books, I am schooled to take a long and contemplative engagement with what is presented. In *Modelling Selfies (In paper Outfits)* the online goes offline, enabling me to divert image loops and slow down my rate of image consumption and production, in order to take a deliberate and measured look at the image's affective pull.

Ultimately *Modelling selfies (In Paper Outfits)* and Snapchat are sites through which I can explore my body's desire to emulate and inhabit the image. The lenses, filters, cat hats and paper outfits - that is to say, 'image templates' are methods for revealing the body's readiness for contact and association with the image. The use of image templates – cats, pugs, rainbows, *black jumper dress (belt not included)* and so on – exposes the impulse to self-transform, to perform and experience ourselves anew, which is made possible through the phygital merging of the body with the image. Through this process, the digital mirror/image transforms the analogue/offline self, by turns, the physical body becomes an avatar of its digital other. Or perhaps tries to and falls apart at the seams.

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[131] Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film Intercultural cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses,* Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2000, p.163.
[132] Isobel Harbison, *Performing Image,* Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The MIT Press, 2019, p.144.
[133] Ibid, on p.15 Harbison discusses information appetites and the speed of image consumption.

Cut out wardrobe

In my early explorations, I didn't pose with the two-dimensional cut-outs. Instead, I ordered clothing from internet marketplaces. However, when the outfits arrived in the post, from the seller's house to my own, I struggled to try them on. Ironically (as I was searching for closeness) they felt too intimate. They held the off-putting scents of the sellers: sweet perfumes combined with bodily odours. Artist, curator and material culture researcher Ellen Sampson writes in her 2017 article on the relationship between fashion garments and the maker and wearer:

> We understand that people and the garments they wear are entangled. The intimate nature of this relationship is highlighted in the way it is expressed through language: "It's just not me," somebody will say, or "it fits like a second skin." We think ourselves into the garments we wear and through this projection they become integral parts of ourselves.[134]

Initially, I could not think myself into these garments. They were "just not me" - too short, too tight, and not my colour. Nevertheless, after several photographic explorations, in which I interacted with the outfits, I did put the clothing on. But the materials offered too much freedom, they clung to my body, fitted my figure, and I could pose, more or less, at liberty. When wearing the attire, I posed in front of a mirror, within my own home, checking the details of my constructions against the original images. I also created some photographs where I didn't worry too much about the original compositions. However, in these explorations all sense of a meaningful connection to the transmission-based image evaporated.[135]

Art historian Lynn Gumpert, when writing about Cindy Sherman's art practice noted, 'pretending to be someone else provided a template for posing.'[136] Gumpert, was referring to the photographs Sherman made in the 1970s, 80s and 90s. These images depict Sherman in various guises, in a variety of scenes, adopting varying personae. In *Untitled Film Stills,* made between 1977 and 1980, the narratives that Sherman constructs are, according to critic and historian Shelly Rice 'floating in an existential void, as a fragment of a cinematic work that

[134] Ellen Sampson, 'The Cleaved Garment: The Maker, The Wearer and the "Me and Not Me" of Fashion Practice', *Fashion Theory*, 22:3, (2018), pp.341-360, (p.343), doi:10.1080/1362704X.2017.1366187.
[135] Please refer to the Appendix at the end of the thesis, to see early explorations.
[136] Lynn Gumbert, 'Introduction', in *Inverted Odysseys,* ed. Shelly Rice (London: Grey Art Gallery, New York University, Museum of Contemporary Art, MIT Press, 1999), pp.ix-xi, (p.ix).

does not exist.'[137] Indeed, Sherman's 'stills' cannot be traced to actual scenes from specific films. Her photographs evoke and suggest rather than refer to, and interpret, an original. In her 2023 work, Sherman uses digital manipulation and analogue collage, along with costuming and cosmetics to create a series of characters who pose, facially, for the portrait. According to Hauser and Wirth gallery website, Sherman's working process involves, 'photograph[ing] isolated parts of her body—her eyes, nose, lips, skin, hair, ears—which she cuts, pastes and stretches onto a foundational image, ultimately constructing, deconstructing and then reconstructing a new face.'[138] There is an element of bad Photoshop to these artworks, much like *Modelling Selfies,* as the resultant composites present mismatched, warped and exaggerated bodies. Similarly, Sherman's Instagram account presents the artist's face distorted by filters. A 2017 The New Yorker article claims Sherman uses Perfect365, a photo-editing application that allows users to retouch selfies to brighten and smooth skin, whiten teeth, reshape the face and enhance hair and make-up.[139] However, instead of editing her face to beautify and perfect, becoming flawless to adhere to norms of femininity, she transgresses the template, digitally stretching, pinching and warping her features. Her image-manipulations appear to explore how, in the digital era, we can alter or 'tune' our self/image with the technology we hold in our hands.[140] In a similar way to the *Untitled Film Stills*, what is depicted is invented. In *Modelling Selfies* my own imagination didn't provide a satisfactory template for posing. I needed something to refer to and follow, to direct my body.

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[137] Shelly Rice, *Inverted Odysseys,* London: Grey Art Gallery, New York University, Museum of Contemporary Art, MIT Press, 1999, p.7.
[138] 'Cindy Sherman', Hauser & Wirth, 2024 <https://www.hauserwirth.com/hauser-wirth-exhibitions/cindy-sherman/> [accessed 15 February 2024].
[139] Jason Farago, 'Cindy Sherman Takes Selfies (as only she could) on Instagram', *The New York Times,* 6 August 2017 <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/06/arts/design/cindy-sherman-instagram.html> [accessed 15 February 2024].
[140] I refer here to 'Facetune' a photo and video app for editing, enhancing and retouching selfies. Please see: https://www.facetuneapp.com/ [accessed 7 April 2024].

Figure 1.39. Cindy Sherman.
Untitled #661, 2023.
Gelatin silver print and chromogenic colour print.
101.6 x 78.7 cm / 40 x 31 inches.
© Cindy Sherman. Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth.

In the creation of *Modelling selfies (In Paper Outfits)*, I take my cue from Sadie Murdoch's 2015 artwork *Rrosebushwheels 2*. In this photograph Murdoch stands on a chequered floor, against a black backdrop, her face hidden by a black and white mask of rose petals. In a short piece of speculative writing on her art practice titled, *I Can See the Men Hidden in the Forest,* Murdoch articulates that the enlarged duplicated face covering is created from an image originally seen in a photograph of Sheila Legge made by Claude Cahun in Trafalgar Square.[141] Other historical references are utilised within this work. Again, Murdoch, in her written interpretation of her self-staged construction states that the images were drawn from 'gendered historical references.'[142] The image attached to her torso is a scaled-up image of a woman photographed by Man Ray, positioned alongside is part of Unica Zurn, reconfigured

[141] Sadie Murdoch, 'I Can See the Men Hidden in the Forest', *Journal of Visual Art Practice,* 16(3), pp.229-239, doi:10.1080/14702029.2017.1384914. On p.231 Murdoch lists the female figures, and the photographs used in *Rrosebushwheels 2*, 2015.
[142] Ibid.

by Hans Bellmer, Murdoch holds a replica of Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven's portrait of Duchamp - an assemblage of wine glass and feathers.[143]

A statement on The Stanley Picker Gallery website describes Murdoch's work as an ongoing exploration of 'the elision of women from narratives about modernism.'[144] It is Murdoch's method of part reenactment and part image-appropriation that inspired me to attach inkjet prints to my own body. I could see how the cut-outs would provide image-templates to guide my body, and how this would enable me, physically and photographically, to explore, adopt and reimagine the performative feminine identities contained within the marketplace images.

Figure 1.40. Sadie Murdoch.
Rrosebushwheels 2, 2015.
Giclée print on Hahnemühle Photo Rag. 112 x 74.5 cms.

[143] Ibid, I also utilise the writing of Elza Adamowicz, who in her 2019 book, *Dada Bodies: Between Battlefield and Fairground*, cites the female figures and photographs used in Sadie Murdoch's *Rrosebushwheels 2*, 2015. Eliza Adamowicz, *Dada bodies: Between battlefield and fairground,* Manchester*:* Manchester University Press, 2019.
[144] Sadie Murdoch, 'Stanley Picker Fellow 1990', Stanley Picker Gallery, 2007, <https://www.stanleypickergallery.org/fellowships/sadie-murdoch/> [accessed 15 October 2023].

Whilst Murdoch makes an outfit out of an amalgamation of replicated historical photographs, I create attire out of one image at a time. The action of making the 2D clothing is, for me, a process akin to pattern cutting. When I was a child, my mother made my clothes. At home, she would lay out the wafer-thin tracing-paper-like patterns on the living room floor, on top of the fabric she was using. She pinned the patterns to the cloth, before making slow and precise cuts around both materials, with dressmakers' shears. The patterns provided a template for her to follow. The edge of the seller's garment is where I make my incision. I cut around the dresses, jackets and shorts, creating paper fashion. In the early days of creating *Modelling Selfies*, I would discard the paper-outfits after I had used them. This act of cheaply manufacturing clothing, disposing of it after very little use and replacing it with new attire, mirrors fast fashion. Fast fashion fits within 'the pattern of abundance for 20th [and 21st] century living' as Geoff Dyer says.[145]

The fast within fashion refers to the manufacturing as well as use of clothes. They are quickly produced and sold, and then, as a survey commissioned by Barnardo's in 2019 revealed, often only worn once.[146] Fashion theorist Rebecca Earley is calling for a transformation of the fashion industry. She believes fast fashion won't go away thereby she would like materials such as paper to be used by fast fashion companies, she writes 'fast fashion could be paper, paper-like fabrics that you wear just a few times. You don't wash it, so you don't create a laundry impact, and it gets recycled in your domestic recycling.'[147] Paper takes around two to six weeks to decompose.[148]

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[145] In his book *Yoga For People Who Can't Be Bothered To Do It,* Geoff Dyer writes about the Model T Ford, he says that by 1925 nine thousand Model T Fords were being made each day. He then articulates, 'setting out the pattern for abundance for 20th century living.' See: Geoff Dyer, *Yoga for People Who Can't Be Bothered to Do It,* Edinburgh and London: Canongate, 2012, p.207.

[146] According to a survey undertaken by Barley Communications on behalf of Barnardo's, people in Britain spend £2.7 Billion on fashion that will only be worn once. For more see: 'Barley and Barnardo's The Fast Fashion Crisis', *Censuswide The Research Consultants,* n.d. <https://censuswide.com/censuswide-projects/barley-and-barnardos-the-fast-fashion-crisis-research/#:~:text=It%20found%20that%20Brits%20were,to%2024%2Dyear%2Dolds> [accessed 28 March 2024].

[147] 'Hybrid Talks: Why fast fashion needs to get ultra-fast', *Mistra Future Foundation*, February 2016 <http://mistrafuturefashion.com/why-fast-fashion-needs-to-get-ultra-fast/> [accessed 7 October 2023].

[148] Information on the decomposition time of paper is taken from: Rinkesh, 'How Long Does It Take For 60+ Common Items To Decompose?', *Conserve Energy Future*, *Be Green, Stay Green,* n.d.<https://www.conserve-energy-future.com/how-long-does-it-take-to-decompose.php> [accessed 7 October 2023].

In the 1960's, paper dresses were briefly on trend. Designed to be disposable, they featured bold graphic patterns. The Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) in London includes some of these outfits in their collection. Their website credits the invention of the paper dress to an American company, Scott Paper, who mass produced toilet tissues, baby wipes and other sanitary products. Paper dresses, according to V&A, cost $1.25 and were available from 1966 via mail order.[149]

Figure 1.41. Group of 1960s paper dresses in assorted prints hanging from a ceiling.
Paper Fashion Exhibition, Antwerp, Antwerpen, 2009.
Photograph by Carsten Titlbach. Author: locationsite.
Flickr user ID: 58451451@N06.
https://www.flickr.com/photos/58451451@N06/5366198803/
CC BY 2.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0>, via Wikimedia Commons.
This image has been cropped.

Designers such as Ossie Clark and Celia Birtwell launched what V&A describe as 'their own range of 'throwaways'.[150] V&A also notes, 'the 'no sew' nature of paper dresses made them a good fit for female consumers keen to reject the 'make do and mend' attitude of the previous generation.'[151] As I found with my own 2D outfits, the paper-dresses of the 1960s tore and creased. The paper dress trend ended when, as V&A state, 'high-street shops were able to

[149] 'Paper Dresses', V&A, 2024 <https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/paper-dresses> [accessed 7 October 2023].
[150] Ibid.
[151] Ibid.

compete by offering a quicker turnover of everyday fashions in materials that were cheap, relatively long lasting and far more wearable than cellulose.'[152] Until paper-clothing comes back into fashion, Barnardo's are encouraging people to choose pre-loved clothing, to keep materials out of the landfill, which is a harmful way of disposing of clothing, as toxins and gases are released as fabrics decompose.[153] Clothing from online fast fashion retailers such as PrettyLittleThing, Missguided and Shein appear in my selling site searches.

The act of attaching the paper clothes to my body reconnected me to my childhood: to Bunty's Cut Out Wardrobe.[154]

Figure 1.42. Bunty's Cut Out Wardrobe.
Bunty's Comic, Issue 1198, December 1980.

[152] Ibid.

[153] Please see, Daniel Wightman-Stone, 'Barnardo's calling on consumers to think "pre-loved"' *FASHIONUNITED,* 16 July 2019 <https://fashionunited.uk/news/fashion/barnardo-s-calling-on-consumers-to-think-pre-loved/2019071644271> [accessed 23 March 2024]; and Fashion production, consumption and disposal is hugely problematic, for more information on the impact, please see: Armanos Algamal, 'New Shocking Facts About The Impact of Fast Fashion On Our Climate', *Oxfam*, 28 August 2019 <https://www.oxfam.org.uk/oxfam-in-action/oxfam-blog/new-shocking-facts-about-the-impact-of-fast-fashion-on-our-climate/> [accessed 7 October 2023].

[154] Bunty was a children's comic and annual, I received the latter for Christmas during my childhood. It featured a paper cut out Bunty and a range of cut out paper clothes to attach to Bunty's body.

Bunty, a paper figure of a girl, and her cut out paper wardrobe were flaky and frustrating to play with, nevertheless I could temporarily lose my childhood self in the fantasy of playing dress-up. The tabs which attached the outfits to Bunty's body broke easily, and the garments shifted around on Bunty's frame, exposing her illustrated white skin and underwear.

Similarly, the paper clothing that I create will not stay positioned against my body, but I'm not looking for a perfect fit, it is not my desire to fool people into thinking I am wearing outfits made from dressmakers' materials. Rather, in the same way that Sadie Murdoch, in her black and white reenacted photographs of historical characters, allows us to note her flesh peeping through her body paint, I wanted people to become aware of the fixings, the tears, the misalignments, and the poor-quality surfaces of the paper against my body. For me, to borrow Murdoch's words, 'the flaws are an important part of the work.'[155] Like Murdoch, the curled-up paper edges, the uncovered skin and the uneasiness of my poses, bears out the different kinds of labour involved in producing the work.[156] This includes the cognitive effort of researching selfies and the creative labour of making image templates and the styling of rooms. It also involves the physicality of shapeshifting and shape-holding different poses.[157]

Bodily labour

Writers, Sarah Neely and Sarah Smith draw attention to the extraordinary amount of labour that multimedia artist, Rachel Maclean invests into her self-staged performances. In their essay *The Art of Maximal Ventriloquy: Femininity as Labour in the Films of Rachel MacLean,* they emphasise Maclean's level of investment by articulating how she is involved

[155] I draw here from a BBC Radio 4 Woman's Hour interview, discussing Charlotte Perriand, in which Sadie Murdoch says, 'the flaws are an important part of the work'. 'Charlotte Perriand', *Woman's Hour,* March 2007, BBC Radio 4 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/womanshour/03/2007_12_thu.shtml> [accessed 29 March 2023].
[156] In my framing I draw again from the BBC Radio 4 Woman's Hour interview with Sadie Murdoch, who speaks to her working process saying, 'as part of this process of 'faking it', there is a performative element, which manifests itself materially in the way in which the make-up smudges, wipes off and soils the clothing and props. A trace of the process of making the work, it points not just to the process of physically constructing the image but also to the way in which we leave traces behind us when we use things.' A transcript of the interview can be found here: Nigel Warburton, 'Interview: Sadie Murdoch on her Self-Portraits as Charlotte Perriand', *Art and Allusion,* 22 May 2007 <https://nigelwarburton.typepad.com/art_and_allusion/2007/05/could_you_descr.html> [accessed 29 March 2023].
[157] My thoughts here on the different types of labour found in my work are inspired by Murdoch's own observations of the labour invested within her own work, Ibid.

in every aspect of the production from the writing, directing and acting, to the making of costumes, props and the editing of her films.[158] Working predominantly with digital video, Maclean pushes things to an extreme in order to examine them. Indeed, her videos are hyper-real and over-saturated and include extravagant costumes and outlandish characters.[159] In Neely and Smith's words, '[o]ften the weird and wonderful array of characters played by Maclean invoke familiar pop cultural types. Always strikingly off-kilter, they enable her to excavate the saccharine surfaces of pop-culture in order to reveal the more grotesque and disturbing seam running beneath.'[160] Maclean also exerts herself in a physical way. I have noted that my legs, arms and neck often ache after photo-shoots, that is to say, moulding my body to approximate 'fitting into' paper dresses and holding poses that appropriate someone else's performance for the camera can be a physically uncomfortable experience, however this is really nothing compared to how Maclean exerts herself. Neely and Smith cite a passage from Rachel Maclean's blog, in which Maclean describes the intensive physical and mental process involved in creating the 2013 digital video, *Germs*. Maclean is quoted as writing:

> The 2-day shoot followed a manic and sleepless few days of costume and prop production, so I was pretty exhausted and confused. However, I just about managed to pull off an improvised dance routine in a life-size 'germ' costume, which was constructed using the contents of 2.5 double duvets. Consequently, the suit was so amazingly insulated that I was concerned I might pass out from heat exhaustion, so had to aim a fan into my face at intervals to cool down.[161]

The demands articulated above are in pursuit of transformation, a self-transformation into a character, a 'germ', with two blue legs and nine blue hands: four sticking out from her waist, two of which constitute her actual arms, and three protruding from her head. On her chest is a blue emoticon-like unhappy face, whilst her own face, painted blue, peers out of a thickly padded hood. Neely and Smith, whose essay synthesises Maclean's work with women's

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158 Sarah Neely and Sarah Smith, 'The Art of Maximal Ventriloquy: Femininity as Labour in the Films of Rachel Maclean', in *Women Artists, Feminism and the Moving Image: Contexts and Practices,* ed. Lucy Reynolds (London: IB. Tauris, 2019), p.170.

159 In my description of Maclean's work, I draw from Patrick Langley's Frieze Magazine article in which he writes, '[Maclean's work is] a Hogarthian satire of consumerism and corporate power, the film is replete with over-saturated colours, elaborate costumes and pantomime-style performances, creating a sickly, candy-coated fantasia in which everyone is 'too happy' yet nothing is quite what it seems.' Please see: Patrick Langley, 'In Focus: Rachel Maclean', *FRIEZE,* 13 February 2016 <https://www.frieze.com/article/focus-rachel-maclean> [accessed 7 October 2023].

160 Sarah Neely and Sarah Smith, 'The Art of Maximal Ventriloquy: Femininity as Labour in the Films of Rachel Maclean', in *Women Artists, Feminism and the Moving Image: Contexts and Practices,* ed. Lucy Reynolds (London: IB. Tauris, 2019), p.165.

161 Ibid. p.171.

labour in the digital economy, describe Mclean's practice as 'a kind of endurance test.'[162] Her endurances, as Neely and Smith highlight in their writing, recall the sometimes extreme and dangerous cosmetic surgeries and beauty procedures that women subject themselves to in the name of bodily self-transformation, to become, or be, 'living image'.[163]

Figure 1.43. Rachel Maclean.
Germs (still), 2013.
Digital video, 00.03.00 minutes (duration)

Neeley and Smith write, 'young women invest in sophisticated levels of what Elizabeth Wessinger refers to as 'glamour labour' and elsewhere Ana Sofia Elias, Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff refer to as 'aesthetic labour'.'[164] They go on to articulate how these terms speak to the kinds of normalised work undertaken on the surface of the body, and beyond, by women, in the name of self-improvement.

[162] Ibid.

[163] I borrow the term "living image" from Dawn Woolley, 'The Iconography of Disruptive Bodies: Social Media and Medical Identities', in *Bodies in Flux*, ed. Hanan Muzaffar and Barbara Braid (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2019), pp.9-35. On p.16. Wooley says: '[t]he desire to become a "living image" is encouraged in consumer culture'.

[164] Sarah Neely and Sarah Smith, 'The Art of Maximal Ventriloquy: Femininity as Labour in the Films of Rachel Maclean', in *Women Artists, Feminism and the Moving Image: Contexts and Practices,* ed. Lucy Reynolds (London: IB. Tauris, 2019), p.172.

They explain how neoliberal bodily labour places high regard on individual responsibility, personal choice and risk-taking, which are carried out to maximise bodily capital - the value attached to people's appearance.[165] As gender theorist Elizabeth Wessinger notes, 'it's the body work required for one's close-up, to make the physical self-match the public image of self as closely as possible.'[166] For Neely and Smith this bodily labour involves 'increasingly complex and time-consuming levels of personal styling and online self-representation.'[167]

Like Maclean, my attempts at shapeshifting to fit other forms brings attention to our image-obsessions and glamour/aesthetic labour. In her art practice, Maclean integrates what we might call a template of femininity. Amongst other things this includes subscribing to a colour palette of pinks, purples, blues, greens and yellows. Rather than adopting girly pastel shades, Maclean ramps up the saturation, and in doing so her visuals subvert the template. But that's not the only thing she subverts. She also co-opts cuteness, softens her visuals and adds luminosity to her footage, to make her imagery glow whilst appearing infantile. Her work explores the merging of childhood and adult worlds. It is her ability to bring together and present odd and oppositional states that draws me to her art practice.

Maclean's computer-generated imagery is slick, seamless and post-produced. My low-res renderings in which paper attire is attached to my body with sticky tape, in a makeshift setting, puts a divide between our practices. The bringing together of different states, albeit in a rudimentary way, offers a consideration of how once distinctly different surfaces are coalescing in the digital age.

Cultural theorist Meredith Jones argues human flesh and its on-screen representation is being brought into closer alignment. In her 2012 article *Cosmetic Surgery and the Fashionable Face,* Jones proposes that skin is being encouraged to take on screen-like properties: smooth,

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[165] The definition of the politics of appearance is set out in Ana Sofia Elias, Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff, *Aesthetic Labour: Rethinking Beauty Politics in Neoliberalism,* London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, which Sarah Neely and Sarah Smith draw upon, it is their discussion which has enabled my own understanding and articulation, please see: Sarah Neely and Sarah Smith, 'The Art of Maximal Ventriloquy: Femininity as Labour in the Films of Rachel Maclean', in *Women Artists, Feminism and the Moving Image: Contexts and Practices,* ed. Lucy Reynolds (London: IB. Tauris, 2019), p.172.

[166] Elizabeth Wessinger, 'Glamour Labour in the age of Kardashian in Critical Studies', *Fashion and Beauty*, 7(2), (2016), pp.141-152, doi:10.1386/csfb.7.2.141_1.

[167] Sarah Neely and Sarah Smith, 'The Art of Maximal Ventriloquy: Femininity as Labour in the Films of Rachel Maclean', in *Women Artists, Feminism and the Moving Image: Contexts and Practices,* ed. Lucy Reynolds (London: IB. Tauris, 2019), p.172.

flawless and luminous.[168] Citing Revlon's PhotoReady makeup campaign, Jones notes, 'PhotoReady makeup is not, as its name suggests, makeup that is designed to be suitable for photographing. Rather, it is makeup that promises its wearers they will look like photographs that have been digitally enhanced.'[169] Revlon is just one of many off the shelf brands that market products that hold the promise of image-manipulation software. Makeup, however, very quickly folds in, wears away and wipes off. To merge skin and screen, for a longer duration, women may choose to subject themselves to injections of Botox or dermal fillers, a practice which congeals parts of living flesh into statue-like rigidity, immobilisation and arrestation for three to six months. When these results of these cosmetic practices wear off, surgery can permanently reconfigure the flesh, morphing it into an image ideal. Indeed, those attending cosmetic surgery consultations are showing a new attitude to image-body relations.

According to surgeons Susruthi Rajanala et al, patients now seek cosmetic surgery hoping to look better in selfies and on social media.[170] In their article, *Selfies – Living in the Era of Filtered Photographs* published in the *Viewpoint* section of *JAMA Facial Plastic Surgery and Aesthetic Medicine*, Rajanala et al, claim Snapchat, along with other image altering applications, are redefining notions of what is real, and what is possible, at the surgeon's hands. 'Snapchat dysmorphia' as they call it, involves patients undergoing cosmetic surgery to approximate digitally filtered versions of themselves. They go on to say, patients once visited clinics requesting to look like images of celebrities, now they arrive with their heavily edited selfies, and ask to look like their 'face-tuned' images. They see this as 'an alarming trend because those filtered selfies present an unattainable look and are blurring the line of reality and fantasy for these patients.'[171] In their article, Rajanala et al highlight the profound tension between the image's surface and the fleshy body. The patients under discussion perceive their bodies as shifting sites, as potentials in progress, and their desire to recreate their bodies with a scalpel, to align with their photographic representation, exemplifies how

[168] Meredith Jones argues that skins and screens are now merging. She writes, 'I propose that there is a theoretical and an everyday movement towards each other, a coming together of skins and screens. 'Meredith Jones, 'Expressive Surfaces: The Case of the Designer vagina', *Theory, Culture and Society,* 34(7-8), (2017), pp. 29-50, (p.33), doi:10.1177/0263276417736592.
[169] Meredith Jones, 'Cosmetic Surgery and the Fashionable Face', *Fashion Theory,* 16(2), (2012), pp.193-210, (p.204), doi:10.2752/175174112X13274987924096.
[170] Susruthi Rajanala, Mayra B.C. Maymone and Neelam A. Vashi, 'Selfies – Living in the Era of Filtered Photographs', *JAMA Facial Plastic Surgery*, 20(6), (2018), pp.443-444, (p.443), doi:10.1001/jamafacial.2018.0486.
[171] Ibid.

we increasingly find ourselves operating between the registers of the two-dimensional and three-dimensional.

Bodies without heads

Similarly, artist, researcher and writer, Dawn Woolley, in her essay titled, *The Iconography of Disruptive Bodies: Social Media and Medical Identities,* examines the selfie from a medical perspective. Drawing from nineteenth century clinical photographs to online Pro-Ana[172] websites, blogs and selfies, her discussion centres on consumer culture and commodification to consider perceptions of the *fat* and the *thin* body and image in society. In her writing she refers to the 'look' of selfies on Pro-Ana websites noting how the subjects represent themselves in various stages of undress surrounded by objects that highlight the 'process of manufacture'.[173] There is parity here with the images I refer to within my own artworks, they too involve flesh, bodies, and the objects of getting ready. For Woolley, 'the hair clips, cosmetic bottles and clothes strewn across the floor provide a narrative of the construction of the body as an image […] and are signs that labour has taken place.'[174] Woolley sees these tools of 'normalised and everyday beauty work' as articulating more about the lives of the subjects than the bodies they present to the camera. Drawing upon Walter Benjamin, Woolley notes the objects 'produce the "profane glimmer" [that] makes the commodity phosphorescent bringing the illusion of the body to the viewers' attention, whilst reinforcing the body as a commodity fetish, that is to say, as having exchange value or use value.'[175] Woolley goes on to discuss the phenomenon of *thinspiration,* images that celebrate extreme thinness.[176] She notes how the body is frequently shown as decapitated without a head.

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[172] "Pro-Ana" meaning "Pro-Anorexia" and "Pro-Bulimia" or "Pro-Mia", refers to online content that implies eating disorders are a lifestyle choice, rather than symptoms of an illness.

[173] The phrase 'process of manufacture' is used by Dawn Woolley in her essay, please see Dawn Woolley, 'The Iconography of Disruptive Bodies: Social Media and Medical Identities', in *Bodies in Flux*, ed. Hanan Muzaffar and Barbara Braid (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2019), p.19.

[174] Ibid.

[175] Ibid.

[176] "Thinspiration" or "Thinsp" and even "Bonespiration" refers to online content such as blog posts, diet and exercise information, and inspirational messages that idealise the efforts to become extremely thin and maintain this aspiration.

In *Modelling Selfies (In Paper Outfits)* I often use bedroom and hallway mirrors, in tandem with camera angles, to cut up and cut through my body, rendering my representations headless. In doing this, I discovered how the women in the images I refer to, manoeuvre their bodies and cameras to create their images, and I began to feel socialised into certain ways of operating, interpreting and seeing my body. I noted how using a smartphone inevitably means the shape and bulk of the body becomes augmented by the camera's optics: in the foreground, hands grasping phones are depicted as oversized, whilst shoulders, buttocks and breasts bulge as the wide-angle lens disproportionately enlarges them. I also took note of how slicing through the body photographically offers the subject the feeling of anonymity.

For writer Ellie Howard, the obscuring of the face is a symbol of resistance. In her essay on how young women are encouraged to photograph themselves when they sell used clothes via the online marketplace Depop, she writes, 'the face is a symbol of refusal against the audience's gaze, the neoliberal gaze, that greedily desires to capture, identify categorise and then monopolise.'[177] Howard is concerned with the scrutiny of online consumers, and how the marketplace seller invites the gaze of potential buyers, to sell the item, but also refutes it by masking the face. Masks, crops, and the use of the 'camera to eclipse the moon of the face,' as Howard writes, is not the only way sellers avoid depicting their faces.[178] Heads are also scratched out, blocked out with coloured shapes, or replaced completely with emojis.

Obscured features and cropped heads redirect our eyes, and minds, away from the distraction of the face and notions of personhood to the clothes modelled by human figures as-mannequins. They also reduce the human figure to a commodity form: a surface. On Depop, eBay, Vinted and other online selling sites, the body is constructed as an advertising image to display and sell pre-owned clothing. Whilst in the *thininspiration* imagery Woolley refers to, missing heads not only anonymise the selfie-makers they also hide body shame, whilst simultaneously drawing attention to fetishised body parts, namely the contours of bones protruding underneath skin. On internet marketplaces bodies-without-heads can similarly be understood as a form of identity erasure yet in this instance this is to enable the imagining of fitting into, becoming or being, image. The removal of faces from photographs may also protect against identity theft. Ellie Howard, in an online interview about Depop sellers'

[177] Ellie Howard, 'Depop Worker' *Source Thinking Through Photography,* Autumn Issue #112, (October 2023), pp.24-25, (p.25), ISSN 1369-2224.
[178] Ibid.

images, articulates how personal data such as names and addresses, shared via marketplace transactions, could give thieves access to where sellers live. She also notes how the inclusion of one's portrait could offer thieves a visual form of ID to take and illegally use.[179]

Repeating images

The women in the imagery I refer to follow the familiar conventions of performing a reinterpretation of an amalgamation of feminine poses picked up from encounters with advertising imagery, fashion photography and pornography - arms on hips, chests pushed out, hips thrust - that is to say, they draw on sexiness as a resource. I see this kind of agentic sexual display, within these images, as performing the work of moving things along: this could be you, look no further, buy now, be this sexy in this outfit. Thereby, sexualised poses provide a template to follow for capital. Whilst image templates enable women to quickly perform images and participate in e-commerce they should not be thought of as fixed, reliable, or stable, as they glitch, re-tune and re-configure on screen, or, as in my own practice, become unstuck, tear and curl from the skin. Such ruptures reveal TMI[180] and the monstrous other, generating - and this could be for a split second as Snapchat recalibrates - misrecognition. The surprise of which instigates an undoing of the fabric of our self-perceptions and amplifies the gap between the recognised and unrecognisable, staying with us in our minds, giving us a sense of an edge, bearing out what philosopher Jean Luc Nancy calls 'a trembling on the edge of being.'[181] In other words, we can only know the limits of our own body and what lies beyond renders our imagined presentations of self at stake.

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[179] Ellie Howard, 'Source 112 Zoom Launch', online discussion with Richard West and Moira Lovell, *Source Thinking Through Photography,* 26 October 2023, [33 minutes 3 seconds] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=04F70QvRjXQ> [accessed 29 March 2024].

[180] TMI is an abbreviation for Too Much Information.

[181] Jean-Luc Nancy, 'Myth Interrupted', in *The Inoperative Community,* Jean-Luc Nancy (Chicago: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), pp.43-70, writes, 'it is a contact, it is a contagion: a touching, the transmission of a trembling on the edge of being, the communication of a passion that makes us fellows, or the communication of a passion to be fellows, to be in common (p.61). His words trace the spacing between bodies to expose the union and the unbordering of fact and fiction, in the generation of, and sharing of, myth. Nancy goes on to say, 'we understand ourselves and the world by sharing' (p.69). Nancy's discussion of myth is useful when considering digital avatars and online profiles as enabling the creation and curation of our own visual myths. My argument is that the myths we create, for online transmission, can be disrupted and shattered when we catch a glimpse of our glitched, untuned and unfiltered face. I have, many a time, forgotten that my phone-camera lens is facing towards me, as I quickly try to photograph something in front of me. When I realise my mistake, and view myself on screen, I struggle with the reality of what I'm presented with - an unfashioned, double chinned and crudely framed incomprehensible 'me'.

Cyberfeminist, Legacy Russell, in her book *Glitch Feminism* shows us through memoir, art and critical theory, that the faults and fissures of technology, the resultant mistaken identities, and the disregarded traces of ourselves are, in fact, an opportunity to create an endless chain of possible identities. For Russell, the 'glitch is all about traversing along edges and stepping to the limits, those we occupy and push through on our journey to define ourselves.'[182] The templates I follow for posing likewise permit the transgression of borders. In *Modelling Selfies*, flesh and paper, two-dimensional and three-dimensional, online, and offline, self and other, are brought together, digital becomes analogue, then digital again. The image reconfigured can never be returned to its original form. The pulse of this image-remix can likewise be located in photography's ability to 'mechanically reproduce'[183] which, to quote image philosopher Daniel Rubinstein 'should not be understood as a simple duplication that produces identical results, but as a creative force capable of creating difference through repetition.'[184] Photography, for Rubinstein, has two dimensions to it, these are, as he notes, 'the repetition of an event or thing that photography repeats by making it into an image and there is the repetition inherent in the photographic process itself which allows the photograph to be endlessly repeated through duplication and dissemination.'[185] He continues:

> Photography is a technology [and] technology implies the ability to repeat something, to make something come again […] endlessly bringing to the eye past events, distant sights, remote happenings in a succession of images […] or the same technology can be perceived as a way of making visible a force for constant renewal, a possibility of different temporality in which things don't have to be the same over and over again.[186]

Rubenstein's 'rhythms of repetition'[187] when directed towards photographic posing templates and considered via Russell's *Glitch Feminism*, generates limitless opportunities to mutate, transform and reconfigure ourselves through our self/images - quite literally enabling the fitting of new forms.[188] My work not only explores the freedom of being able to put on different identities or stitch together different possibilities of self, but it also draws a focus

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[182] Legacy Russell, *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto,* London and New York: Verso, 2020, p.22.
[183] Daniel Rubinstein, 'Photography as the Aesthetic Determination of Difference' (doctoral thesis, Birmingham City University, 2013) <https://ualresearchonline.arts.ac.uk/id/eprint/9493/1/590570.pdf> [accessed 26 March 2024], p.16 -17.
[184] Ibid.
[185] Ibid.
[186] Ibid, p.54.
[187] Ibid.
[188] Ibid, Rubinstein uses the phrase 'rhythms of repetition' on, p.12.

towards the restrictiveness of following a particular image-pattern. In *Modelling Selfies (In Paper Outfits)* I reenact poses that amplify femininity.

Exaggerated in form, there are similarities between the paper bodies I work in relation to, and the trans drag personae of artist 單Sin 慧Wai 乾Kin. Legacy Russell writes 'Sin's drag personae remain pointedly high femme, the different selves they perform underscoring the socio-cultural production of exaggerated femininity as gendered trope, ritual, and exercise.'[189] She goes on, 'Sin's costumery is replete with breast and buttock inserts, a sumptuous wig, make-up painted with vivid artistry and a sweeping gown that glitters […] an evocative, mesmeric cocktail […] cabaret […] burlesque […] Hollywood glamour - all with a dash of Jessica Rabbit.'[190] Russell positions this assortment of body parts, performances and personae as 'a striking reminder that the production of gender is, at best, an assemblage.'[191] She also describes 單Sin 慧Wai 乾Kin's Instagram presence as having semblance with a YouTube video make-up tutorial in that they, 'deliberately expose the seams of their gender prep by sharing video and photographs of what would be labor left unseen.'[192] This disclosure of the 'process of manufacture'[193] takes us back to the Pro-Ana and *Thinspiration* images Dawn Woolley discusses, as well as the prosumer imagery I appropriate and reenact. The online performances of 單Sin 慧Wai 乾Kin, the women who feature in the selling selfies and Woolley's subject matter, in this way expose, as Russell puts it 'the pure trickery of gender as a drag-act.'[194]

[189] Legacy Russell, *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto,* London and New York: Verso, 2020, p.56.
[190] Ibid, p.58.
[191] Ibid.
[192] Ibid.
[193] As already discussed, the phrase 'process of manufacture' is used by Dawn Woolley in her essay, please see, Dawn Woolley, 'The Iconography of Disruptive Bodies: Social Media and Medical Identities', in *Bodies in Flux*, ed. Hanan Muzaffar and Barbara Braid (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2019), p.19.
[194] Ibid.

Figure 1.44. 單Sin 慧Wai 乾Kin.
A View from Elsewhere, Act 1 Part 1, Tell me everything you saw, and what you think it means, 2018, film still.

Figure 1.45. A screenshot from 單Sin 慧Wai 乾Kin*'s* Instagram dated 21 May 2019.

Philosopher, writer and curator Paul B. Preciado argues 'virtual explorations of gender […] [are] forms of transvestism: cross-dressing, Internet drag.'[195] Whilst the digital, for Legacy Russell 'gives us the capacity to perform different selves - quite literally putting them on, and taking them off, as we grow with or away from them.'[196] This notion of dressing and undressing is, for Preciado, and Russell, who also quotes Preciado, proof that, 'gender is not simply and purely performative [as Judith Butler conceptualised] gender is first and foremost prosthetic.[197] Gender as prosthesis is an interesting proposition in light of my own photographic works in which I attach another body to my own. Prosthesis suggests the connection of two formerly separate entities, a conjoining that intends to enable, but is simultaneously liberating and limiting. It also suggests techno-hybridity, a cyborg, a feminist symbol of a utopian post-gendered world, unrestricted by normative concepts, which is not borne out in the images that I draw upon.[198] Instead, these images point to the appeal of stylised, sexualised and glamorised photographs of the female body, reinforcing norms of femininity, in yet another space of, and for, consumption. My image-appropriations are an abstracted and compromised duplication of the original image where the transformative process of taking images offline, making them analogue, and then returning them to the digital, renders them 2D and lifeless, without their original appeal and charm. This is in stark contrast to 單Sin 慧Wai 乾Kin's personae who appear highly polished and otherworldly. In my artworks, the copy, in its reconstructed state, becomes the opposite of the fantasy, and we see the flat and pixelated reality of the pose.

Embracing the image of another

In the artworks *Covers*, created between 2008 - 2020, and *Lounging,* 2017-2020, artist Harold Offeh uses other people's images as templates for posing. Through live performance, video

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[195] Paul B. Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto,* New York: Columbia Press, 2018, p.36.

[196] Legacy Russell, *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto,* London and New York: Verso, 2020, p.108.

[197] Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex,* New York, Routledge, 1993, p.2, posits gender as an 'iterative and citation practice in that it repeats and references social norms.' For a detailed discussion of gender as a repeated performance, also see: Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity,* New York, Routledge, 1990; and Legacy Russell, *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto,* London and New York: Verso, 2020, p.108 quotes Paul B. Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto,* New York: Columbia Press, 2018, p.37.

[198] Donna Haraway, 'A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century', in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women, The Reinvention of Nature,* Donna Haraway (New York, Routledge, 1991) [orig.1985], p.149-181.

and photographs, Offeh reenacts black musicians' album cover art from the 1970s and 1980s. In an interview with Minor Literature[s], Offeh states, '[during this period] people were saying we're not going to be framed by old ways of seeing (and thinking about how they want to represent themselves). About what identities they were going to embrace and formulate.'[199] In the art pieces that comprise *Covers*, Offeh embodies and repeats the poses of artists such as Betty Davis and Funkadelic, in a variety of spaces, some domestic and others not. In *Graceful (Arabesque 2) wide angle,* 2008, Offeh holds an arabesque pose that approximates a posture performed by Grace Jones on her album cover for *Island Life*, released in 1985. The space surrounding Offeh is that of the home. A bathroom, complete with a white porcelain toilet and towels hung on the back of a door, can be seen to the left of his reenactment. To the right, kitchen cupboards, a work surface and washed dishes are depicted.

Figure 1.46. Harold Offeh.
Graceful (Arabesque 2) wide angle, 2008.
Photograph.

[199] Yvette Greslé, 'Harold Offeh: Performing Covers', *Minor Literatures[s],* 21 January 2014 <https://minorliteratures.com/2014/01/21/harold-offeh-performing-covers/> [accessed 29 March 2023].

In the works that constitute *Lounging* Offeh extends *Covers,* this time his focus turns to black male singers who are depicted as leaning back or lying horizontally for their portrait. In his live performances, Offeh reclines as per the demands of the original photograph and embodies the pose for the duration of the performance. He does this to the soundtrack of a song taken from the album his artwork responds to.

A description of Offeh's practice on Project Arts Centre's website describes the artist as, 'examin[ing] the impact and power of bodies holding space and time and how artists and activists have used this as forms of visibility and resistance.'[200] The statement opens with the quote, 'to strike a pose is to pose a threat' which is attributed to art critic and activist Craig Owens.[201] Owens in his writing on posing, draws upon the words of Dick Hebdige, who previously used a version of the phrase to describe punk women who, through their dress and behaviour, challenged the status quo.[202] As Hebdige wrote, '[the women were] transforming the fact of being under scrutiny into the pleasures of being watched.'[203] Posing, for Offeh, and the musicians he refers to, is a form of self-expression and empowerment that can present a threat to power relations. *In Modelling Selfies (In Paper Outfits)* I strike a pose and take up space. Similar to Offeh, I respond to, embody, and inhabit existing representations, transforming them through reenactment. Unlike Offeh, who draws upon the iconic poses of celebrities, I recreate stances held by ordinary women for their everyday DIY digital image making practices.

For art historian Rebecca Schneider, some forms of reenactment enable 'the past [to be] tried on like a piece of clothing.'[204] She clarifies, 'here participants are encouraged to "get the feel", but not actually to *become*, or become overcome with the past.'[205] In my reenactments, I don an article of paper clothing to trace and approximate past events rather than exactly

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[200] 'Strike A Pose - Harold Offeh Performance Workshop', *Project Arts Centre*, 2020 <https://projectartscentre.ie/event/strike-a-pose-harold-offeh-performance-workshop/> [accessed 29 March 2023].
[201] Craig Owens, *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture,* LA & London: University of California Press, 1992, p.202.
[202] Dick Hebdige, writes 'they are playing with the only power at their disposal - the power to discomfit, the power, that is, to pose […] to pose a threat.' Please see: Dick Hebdige, 'Posing... Threats, Striking... Poses: Youth, Surveillance, and Display', *SubStance*, 11(4), (1982), pp.68–88, (p.85), doi:10.2307/3684181.
[203] Ibid, p.86.
[204] Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment,* New York: Routledge, 2011, p.13.
[205] Ibid.

restage what went before. Offeh's photographs have been useful to me, specifically when considering how much of the selling site images I will represent. Instead of constructing a set within my own home that replicates what is seen in the women's photographs, I create a scene that offers up more of my life. In the Contextual Review of this thesis, I refer to Rebecca Schneider's ideas around the temporisation of the reenacted performance. Schneider's words evoke a visual in which reenactors reach across time and space to bring prior events into close contact, in the present. Schneider highlights the interconnected nexus of reenactment, which for me includes bodies, images, situations and the phygital. This kind of relational working - that is, utilising, responding to, and making something new from that which was initially created by someone else, challenges the notion that the artist is the only person involved in producing their creative outputs.

Curator and art critic Nicolas Bourriaud in his essay *Postproduction: Culture as Screenplay: How Art Reprogrammes the World,* moves beyond what he calls 'an ideology of ownership'[206] towards ideas of collective and relational working.[207] His writing is a response to artists who utilise the already existing, Bourriaud writes:

> These artists who insert their own work into that of others contribute to the eradication of the distinctions between production and consumption, creation and copy, readymade and original work. The material they manipulate is no longer *primary.* It is no longer a matter of elaborating a form on the basis of a raw material but working with objects that are already in circulation on the cultural market, which is to say, objects already *informed* by other objects. Notions of originality (being the origin of) and even of creation (making something from nothing) are slowly blurred in this new cultural landscape marked by the twin figures of the DJ and the programmer, both of whom have the task of selecting cultural objects and inserting them into new contexts.[208]

In *Modelling Selfies,* I insert someone else's work into my own. My resultant images refer to a practice of relational working i.e. responding to and extending photographs made by another, they explicitly depict a montage or assemblage of connected forms.

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[206] Nicolas Bourriaud, 'Postproduction, Culture as Screenplay: How Art Reprogrammes the World', New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2002, p.6.
[207] Bourriaud's theory is also discussed in the Contextual Review of this thesis.
[208] Nicolas Bourriaud, 'Postproduction, Culture as Screenplay: How Art Reprogrammes the World', New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2002, p.8.

Like *Modelling Selfies*, Dawn Woolley's 20017/8 photographic series *The Substitute* also features printed paper cut-outs of the female form. Unlike my work, where I appear physically and other people's bodies are seen as paper duplicates, in each of her photographs Woolley is depicted as a flat paper duplicate rather than her physical self. Her body is seen alongside a man, who embraces her image, Woolley's substitute does not, and cannot return his hold.[209] According to her website, 'the photographic cut-out is [a] metaphor for the lure of the edited, idealised and sexualised images of the female body that dominate our visual culture: they produce unrealistic expectations of how bodies should be, and when we judge our own and other people's bodies against these impossible standards, we can only be disappointed.'[210] The paper figures that I attach to my body in *Modelling Selfies (In Paper Outfits)* can also be understood as substitutes, used to conceal parts of my own body, revealing, or being replaced by parts of other women's figures. My self-portraits depict uneasy poses as a result of moulding and holding my body to fit the paper templates, which makes visible the impossibility of obtaining or maintaining a desired image. I will return to the notion of trying to live up to a fantasy image, in Chapter Three.

[209] Here I refer to Dawn Wolley's description in Lens Culture Magazine, where she is quoted as saying '…in each photograph a man embraces a cut-out of a female form and seems satisfied with a woman that has no substance and cannot reciprocate his embrace. 'The Substitute', *Lensculture,* n.d. <https://www.lensculture.com/articles/dawn-woolley-the-substitute> [accessed 12 October 2023].

[210] My description of Dawn Woolley's *The Substitute* is fashion from a short artist's statement found on Woolley's website, which reads: 'In the work I create a photographic copy of myself and place it in the real world instead of me. The photographic cut-out is my metaphor for the lure of the edited, idealised, and sexualised images of the female body that dominate our visual culture: they produce unrealistic expectations of how bodies should be, and when we judge our own and other people's bodies against these impossible standards, we can only be disappointed. This statement can be found via: Dawn Woolley, 'The Substitute', 2022 <https://www.dawnwoolley.com/the-substitute> [accessed 7 November 2020].

Figure 1.47. Dawn Woolley.
The Substitute (holiday, Majorca), 2007.
C-type print.

The rhythm of my working process - the researching and finding of images, the enlarging and duplicating of forms, the tracing out of shapes, the fitting of figures, the performing of a flattened image as a template for posing for the next image, to give definition to its surface, breaking its eternal compression - not only discloses how the body can be imagined and re-imagined, it also shows us that there is always more work to be done on the body for the image. This work is bound up with the requirements of the status quo, which imposes particular rules to follow, within the confines of a limited language of attractiveness, that women are continually required to research, mirror, perform, perfect - and learn.

Chapter Two

Learning as a Template for Being

Visual prompts

In *Pronouncing Prune* or indeed any of the videos that comprise this series of artwork, I sit alongside a speech coach who helps me say the words "prune", "prawn", "sausage" and "cheese".[211] With the trainer's guidance, encouragement and intervention, I practise these words, using typographical prompts (graphemes), over and over, softer and louder, broken down into distinct units of sound (phonemes), and put back together using literacy and language techniques (Fred Talk,[212] Fred Fingers[213] and Special Friends[214]). Graphemes, phonemes, Fred Talk, Fred Fingers and Special Friends are used in UK primary schools as part of the Read Write Inc (RWI) phonics programme.[215] Developed by Ruth Miskin, a former teacher and government advisor on literacy teaching, the RWI scheme offers a structured approach for acquiring the skills to read, comprehend and write the English language.[216] Utilising Miskin's pedagogy, the speech coach I work with, whose name is Sue Holling, gently guides me, offering praise and constructively correcting my efforts. The pedagogy that RWI fits within is framed around theories and practices of a 'bottom-up' model of how children learn to read, which suggests a child should start with the most basic units of text. In the UK children begin to read and write by mastering what individual sounds and groups of letters make, before working their way up to grasping whole words and texts. Following the bottom-up theory of reading, approaching a text by breaking it down into graphemes, the English language takes on the form of written symbols which serve as stimuli for identification, knowledge and recall.

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[211] See Chapter Three: *The Image as the Object on the Horizon* for a detailed account of these terms, which are sounded out in portrait photography to help create a particular kind of facial expression.
[212] In the classroom, a puppet called Fred the Frog is often used to help children pronounce phonemes and spell words. To aid learning and teaching, the frog can only speak in sounds rather than whole words. Sue doesn't use a toy frog with her adult learners, instead she encourages the use of fingers. Looking at one's own fingers, enables the visualisation of each sound of the word on a single finger.
[213] Fred fingers are used to spell. In our exchange Sue asks me to hold up the right number of fingers to help me sound out the word I am spelling, for example P-R-U-N-E equals five fingers.
[214] Special Fingers are a combination of two or three letters that represent one sound. For example, UNE.
[215] 'Read Write Inc. Phonics: A Guide for Parents', *Oxford Owl,* 2023 <https://home.oxfordowl.co.uk/reading/reading-schemes-oxford-levels/read-write-inc-phonics-guide/> [accessed 10 November 2023].
[216] Further information about Ruth Miskin's can be found via: 'Read Write Inc. Phonics', *Ruth Miskin Training*, 2022 <https://www.ruthmiskin.com/> [accessed 10 November 2022].

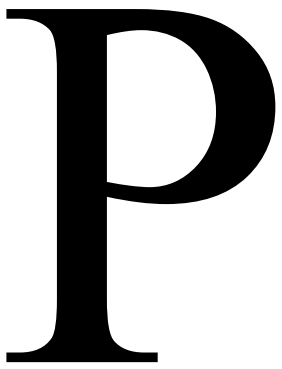

Figure 2.1. The phoneme “P " is presented on the page as a grapheme.

r

Figure 2.2. The phoneme “r” is presented on the page as a grapheme.

une

Figure 2.3. The phoneme “une” is presented on the page as a grapheme.

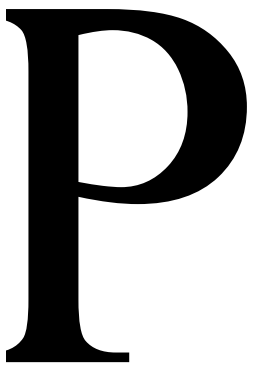

Figure 2.4. The phoneme “P” is presented on the page as a grapheme.

r

Figure 2.5. The phoneme “r” is presented on the page as a grapheme.

aw

Figure 2.6. The phoneme “aw” is presented on the page as a grapheme.

n

Figure 2.7. The phoneme “n” is presented on the page as a grapheme.

Figure 2.8. The phoneme “Ch” is presented on the page as a grapheme.

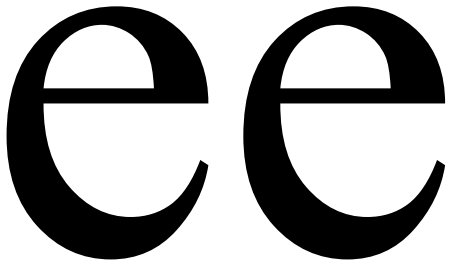

Figure 2.9. The phoneme “ee” is presented on the page as a grapheme.

Figure 2.10. The phoneme “se” is presented on the page as a grapheme.

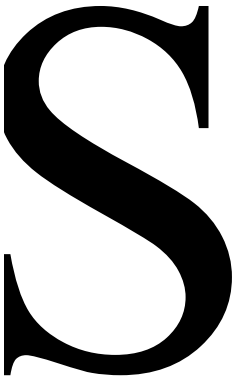

Figure 2.11. The phoneme “S” is presented on the page as a grapheme.

au

Figure 2.12. The phoneme “au” is presented on the page as a grapheme.

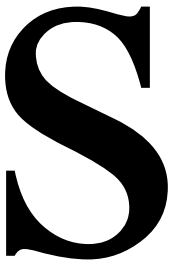

Figure 2.13. The phoneme “s” is presented on the page as a grapheme.

Figure 2.14. The phoneme “age” is presented on the page as a grapheme.

RWI, as a teaching method, enables learners to decode the written word.[217] The words "prune", "prawn", "cheese" and "sausage" when broken down into graphemes serve as visual prompts. Thereby, shapes, spaces, links and dots become patterns for recognising and understanding the phonemes that are made when words are pronounced. Or to put it another way, the written symbols **P** and **R** as well as **UNE** and so on, are used as modes of deconstruction: which make sensible the structures of language that comprise this set of words, that have been identified as verbal templates for posing. This could be compared to the paper cut-outs discussed in Chapter One, which also work to direct the body to move/pose in a certain way to fit into a pattern for being. Eva Stenram's image-appropriations similarly use fragmented forms. For her however, the fragment is used to - and I paraphrase Stenram here - recognise the body, as image, as changeable and constructed.[218]

Figure 2.15. Eva Stenram.
Part 3, 2013, gelatin silver print.

[217] My knowledge of 'bottom-up' and 'top-down' teaching methods is drawn from: 'Bottom Up', *British Council, Teaching English*, n.d. <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/professional-development/teachers/knowing-subject/c/bottom> [accessed 10 November 2022]; and 'Top Down', *British Council Teaching English*, n.d. <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/professional-development/teachers/knowing-subject/t-w/top-down> [accessed 10 November 2022].

[218] Eva Stenram in an interview for Photoworks Magazine states 'A lot of artists are currently engaged in ideas around disembodiment. It's perhaps a move towards the recognition of the body as pure image, constructed, fleeting, changeable and in bits', this quote can be found at: Interview with Eva Stenram (2016) Watch, Listen, Read Photoworks. Available at: https://photoworks.org.uk/interview-eva-stenram/ [accessed 10 November 2022].

In her 2013 series *Parts*, black and white vintage pin-up photographs are altered by the artist. Using digital means, Stenram removes the original sitter's body, leaving only a leg within the image. The remaining limb is always situated in a domestic interior, positioned on a well-made bed, living room furniture or plush rug. The image-manipulations are both absurd and unsettling, and our attention is directed to not only what is present, but also what is absent in the image. *Drapes*, 2011-13, likewise involves the digital appropriation of vintage pin-up photographs. This time however, rather than cutting out the women's bodies, Stenram covers them up by digitally extending the surrounding soft furnishings, leaving only a leg (and sometimes arms and/or hands). Again, through the act of concealment something is revealed: namely my very gaze - I become acutely aware of looking.

Figure 2.16. Eva Stenram.
Drape VII, 2013, gelatin silver print.

In an article titled *Modes of Fabrication*, published in Aesthetica Magazine, Stenram notes, 'I investigate how we look - by diverting the viewer's gaze, removing the overt sexual content.'[219] In another interview, this time with Photoworks Magazine, she is quoted as saying, 'A lot of my work could be said to celebrate the viewer's imagination - what each viewer imagines will perhaps always be more interesting than what was originally present in the photograph.'[220] Her manipulations create, for me, a kind of visual illusion or afterimage - something that continues to appear in the eyes, and imagination, after the removal of the stimulus, in this case the women's sexual display. It is the very erasure of stimulus - the explicit, attention-grabbing sexual display - that makes me aware of my gaze; its exclusion also softens or quietens the image.

In 1919, just short of a hundred years before Stenram made *Drapes* and *Parts*, Dadaist Hannah Höch created the photomontage *Cut With The Kitchen Knife Dada Through the Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch of Germany*. The artwork presents a chaotic collection of repurposed images and texts drawn from sources such as newspapers and magazines. Speaking to the moment it was created - Weimar Germany during the interwar years - the artwork depicts bits of machinery, disembodied heads, bodies with faces and buildings punctuated with words. The work's title nods to DIY modes of image making. Yet the choice of cutting tool - the kitchen knife - specifically belongs to the domestic space of the kitchen, traditionally a place of women's work and women's oppression. The domestic implement is an apt reference for an artwork that draws a focus towards the socially constructed roles of women. Höch also pasted a map of Europe to the bottom right corner of the work, which served to highlight the counties in which women, at the time, were able to vote.[221]

The word 'cut', which features in Höch's title, has been conceptualised by new media theorists, Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylinska, as 'a creative in-cision that is also a de-cision, because it gives shape to the world; it makes it into this or that.'[222] When Höch, Stenram or

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[219] Rachel Segal Hamilton, 'Modes of Fabrication', *Aesthetica,* n.d. <https://aestheticamagazine.com/modes-of-fabrication/> [accessed 10 November 2022].
[220] 'Interview: Eva Stenram', *Photoworks,* 2016 <https://photoworks.org.uk/interview-eva-stenram/> [accessed 10 November 2022].
[221] Brian Dillon, 'Hannah Höch: art's original punk', *The Guardian*, 2014 <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2014/jan/09/hannah-hoch-art-punk-whitechapel> [accessed 23 February 2023].
[222] Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylinska, *Life After New Media: Mediation as a Vital Process,* Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2012, p.88.

Sue, cut representations they create fragments as a result of this operation. Removed from its original context and meaning the fragment becomes detached and isolated yet offers the possibility of new connections and reconfiguration. Carefully juxtaposed alongside other fragments - other images and/or letters - Höch, Stenram, and Sue show us how visual representations and words can be adapted, reorganised, reimagined, and translated, to create new configurations.

Figure 2.17. Hannah Höch.
Cut With The Kitchen Knife, 1919,
Collage.

Courtesy of Neue Nationalgalerie, Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz zu Berlin
Photograph of the work by: Jörg P. Anders

In my videos, in which I work with a speech coach, the impetus for adaptation, reconfiguration, and translation is not presented within a collage, like Stenram or Höch, or a selfie-image, as in the marketplace images and *Modelling Selfies (In Paper Outfits)*. Rather what is depicted is a document of a performance of a pedagogical encounter. Unlike the other to-camera performances presented as part of this research project, I am not performing for the lens, instead I perform for my teacher. During our teacher and learner, tutee and tutor exchanges, or indeed lessons, I am being taught how to speak the language of selfie-making or to put it another way, I am being provided with a template for being, in advance of the image.

Figure 2.18. Moira Lovell
Pronouncing Prune, 2020.
*D*igital video still.

In the performances, I am preparing or rehearsing for the portrait. I am, in this sense, in selfie-training. The exercises that Sue supports me with enable me to internalise the verbal templates for posing, to ultimately create an alleged external image ideal. There is something similar at stake in Eleanor Antin's 1972 artwork *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture*. An art piece for which the artist followed a diet plan, documenting her body, via a series of unclothed full-length photographs, taken from four repeated angles, until the desired weight and aesthetic-ideal was reached. The resultant one hundred and forty eight black and white

photographs, presented in thirty seven vertical columns - to correspond to the number of days she restricted food - refers to, according to the Henry Moore Foundation, classical figurative sculpture.[223] Such sculptures, as the Henry Moore Foundation explains, were fashioned from marble, and created through a process that involved chiselling away at, and smoothing, the surface of rock, over a period of time, until the idealised form was created.[224] Antin however, presented her own fleshy body as a work in progress. Through her photographs we can see her working process: her female form is shaped, or rather carved, from within, for a desired external aesthetic.[225]

Figure 2.19. Eleanor Antin.
Carving: A Traditional Sculpture, 1972, gelatin silver prints and text panel.
© Eleanor Antin, all rights reserved. Courtesy Richard Saltoun Gallery.
Detail of installation, 'Eleanor Antin: 'CARVING: A Traditional Sculpture',
28.09.2016 - 03.01.2017, Henry Moore Institute, Leeds, UK.
Image courtesy of the Henry Moore Foundation. Photo: Jerry Hardman-Jones.

[223] Information drawn from: Tom Folland, 'Eleanor Antin, Carving: A Traditional Sculpture', *Khan Academy*, n.d. <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/art-1010/conceptual-and-performance-art/conceptual-performance/a/eleanor-antin-carving-a-traditional-sculpture> [accessed 13 February 2023]; and Eleanor Antin, 'Carving: A Traditional Sculpture', *The Henry Moore Foundation,* 2016 <https://webarchive.henry-moore.org/hmi/exhibitions/eleanor-antin-carving-a-traditional-sculpture> [accessed 13 February 2023].
[224] Ibid.
[225] Ibid.

Both Antin's artworks, and my own, draw attention to the bodily labour undertaken by women in order to follow conventions of femininity. *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture* takes a particular look at femininity and thinness, underscoring the painstaking efforts women undertake to lose weight and actively reshape their bodies. Whilst Antin charts her weight loss over time, I participate in, and record, an educational situation to follow a curriculum that controls gendered bodily practices.

Learning and teaching to transgress

In 2011, artist and writer Felicity Allen edited the Whitechapel/MIT Press publication, *Education.* In the introduction, she uses the phrase 'hidden curriculum'. Within her writing she draws upon *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, a story by philosopher Jacques Rancière, and *Deschooling Society* by radical thinker Ivan Illich, to examine the notion of a 'hidden curriculum' underpinning educational structures.[226] Quoting Illich, Allen notes 'many students […] intuitively know what the schools do for them. They school them to confuse process and substance.'[227] In contrast, 'hidden curriculum' for artist Annette Krauss - who Allen also refers to in her writing - is 'everything you can learn outside of and alongside the official school curriculum and the way we learn from one another.'[228] *Hidden Curriculum* is also the title of a community project that took place between 2012 and 2013 during which Annette Krauss collaborated with the Whitechapel Gallery, London and pupils from two East London schools.

The outcome of the collaboration was the creation of a series of participatory video works, that explore, as Krauss writes, 'the unwritten rules that govern institutions (gallery/school) and how unseen structures direct the ways we behave and look at the world, pointing to the transformative potential of (un)learning everyday routines.'[229] The children who took part in Krauss's project are depicted running riot in an art gallery: hiding within, and climbing on,

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[226] Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster,* Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1991, [orig. 1987]; and Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society,* London: Pelican Books, 1978 [orig. 1971].
[227] Felicity Allen, *Education: Documents of Contemporary Art*, London: Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press, 2011, p.15.
[228] 'Annette Krauss Hidden Curriculum', *Whitechapel Gallery*, 2012 <https://www.whitechapelgallery.org/project/201213-annette-krauss-hidden-curriculum/> [accessed 13 February 2023].
[229] Ibid.

the fabric of the building, which presents a seemingly deregulated pedagogical approach - something Felicity Allen claims Ivan Illich called for, in his writing.[230]

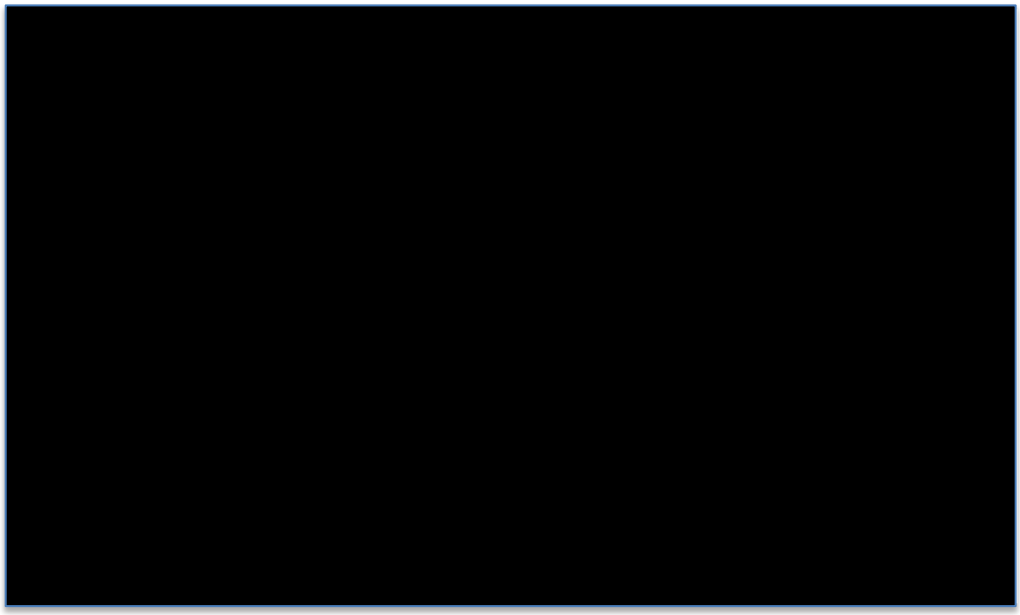

Figure 2.20. Annette Krauss.
Hidden Curriculum (still), 2012-13.
Series of video works.
<https://www.whitechapelgallery.org/project/201213-annette-krauss-hidden-curriculum/> [accessed 20 January 2024].

Likewise, sculptor Eva Rothschild was commissioned by the Whitechapel Gallery to make a work that engaged a young audience. In a similar way to Krauss, Rothschild invited children into the gallery space. However, in these works, Rothschild recorded a group of boys interacting with her own artworks. The boys, all between the ages of 6 and 12, initially walked around sculptural forms within a white cube space, gazing at their height, spacing and shape.[231] This interaction soon shifts and looking becomes touching, and their touch, in one case, leads to a sculpture falling apart. The kids wholly embrace the opportunity to pick up the pieces but instead of reconstructing the sculpture or finding a gallery assistant to report the incident to, they kick or throw the ball-like sculptural elements. That's to say, they engage in play.

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[230] Felicity Allen, *Education: Documents of Contemporary Art*, London: Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press, 2011, p.15.
[231] Information about the children's ages, the commission and the video-work can be found here: 'Children's Commission 2012: Eva Rothschild, Boys and Sculpture', *Whitechapel Gallery*, 2012 <https://www.whitechapelgallery.org/exhibitions/childrens-art-commission-eva-rothschild-boys-and-sculpture/> [accessed: 13 February 2023].

Psychoanalyst Donald W. Winnicott conceptualises children's play as not just recreation and enjoyment, but as an important coping mechanism.[232] Furthermore, educationalist Rudolf Steiner, founder of Steiner Waldorf schools, promotes a curriculum that focuses on play, notably with objects that are fashioned from natural materials, with organic forms and minimal features.[233] Routine is important in the Steiner learning environment, it is thought to set up habits, help students learn and retain information, whilst offering a sense of security.[234] Following Steiner and Winnicott's lines of thought, I propose that the children in Krauss's and Rothschild's works are using play to learn, as a tool for developing resilience to orientate themselves with, or negotiate the situation.

Figure. 2.21. Eva Rothschild.
Boys and Sculpture (still), 2012.
Video, 00:24:39 minutes (duration).

Both Rothschild and Krauss's video works of children in the art-space make visible the template that we should follow when interacting with art within art institutions. Seeing the

[232] In his 1971 book *Playing and Reality* Donald Winnicott considers transitional objects and obsessive behaviours. On pages 11-13 he discusses a patient who repeatedly licked things, made repetitive throat noises and played obsessively with a piece of string. Winnicott saw this behaviour as a coping mechanism. The child was perceived to be anxious about his sister's wellbeing, and his strong preoccupation soothed and helped him cope. Donald Winnicott, *Playing and Reality,* London: Routledge, 1971, p.11-13.
[233] Information on the Steiner approach can be found on Edinburgh Steiner School website, 'Edinburgh Steiner School', *The Three R's: Rhythm, Repetition and Reverence,* 2023 <https://edinburghsteinerschool.org.uk/2023/06/13/the-three-rs-rhythm-repetition-and-reverence-tuesday-notice/> [accessed 22 February 2023].
[234] Ibid.

template helps us think about its transgression or deconstruction, and how freeing, exciting, and uncomfortable breaking a template can be. Cultural theorist and social activist bell hooks in her 1994 publication *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom,* also exposes a template, and breaks it, making other ways of being possible.

hooks, called for a classroom, and an educational system, that invites 'students to think seriously about pedagogy in relation to the practice of freedom.'[235] For hooks, education as the practice of freedom means putting into consideration individual differences, and to call on students to be active participants in the educational experience. In this way learners are not simply passive consumers, they are received as complex beings with life practices, who can shape conversations in the classroom by drawing on lived experience. Thereby, the practice of learning and teaching shifts from being top down or vertical and from teacher as conduit and student as receptacle, to a more horizontal and equal relationship, in which teacher and student can both be engaged in, shape, and grow through the classroom pedagogy.[236]

Rothschild and Krauss, as artists and educators, are seemingly 'teaching to transgress'. By this I mean, there is a freedom and willingness - indeed permission has been granted - for the school pupils to enter the 'classroom' and transgress beyond accepted boundaries of not just the teaching space, but also the teacher-learner relationship. They are placed in the role of active learner, enabling them to potentially have a role in shaping the curriculum.

In my videos, I am being taught a curriculum set by me. Indeed, ahead of our pedagogical encounters, I provided Sue with a verbal descriptor, or template, from which she developed a series of learning and teaching tasks. Sue and I are seated at a table and filmed straight on. The table allows Sue to spread the graphemes across a flat surface, thereby keeping the focus on the teaching aids, our upper bodies, and the pedagogical exchange. We are not in a classroom setting, but in Sue's house. Following the tradition of the home-movie, and the domestic spaces featured in the original selfie-like images that initiated this research project, Sue's private backdrop, through the recording device, goes public. Political theorist Hannah Arendt argues that the public and private are interdependent: one is inconceivable without the

[235] hooks, b, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom, New York:* Routledge, 1994, p.16.
[236] Ibid, p.21.

other.[237] It is the home, for Arendt, that 'provides space that protects, nurtures, and makes the individual fit to appear in the public realm.'[238] The home is therefore a fitting space for someone constructing their self/image for an imagined public.

The home features predominantly in video works of artist Moyra Davey. In her New York apartment, Davey listens to recordings of her own words, through headphones, whilst delivering a monologue. Her narration contemplates the lives of others and recounts aspects of her own life. As she talks, she moves through her domestic spaces. The website Walker.org compares Davey's wanderings to the didactic memory game of Roman Rooms.[239] For Gareth Bell-Jones, Davey's choreography creates for the viewer a psychological portrait fashioned from a series of clues.[240] MoMA's website describes Davey's work as exploring questions of how, and who, to picture.[241] Moving around whilst reading out loud seemingly not only helps Davey construct a story about the self in relation to the other, but also commit it to memory. Although it is evident that sometimes the recordings and recital of it, go out of sync. I, like Davey, often struggle to deliver my words. This is because the process of deconstructing and reconstructing the words, as per the demands of the RWI pedagogy, is tricky.

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[237] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition,* Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1953.
[238] Hannah Arendt's concept of public space quoted in Alison Dean, 'Intimacy at Work: Nan Goldin and Rineke Dijkstra', *History of Photography*, 39:2, (2015), pp.177-193, (p.179), doi:10.1080/03087298.2015.1038109.
[239] Gareth Bell-Jones, 'Moyra Davey's "Les Goddesses"', *e-flux Criticism,* 2011 <https://www.e-flux.com/criticism/233094/moyra-davey-s-les-goddesses> [accessed 27 February 2023].
[240] Ibid.
[241] 'Moyra Davey: Interleaf', *MoMA,* 2022 <https://www.moma.org/magazine/articles/781> [accessed 27 February 2023].

Figure 2.22. Moyra Davey.
Les Goddesses (still), 2011.
Video with sound, 00:61:00 minutes (duration).

Courtesy of the Artist & greengrassi, London.

My performance presents a diligent learner, in a situation that seems more controlled and contrived than Davey's. I appear to identify with, express, understand and perform the role of the student. Such an act is, for producer director of theatre and writer of acting techniques Peter Brook, 'the method actor's freedom'. For Brook, the method actor, 'chooses […] from the gestures of everyday life […] basing [their] gestures on observation or on spontaneity […] reaching inside [themselves] for an alphabet that is also fossilized, for the language of signs from life that [they] know is the language not of invention but conditioning. [Their] observations of behaviour are often projections of [themselves].'[242] I am familiar with what is expected of me, how I should behave in the teaching and learning environment. Or to put it another way, I can follow the template set out for the classroom learner. Indeed, have been extensively schooled, as a life-long learner, in the performance of a pedagogical exchange.

Method acting is, for scholar Lauren Berlant, a 'crucial part of being a successful entrepreneur and consultant'.[243] Berlant is referring here to 'the good subject of neoliberal labour.'[244]

[242] Peter Brook, *The Empty Space,* London: Penguin Classics, 2008, [orig. 1972], p.125.
[243] Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism,* Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2011, p.218.
[244] Ibid. For additional discussions of neoliberal labour please see Chapter One and Two of this thesis.

Method acting, in Berlant's terms, is a technique for negotiating 'living in an impasse.'[245] This impasse refers to a 'stretch of time' or the ongoingness of a situation where, no matter how much you try, or how much work you undertake, the thing you want to get done or attain, never comes to pass.[246] Berlant describes this impasse as 'the fraying of the fantasy of the "good life" specifically attached to labor, the family wage, and upward mobility.'[247] Social mobility is referred to, in my lessons with Sue, in that we focus on the pronunciation and the delivery of certain words and sounds in preparation for entry into society. Writer Frances Hatherley, in her 2020 essay on the work of photographer Jo Spence notes, 'to flourish in life - both financially and emotionally - one most [sic] learn to behave more like those in higher class positions. This continues from childhood, through education and into our adult lives.'[248] She goes on to write, 'society positions working-class girls as having a faulty or shameful identity: speech, dress, behaviour, all need improving.'[249] The study of formal speaking or elocution, with its emphasis on pronunciation, transformation and normalisation, should iron out my South Yorkshire accent and help me sound smarter and therefore appear more attractive.[250] Elocution in my videos takes up the connection between language and appearance, it can be understood as a kind of finishing school for the image conscious. The primary goal of this development platform is to instil in me the specific rules for creating certain facial expressions in anticipation of a future selfie-representation. One that will, in not just class but also in neoliberal terms, place me in a better position. Other people, those that see my videos, can follow my word-play performances too, as a sort of textbook, manual or instruction guide for their selfie-expressions, to likewise learn how to improve their future self/image.

The textbook is an informational guide, produced to meet the needs of educators. The manual is another instructional source that describes the steps one should take to do a thing or task. According to the article *Inside the World of Instruction Manuals* published on the BBC website, instructional guides are not modern inventions, they have been around for at least

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[245] Ibid, p.4.
[246] Ibid.
[247] Ibid.
[248] Francis Hatherley, *Class Slippers Jo Spence on Fantasy, Photography & Fairytales,* Bristol: RRB Photobooks, 2020, p.26.
[249] Ibid, p.27.
[250] I became aware of the connection between dialect, intelligence and appearance at 18 when I moved from the North of England to the South to attend university. I have lived with class-conflict since.

two centuries.[251] In the digital age these resources are often disseminated as e-resources or accessed via QR codes or found through online searches.[252] Traditionally they were paper publications. Textbooks, manuals, and instruction guides usually contain text and images - the words explain 'how to' whilst the images 'show how'.[253] As a student of photography I owned a copy of Michael Langford's *Basic Photography Guide*.[254] It was required reading for my undergraduate programme. It contained detailed technical information for operating the camera as well as step by step instructions on processing and printing. The written narrative was accompanied by photographs.

Following or mirroring what is set out in the instructional guide, whatever its form, should help users become equipped for dealing with the thing at hand - photography, preserving fruit, posing for the camera, learning a language, and so on. However, it's not always easy to follow the steps, sometimes there is an illogical connection between what is being said and/or shown, and the user's understanding or ability.

Mirror/Machine learning

Perfecting the pronunciation of prune, prawn, cheese and sausage with a speech coach, in advance of the portrait, highlights an estrangement or disjunct between language and meaning. The terms become stretched, emptied out and detached from their original definition and application, or in philosopher of language, Ludwig Wittgenstein words, 'language goes on holiday'. Wittgenstein in his 1953 book *Philosophical Investigations* uses the phrase 'language goes on holiday' to describe how vocabulary has meaning in specific contexts.[255]

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[251] Helene Schumacher, 'Inside the World of Instruction Manuals', *BBC Future,* 2 April 2018 <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20180403-inside-the-world-of-instruction-manuals> [accessed 22 February 2022].

[252] Ibid, according to the BBC article *Inside the World of Instruction Manuals,* the instruction manual is evolving with the digital situation, they can be accessed quickly via QR codes, found on YouTube and increasingly artificial intelligence (AI) and augmented reality (AR) are being used to enable users to learn as they interact with the product. Ibid.

[253] Ibid.

[254] Numerous editions of Michael Langford's photography guides have been published. His Obituary, which contains details of his contributions to photography, can be accessed here: Jenny May, 'Michael Langford', *The Guardian Obituary,* 25 May 2000 <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2000/may/25/guardianobituaries1> [accessed 22 February 2023]. Also see: Michael Langford, *Basic Photography: The Guide for Serious Photographers,* Oxford: Focal Press, 1965.

[255] Luwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations,* Oxford: Blackwell, 2001, [orig. 1953], section 38.

As a guest at Sue's house, at her dining table, now utilised as an instructor's desk, food stuffs are served up, but not to be eaten. Rather prunes, prawns, cheese and sausages are presented as a feast for oration. Just as the private space of Sue's home becomes separated from its intended use - a place to consume food - prune, prawn, cheese and sausage no longer connect to their original definitions or image-templates. Prawn no longer indicates a marine animal with an exoskeleton and numerous legs, prune doesn't refer to a preserved fruit, cheese doesn't mean a tasty dairy product and sausage does not stipulate protein encased in skin. In fact, their meaning is not relevant, it is the application of the word towards the image that is important. As such the words became strange, conflicted and undone.

A Recipe for Disaster (2018) by artist Carolyn Lazard presents a conflict between imagery, text and sound. The 27-minute (looped) video uses footage from *The French Chef*, a 1970s American cooking programme.[256] The TV show can be seen along with its original captions for deaf and hard of hearing audiences, presented as white text which sits low down on the screen, its positioning seemingly treats access as an afterthought. Lazard disrupts the source material by adding their own text to the visuals. The words, all upper-case, are written in yellow text spread across the screen. They can't be missed. A voice off-screen, reads the yellow type out loud. Overlaid is yet another voice, this time describing the onscreen actions of the chef. The chef, herself can also be heard discussing, in a didactic manner, what she is cooking. The layering of texts, sound and visuals is disorientating and distancing.

[256] Video length and original source material information taken from: information taken from: Lizzie Homersham, 'Good Measure, Lizzie Homersham on Carolyn Lazard's CRIP TIME (2018)', *ARTFORUM,* 11 May 2020 <https://www.artforum.com/columns/lizzie-homersham-on-carolyn-lazards-crip-time-2018-247555/> [accessed 9 February 2023].

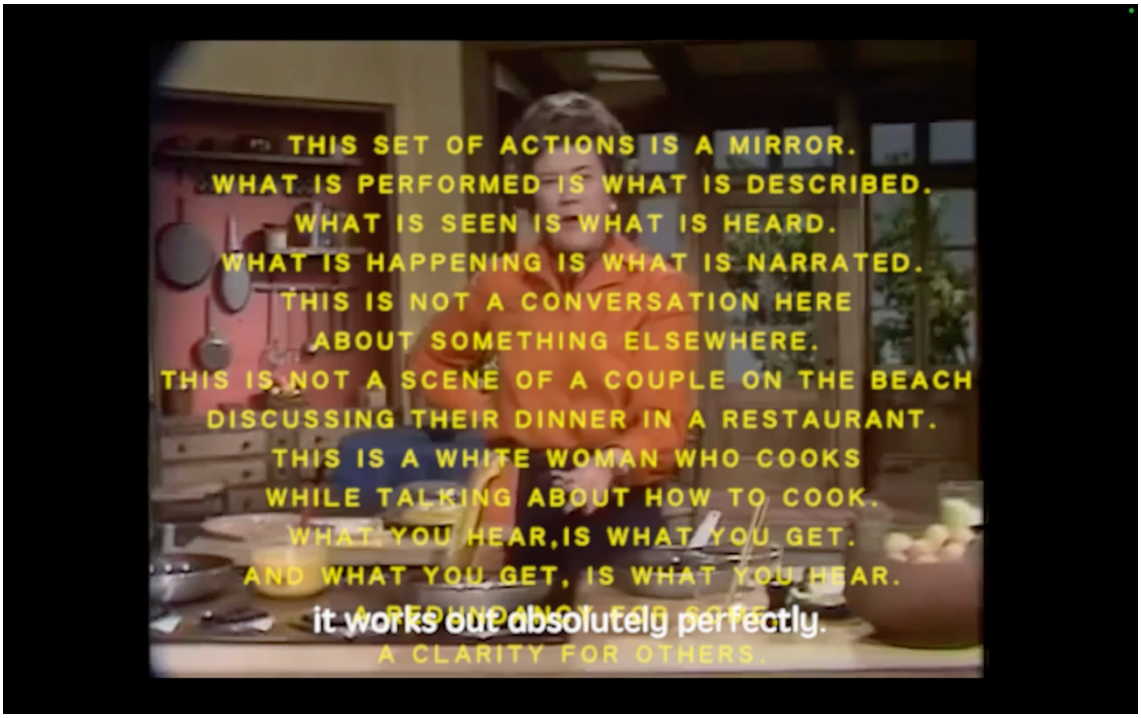

Figure 2.23. Carolyn Lazard.
A Recipe for Disaster (still), 2018.
HD video (colour, sound), 00:27:00 minutes (duration).

Lazard shows us situations simultaneously for what they are, and differently. She achieves this through a working approach that mirrors or follows the template of the original format. By adding more text and layering supplemental sound to the original, Lazard at once riffs off, probes, and directly criticises ableist communication structures, drawing a focus towards accessibility and inaccessibility; inclusivity and exclusion in television broadcasting.[257]
In my own video works I am depicted as attempting to mirror the behaviours and words of my female mentor. Our interactions not only have an appearance of a teacher/student exchange but also fit into a parental template for motherhood. Additionally, there is an air of talking therapy at play in these works - Sue is counselling me to master certain patterns of behaviour. Helping me to free myself from old ways of doing things. Through a process of deconstruction, breaking things down into smaller parts, and reconstruction, putting them back together to improve my understanding of them in the context of improving my image.

[257] For more on Lazard's *A Recipe for Disaste*r see: Emily Watlington, 'Critical Creative Corrective Cacophonous Comical: Closed Captions', *Mousse Magazine*, 6 June 2019 <https://www.moussemagazine.it/magazine/critical-creative-corrective-cacophonous-comical-closed-captions-emily-watlington-2019/> [accessed 22 March 2024].

Our mimetic counsellor/client, mother/daughter or rather mentor/mentee pedagogical interactions utilise 'rote' or 'parrot fashion' learning, which is thought to commit information to memory through mimesis and repetition.[258] As I perform, I watch Sue, and she looks back at me, looking at her. Her gaze and her actions, along with her feedback, offers a kind of mirror-seeing, through which I can visualise, experience and mould my self/image. Whilst I construct my image in relation to another, I do not feel entwined or connected to Sue's mirror-picture (as I do with the representations discussed in Chapter One), in these performances my body, imagination and image stays separate and differentiated from the image in front of me.

In his essay *The Mirror Stage* psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan describes the moment when an infant first recognises themselves via the mirror-image.[259] Art theorist Amelia Jones in her book *Body Art Performing the Subject* describes Lacan's theory as '[the] moment in a child's life when the infant first acquires an image of [themself] as a subject and thus begins to formulate a body image and ego in relation to [their] discrete existence (via the image) in relation to others.'[260] Therefore, Lacan's mirror-stage can be understood as the moment when a child understands themselves as an individual. Through their encounter with their own reflection, they gain a sense of their own selfhood as "I" or "me'. Scholar Jas Johl, a visiting fellow at The Oxford Internet Institute, succinctly writes on her blog about Lacan's mirror stage, 'to recognise oneself as "I" is like recognising oneself as other ("yes that person over there is me"); this act is fundamentally self-alienating.'[261] Johl goes on, 'Indeed, for this reason feelings towards the image are mixed, caught between hatred ("I hate that version of myself *because* it is so much better than me") and love ("I want to be like that image").'[262] Such mixed feelings towards the mirror-image or on-screen image has led, for me, to a great

[258] For further information, Twinkle, an online educational resource recommended by my children's primary school, outlines the Rote Learning method: 'What is Rote Learning', *Twinkl,* n.d. <https://www.twinkl.co.uk/teaching-wiki/rote-learning> [accessed 11 November 2023].
[259] Jacques Lacan, 'The Mirror Stage', in *Écrits,* Jacques Lacan, New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006, [orig. 1949], pp.94-100.
[260] Amelia Jones, *Body Art Performing the Subject.* Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1998, p.118.
[261] Jas Johl, 'The Subject of Fantasy', *Medium,* 19 November 2018 <https://jasjohl.medium.com/the-subject-of-fantasy-c1baa0232c9d> [accessed 15 January 2023].
[262] Ibid.

deal of selfie-making.[263] Filtered, unfiltered, available light, ring-light, framed from above, to the side and so on. As Jas Johl writes 'locating a fixed subject proves ever elusive.'[264]

Surrealist photographer Claude Cahun seemingly explored the inability to fix the subject through a body of work made in the early 1900s that included photomontages and self-portraits. In front of the camera Cahun assumed a variety of personae - Buddha-like depicted in lotus pose, a female dancer awkwardly arranged on one knee wearing silver foil wings and a deep-set scowl, as well as an androgynous figure in a chequered jacket propped against a mirror, looking at us, rather than their reflection. My photographic series *Modelling Selfies (In Paper Outfits),* which I discuss at length in Chapter One, visually connects with Cahun's portraits, performing a range of characters. Unlike Cahun, I explore the technologically enhanced accelerated reconfiguring of the relationship between bodies and images shaping contemporary notions of selfhood in the digital age through the somewhat archaic modelling of paper forms onto my body.

[263] Screen-images are not mirror-images, so I experience my representation in a way I am less familiar with, as non-mirrored. As discussed in other chapters the optics also distort the face and body.
[264] Jas Johl, 'The Subject of Fantasy', *Medium,* 19 November 2018 <https://jasjohl.medium.com/the-subject-of-fantasy-c1baa0232c9d> [accessed 15 January 2023]. Also, see Chapter Three, *The Image as the Object on the Horizon* for a detailed discussion of the elusive nature of the image, and the desire and repetition involved in chasing the ideal-self/image through smartphone-led prosumerism.

Figure 2.24. Claude Cahun.
Self-portrait (reflected image in mirror with chequered jacket), 1927.
Photograph.
Courtesy of the Jersey Heritage Collections.

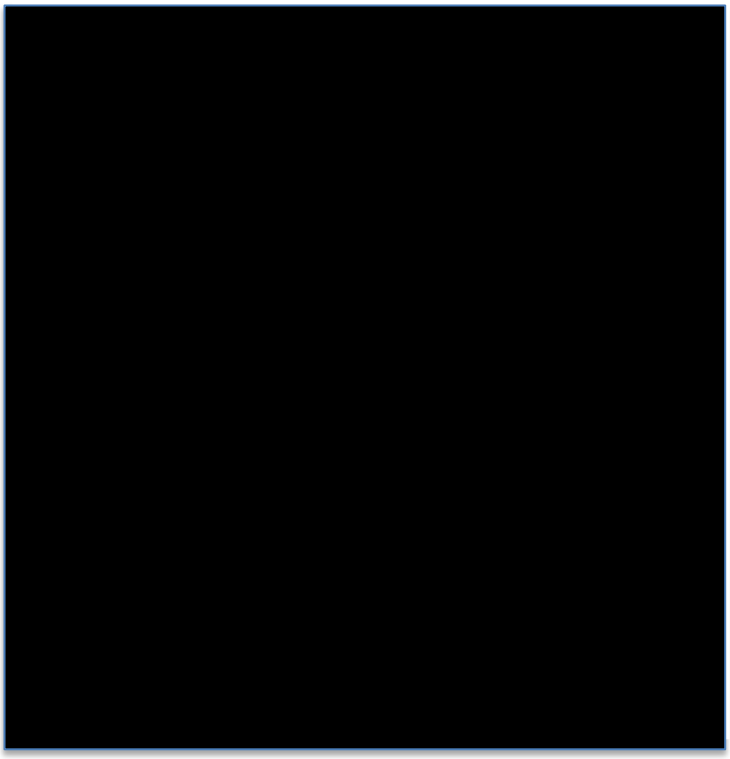

Figure 2.25. Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore.
I.O.U. (self-pride), 1930.
Photomontage.

Cahun also made photomontages to explore the multiple, the accumulated, and the mutable self through cut-out and repeated images of her face, body and other objects. One such object is the recurring motif of the shiny surface, in the form of glass domes, mirrored orbs and magnifying glasses. Objects that can reflect one's double or magnify the body or aspects of the world around us. An article published on Artforum's website in 2023 suggests that Cahun's work infers 'the fragmented self' and 'further distortions'.[265] Yet, for Cahun, her self-explorations suggest masks, and lots of them, she is cited as saying 'under this mask, another mask. I will never finish removing all these faces.'[266] Cahun's conception of identity seemingly anticipates our relationship to the self/image in the digital age - DIY self-portraits depicting various identities drawn from images that surround us, which builds a fragmented

[265] Therese Lichtenstein, 'A Mutable Mirror: Claude Cahun, *ARTFORUM,* 30(8), (April 1992), pp.64-67, (p.67) <https://www.artforum.com/print/199204/a-mutable-mirror-claude-cahun-33591> [accessed 22 January 2023].

[266] In 2017 The National Portrait Gallery, London exhibited Claude Cahun's self-portraits alongside Gillian Wearing's self-images. The title of the show was *Behind the Mask, Another Mask,* which is directly drawn from something Claude Cahun is cited as saying. The quote can be found in a review of the show on the Royal Academy's website: Lauren Elkin, 'The Many Masks of Gillian Wearing and Claude Cahun', *Royal Academy,* 16 March 2017 <https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/article/magazine-identity-parade-gillian-wearing-claude-cahun> [accessed 22 January 2023].

body of knowledge about us, that speaks to the things we have seen and engaged with. In this way, portraiture can be understood as not just a representation or a likeness, but also as sources of information that highlight our viewing habits, motivations and interests.

In his facial recognition series, artist Tony Oursler, explores, 'technology as a reflection of our own ontologies, belief systems and desires' through artworks that map patterns onto human faces.[267] According to Oursler's website, the patterning used in the 2019 wood and LCD screen installation work such as *+25^N* refers to algorithmic points in facial recognition technology utilised by a range of organisations from Apple, Facebook and Google to police, banks and governments.

Figure 2.26. Tony Oursler
+25^N, 2019.
Mixed media artworks.
© Tony Oursler. Courtesy of the artist.

[267] I quote here from Oursler's website: Tony Oursler, 'Focus Booth, The Armory Show New York', n.d. <https://tonyoursler.com/focus-new-york> [accessed 3 March 2023].

Oursler, when discussing his 2016 exhibition, titled *PriV%te* at Lehmann Maupin gallery in Hong Kong, is quoted as saying:

> To set pattern recognition, you need set points — pupil width, cranium size, things that don't change over time. For me, it's a metaphor for what's happening now with big data and a tectonic shift in identity and portraiture. All this material is now instantly accessible via these databases and becomes linked — your Google searches, bank history, history of crime, financial information, education, spending patterns, transportation patterns, medical history, DNA, even odor and pheromones. Portraiture today is no longer a chiaroscuro painting or photographic mugshot. It's about this swarm of invisible data.[268]

Ourslers quote - to use his words again - demonstrates the 'increasing sophistication and prevalence of technology within our lives.'[269] It also draws attention to the myriad of ways machines, in computerised societies, survey and control our representations. This relationship between technology, representation, observation and regulation invokes John Tagg's extensive writing on the uses of photography as an everyday form of surveillance and control. Tagg argued in his 1988 book *The Burden of Representation* that photography's ability to record and provide visual documentation as evidence of a thing or event, became bound up, in the nineteenth century and at the start of modern capitalism, with practices of record-keeping, database building and categorisation in institutions like hospitals and in fields of social sciences. For Tagg, this tied photography to the state enabling the policing of the social body.[270] Tagg's formulation of photography as an apparatus of surveillance, authority and organisation still has relevance today. However, in the digital age, as Oursler demonstrates, we are individually surveyed and controlled by new technologies for the profit of vast online corporations.

Discussing platform surveillance writer and curator Ben Burbridge notes:

> Advertisers pay to access the attention we devote to photographs, and, particularly, the ability to manipulate desires facilitated by harvesting user data. Every time a photograph is uploaded, tagged, shared, viewed, liked, geo-tagged and commented on, our preferences, relationships, and social

[268] Sarah Trigg, 'Tony Oursler's Ghost Stories', *Tony Oursler,* n.d. <https://tonyoursler.com/tony-ourslers-ghost-stories> [accessed 3 March 2023].
[269] This observation is drawn from Ourslers website: Tony Oursler, 'Focus Booth, The Armory Show New York', n.d. <https://tonyoursler.com/focus-new-york> [accessed 3 March 2023].
[270] John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories,* London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1988.

> networks become clearer. When algorithms survey what we do, what we like, who we like to do it with, they get better at encouraging us to want stuff, whether sports shoes or presidential candidates.[271]

Our online behaviours form, for Burbridge, 'a quantifiable, essentially statistical, notion of selfhood.'[272] He further explains, 'the requirement to present a single, stable identity is essential to the monetisation of our online behaviour. Even when the online world is understood to be inherently performative, it is the consistency of individuals' performances in particular contexts or situations that allows sociological patterns to be identified, specific demographics exposed and common desires to be exploited.'[273]

This concept of identifying patterns, exposing demographics and exploiting interests emphasises the processes by which our data is organised before it's sold on. Digital economy scholar Nick Srnicek, in his 2017 book *Platform Capitalism,* clarifies advertisers don't receive our personal data per se, rather we are identified as a match.[274] He also highlights the fact that each and every single one of our online movements is tracked, he writes, 'every action performed by a user no matter how minute, is useful for reconfiguring algorithms and optimising processes.'[275] I am more than aware of being targeted by advertisers. I see an increasing number of adverts on social media. They dominate my feed. The relentless coercion is, for professor emerita at Harvard Business School Shoshana Zuboff, a threat to individual autonomy. In her writing on surveillance capitalism, Zuboff, states, 'this is a coup from above: an overthrow of the people's sovereignty.'[276] Yet, we actively give permission for our online data-identities to be observed, aggregated and sold on. As Isobel Harbison spells out, 'when we sign up for social media, we licence our uploads and release our data, subject to tracking algorithms that aggregate data for sales. Human data generates hundreds of billions of dollars of revenue every year for corporations that employ relatively few staff while trading on the leisure hours of billions of users.'[277] The monetisation of our interests, is, for scholar-activist for sustainable digital media, Trebor Scholz, 'a new kind of

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[271] Ben Burbridge, *Photography After Capitalism*, London: Goldsmiths Press, 2020, p.65.
[272] Ibid, p.66.
[273] Ibid, p.75.
[274] Nick Srnicek, *Platform Capitalism,* Cambridge: Polity Press, p.57.
[275] Ibid, p.99.
[276] Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism,* London: Profile Books Ltd, 2019, see page titled, 'The Definition'.
[277] Isobel Harbison, *Performing Image,* Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The MIT Press, 2019, p.13.

exploitation.'[278] In his writing on digital labour Scholz defines online exploitation and provides a possible solution, he says:

> Such exploitation must be conceptualised differently than the one concerning waged work. It implies a privitization of the wealth produced by free labor that takes the shape of an impoverishment of potential users' appropriation of the fruits of such labor. This impoverishment can be understood in terms of the unilateral appropriation and hence accumulation of the wealth generated by users' interactions (both personal data, which become property of the company, and general activity of sharing, posting, linking, commenting etc.) but also in the actual quality for the participation to the digital economy constrained by the control unilaterally exercised by web giants on the technical configurations of social networking platforms. As the mechanisms of such expropriation are clearly embedded within the forms of financialization that impoverish society as a whole, asking for the liberation of free labor means asking for two things: that such profits be returned to those who actually produce them - that is, to living labor - and that social networking platforms should be deprivatized - that is, that ownership of users' data should be returned to their rightful owners as the freedom to access and modify the protocols and diagrams that structure their participation.[279]

Changing the system, or indeed users' perception of it may be a challenge, as political scientist James Muldoon writes, 'we have come to see it as normal to give up control over our data and allow platform companies to profit from our activities. The exchange seems innocent and even beneficial to us - we use a free service and in exchange companies can use our information gathered from the platform to sell targeted adverts.'[280] Unlike Muldoon, and Scholz, who believe we can reclaim our digital futures and create alternatives to exploitative Big Tech models, I find it hard to imagine any kind of reform of powerful tech companies. I can only foresee further intensification and commodification of our lives. Whilst Muldoon's future focused writing is more optimistic than my own, he acknowledges that capitalism has always appropriated human life, from the slave trade to colonialism to factory labour and now our data.[281] Indeed capitalism has form. It seems to infiltrate more and more aspects of our lives. I see adverts for eBay on my television, on billboards and on LED advertising screens.

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[278] Trebor Scholz, *Digital Labour: The Internet as Playground and Factory*, New York: Routledge, 2013 p.53.
[279] Ibid.
[280] James Muldoon, *Platform Socialism: How to Reclaim our Digital Future from Big Tech,* London: Pluto Press, 2022, p.1.
[281] Ibid, p.21.

What I search for on selling sites then appears in my Instagram feed. IRL[282] and online platforms become interchangeable spaces for targeted advertising.

In my video works I take up the tension between information exchange and behaviour modification. The looped nature of the video-performance stretches time out and collapses it back upon itself, rendering Sue and I stuck in an ongoing exchange of talking nonsense. The circularity of our communication nods towards the flows of information circulating the internet. Political theorist Jodi Dean in her 2010 analysis of data exchanged online, writes 'in communication capitalism […] the use value of a message is less important than its exchange value, its contribution to a larger pool, flow or circulation of content.'[283] Similarly in her writing on selfies disseminated online, she notes, 'selfies exemplify a further move, a move to circulation value.'[284] For Dean, 'a selfie is a repetition of a repeated practice […] it's a quick registration of what we're doing […] the subject is the many participating in the common practice, the many imitating each other. The figure in the photo is incidental.'[285] In her 2012 book Dean extends her thoughts on circulation value over content, drawing on Giorgio Agamben's reflexive approach to communication.[286] She states, '[Agamben] turns from *what* is said to *that* something is said.[287] The word 'prune' in my exchange with Sue turns from *what* is meant to *that* something is said to enable participation within a continuous information stream.

[282] IRL is an abbreviation for In Real Life.
[283] Jodi Dean, 'COMMUNICATIVE CAPITALISM: CIRCULATION AND THE FORECLOSURE OF POLITICS', *Cultural Politics*, 1(1), pp.51-74, (p.58) <https://commonconf.files.wordpress.com/2010/09/proofs-of-tech-fetish.pdf> [accessed 25 February 2024].
[284] Jodi Dean, 'Images without Viewers: Selfie Communism', *Fotomuseum Winterthur*, February 2016 <https://www.fotomuseum.ch/en/2016/02/01/images-without-viewers-selfie-communism-2/> [accessed 24 January 2024].
[285] Ibid.
[286] Here I paraphrase Dean's introduction to how Agamben treats communication, see Jodi Dean, *The Communist Horizon,* London & New York: Verso, 2012, p.153.
[287] Ibid.

Moulding the self

During the COVID-19 global pandemic, my sessions with Sue went online. We moved from a physical situation in which we sat next to each other in Sue's home, to a virtual space, where we appeared next to each other on screen, in our respective domains.

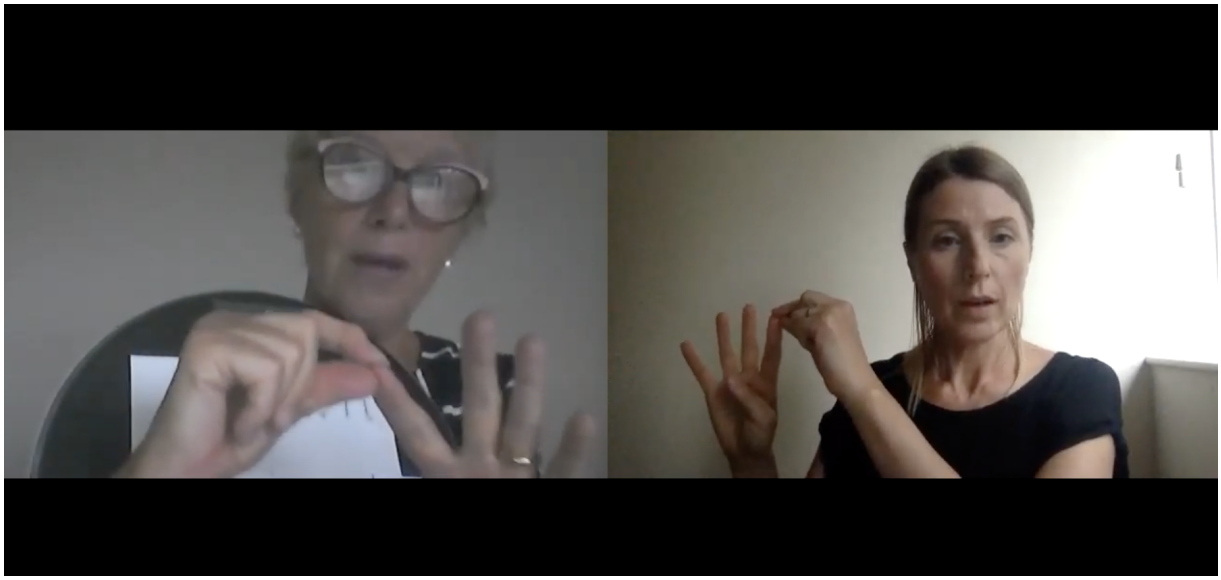

Figure 2.27. Moira Lovell
Pronouncing Prawn via Zoom (still), 2020.
Digital video.

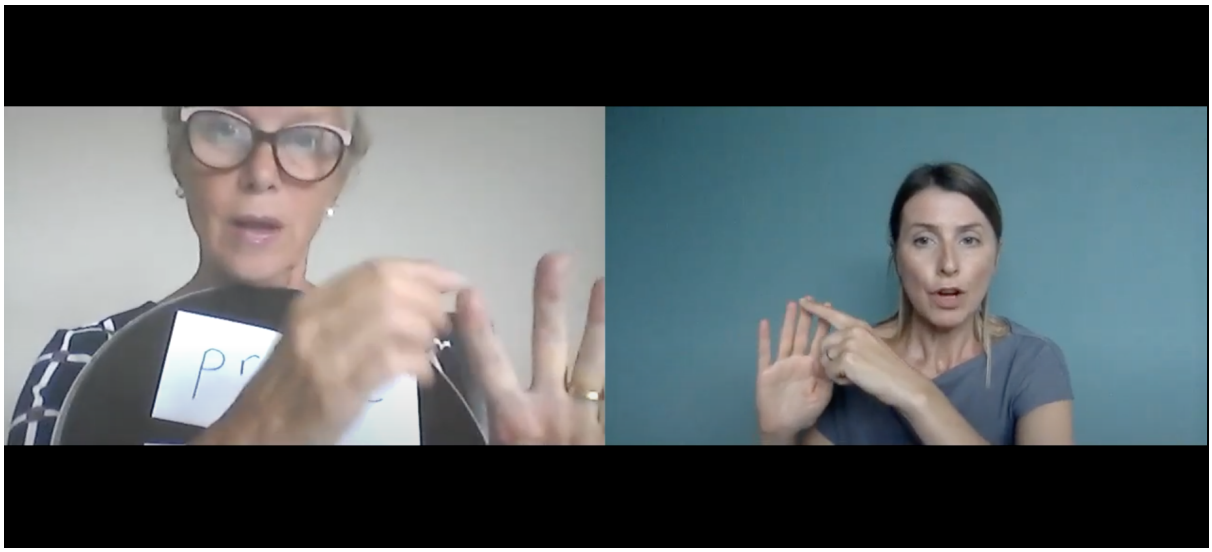

Figure 2.28. Moira Lovell
Pronouncing Prune via Zoom (still), 2020.
Digital video.

Figure 2.29. Moira Lovell
Pronouncing Cheese via Zoom (still), 2020.
Digital video.

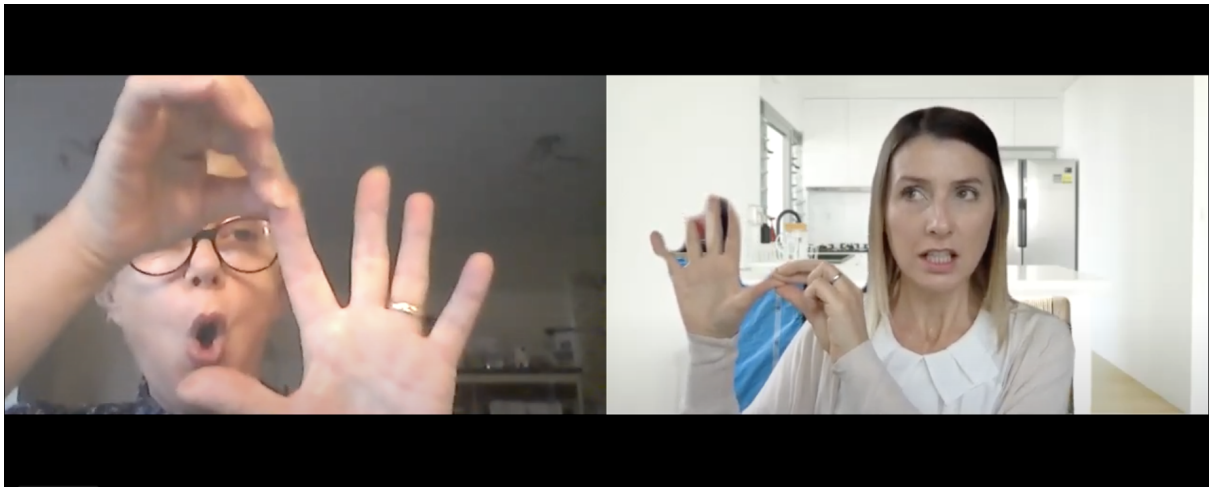

Figure 2.30. Moira Lovell
Pronouncing Sausage via Zoom (still), 2020.
Digital video.

The more time I spent on Zoom the more technically proficient I became. I watched, and followed, the tips of blogger @AngieHotandFlashy, who offers to her 1.1 million followers on YouTube, advice for 'how to look good on video calls.'[288] Her demonstrations instilled in me a skill set for improving my image by adapting my lighting, camera angle, backdrop,

[288] @AngieHotandFlashy tutorial on how to look good on video calls can be accessed via @AngieHotandFlashy, 'How To Look Good on Video Calls | Zoom FaceTime Skype | Blogger Secrets!', online video recording, *YouTube*, 2020 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ACNGhPKnmok> [accessed 9 February 2023].

make-up, clothing and bodily positioning. I have also adjusted my behaviour in response to colleagues who have called out my expressive manner during video-calls. With my camera on and my sound off, I apparently present myself, in online meetings, through the medium of mime. Ultimately, I find any comment on my appearance a tad embarrassing, I do not want to stick out or overstep what is expected of me in a particular situation. So, I actively attempt to modify how I appear, trying my hardest not to act in excess or contribute in any gestural manner until it is my turn to speak. I am continually working on, refining, and controlling my online, and offline, behaviour, yet despite my best efforts, I cannot be consistent.

Behavioural modification and identity formation are, for philosopher Catherine Malabou, an example of 'the plasticity of the self'.[289] Malabou describes 'the plasticity of the self' as that which simultaneously 'receives and gives itself its own form'.[290] Plasticity for Malabou 'thus amounts to thinking of the brain as something modifiable, "formable," and formative at the same time.'[291] Meaning we shape ourselves and our worlds, and our worlds shape us. Plasticity offers the possibility to transform and take shape, it is a form in process, open-ended, and without determination.

In her writing Malabou draws upon neurobiologist Joseph LeDoux to assert that 'the essence of who you are is stored as synaptic interactions in and between the various subsystems of your brain'.[292] She clarifies 'the "self" is a synthesis of all the plastic processes at work in the brain.'[293] The brain, for Malabou, is 'essentially […] what we do with it' she asserts 'the brain is our work, and we do not know it.[294] Yet we know we live in a reticular society […] to survive today means to be connected.'[295] Such an experience of connection is, for art theorist Amelia Jones, the way we experience modern and contemporary subjectivity.[296] Drawing on the words of critical theorist Katja Silverman, Jones writes, 'our flesh is the flesh of the world, continually defined and experienced in relation to everyone around us […] rather than attempting to veil this fact […] we can reorganise the way we experience subjectivity.'[297]

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[289] Catherine Malabou, *What Should We Do With Our Brain?* New York: Fordham University Press, 2008, p.67.
[290] Ibid, p.71.
[291] Ibid, p.5.
[292] Ibid, p.58.
[293] Ibid.
[294] Ibid, p.30.
[295] Ibid, p.10.
[296] Amelia Jones, *Self/Image,* New York: Routledge, 2006, p.10.
[297] Ibid, p.159.

Jones's notion of 'reorganising the way we experience subjectivity' resonates with Malabou's conceptualisation of 'the plasticity of the self' - both conveying an understanding of subjectivity that is social, reciprocal and in process.

Equivalent notions of relationality and interlinking can be located in philosopher Edmund Husserl's concept of 'intersubjectivity'. Husserl's formulation of intersubjectivity stresses reciprocity, and in this way considers the push and pull of social acts. One's self-confidence, self-esteem, self-knowledge and self-understanding is, for Husserl, mediated by the other.[298]

In my artworks, Sue's information becomes my words: her behaviour informs my self/image: mirrored, filtered, reshaped and recited (again), as I learn, and relearn, the template for being. Similarly, in my everyday life I reorganise my subjectivity in relation and response to others, human and not human, offline and online, to varying degrees. I am a composite of multiple images, ideas, reflections and avatars, which I collage, remix, blend and reconstruct.

My body/image/template interactions reinforce the fact that I don't know who I am or what I really look like. In artist Pipilotti Rist's terms 'I am always struggling with myself, no matter what I do […] it's like a quest for a lost body.'[299] Through prosumer choreographies and speech sessions with Sue, I too am in pursuit of my lost body. The process of finding my form is akin to trying to see my own reflection in a dark room. Subjectivity, for philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, dwells in the space of the night-time, as he wrote:

> The human being is this night, this empty nothing, that contains everything in its simplicity – an unending wealth of many presentations, images, of which none happens to occur to him – or which are not present. This night, the inner of nature, that exists here – pure self – in phantasmagorical presentations, is night all around it, here shoots a bloody head – there another white shape, suddenly here before it, and just so disappears. One catches sight of this night when one looks human beings in the eye – into a night that becomes awful, it suspends the night of the world here in an opposition. In this night being has returned.[300]

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[298] My understanding of Husserl's conceptualisation of intersubjectivity is drawn from: Dan Zahavy, *Subjectivity and Selfhood Investigating the First Person Perspective,* Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2005, p.173, Kim Connerton, 'Exposure: Self-Portraiture, Performance, Self-inquiry', (doctoral thesis, Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney, 2015) <https://www.academia.edu/18469691/Exposure_Self_Portraiture_Performativity_Self_Inquiry> [accessed 30 March 2024], p.16.

[299] Riist quoted in Amelia Jones, *Self/Image,* New York: Routledge, 2006, p.238.

[300] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, 1805 is quoted in: Donald Phillip Verene, *Hegel's Recollection.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985, p.7-8.

Hegel exposes the paradox of the subject. For him, the empty nothingness of the human being has rich depths, as a stream of shifting appearances. As Claude Cahun notes, 'we only know how to recognise ourselves, love ourselves, through dreamlike, unrefined and fleeting reflections—moving bodies that we can contemplate only in passing.'[301] The 'unrefined' is important to my study, in which I continually attempt to polish myself for the image. The templates that I follow - verbal or visual - give me my image. In this way, the template is ultimately my subjectivity. The more I view myself performing the templates, the more I perceive myself as a collection of derived and never finished fictional constructions.

What I am taught here is that my self/image is shaped through an expansive, social and ongoing process of learning - and that the ideal-self or image-ideal cannot ever be fully realised, known or understood. That is to say, what we want to look like or what we want to see in our self-representations, is always located elsewhere, just out of reach - and on the horizon.

[301] I am grateful to Kim Connerton for bringing this Claude Cahun quote to my attention, the words can be found on p.16 of her PhD thesis: Kim Connerton, 'Exposure: Self-Portraiture, Performance, Self-inquiry', (doctoral thesis, Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney, 2015) <https://www.academia.edu/18469691/Exposure_Self_Portraiture_Performativity_Self_Inquiry> [accessed 30 March 2024].

Chapter Three:

The Image as the Object on the Horizon

Stills from the videos:

Gestures (for the selfie)

Figure 3.1. Moira Lovell.
"Prune" (still), 2019.
Digital video.

Figure 3.2. Moira Lovell.
"Smize" (still), 2019.
Digital video.

Figure 3.3. Moira Lovell.
"Cheese" (still), 2019.
Digital video.

Figure 3.4. Moira Lovell.
"Silly Sausage" (still), 2019.
Digital video.

Figure 3.5. Moira Lovell.
"Fingermouth" (still), 2019.
Digital video.

Figure 3.6. Moira Lovell.
"Don't Take it Serious" (still), 2019.
Digital video.

I position myself against a magnolia wall; my wall - a wall within the domestic interior of my home, or I sit in front of an appropriated bedroom scene, by this I mean, I place myself before scaled up inkjet prints that originally featured in the backdrops of the images introduced in Chapter One. In these duplicates I remove the bodies of the women from the prints with a pair of scissors, before sticking the remaining images to my home-office wall with masking tape. My body attempts to conceal the spaces where the sellers once appeared, rendering me surrounded by someone else's bedroom decor and possessions. In later videos, I appear before virtual kitchens, sourced online using search terms such as 'Mrs Hinch inspired kitchen' and 'dream kitchen', which glitch as I move or are audibly interrupted as my washing machine kicks into its spin-cycle. In this way, through the creation of slicker and increasing high spec interiors the artworks speak not only to notions of touching up or masking over, but also to aspiration, that is, the chasing of an image-ideal or lifestyle, that is sold to us, sought by us, and appropriated, mirrored and consumed by us, depending on our budgets.

In each video, regardless of the backdrop, I film myself alone, facing a digital device, so only my head, neck and shoulders can be seen, performing, practising and repeating - over and over - a series of facial gestures: Duck-Face Pout, Fish Gape, Smize, Finger-mouth, and another one which involves sticking my tongue out, this, according to my sources, can be understood as the selfie pose 'Don't take it Serious'. These selfie postures were garnered from a selection of online tutorials, fashion magazines and an offline manual for selfie-making, which advise women how to work their bodies for the representation.

Many of the gestures that I perform for the camera are created by pronouncing particular words, for example, saying the term "prune" helps construct the 'right' facial expression for the pose Duck-Face Pout whilst "prawn" corresponds with Fish Gape. Language - or certainly, in this case, a few vocables - can therefore be understood as enabling particular images of femininity.

Capture your style

Influencer, Aimee Song, published in 2016, an instruction manual titled: *Capture Your Style*: *Transform Your Instagram Images, and Build the Ultimate Platform*. The book, endorsed by fashion designer Diane Von Furstenberg, offers - across two hundred and eight mostly candy-pink printed pages - a succession of top-tips for women, to improve their selfies, velfies and online images more generally. For example, on page one hundred and twelve, Song directs her readers to say "prune" to their mobile device, ostensibly verbalising the word "prune" will help selfie-makers 'get that adorable upturn of the mouth.'[302] In other words, stating "prune" to the camera-phone facilitates a 'desirable' performance of femininity for the selfie-representation.

Driven by a strong urge to live up to a digital fiction of myself, along with an almost obsessive impulse to create camera-phone images, and a curiosity to learn more about selfie-poses, I follow Amee Song's guidance. Gazing earnestly at my face on screen, I repeat the required words in a multitude of ways: "prune", "pprune", "prrrrrrrruuuuuuuuuuuune" ... never quite attaining the sought-after self/image, but through the ongoing concentration of repetitions, I gain a sense of what works for me, and what doesn't, by turns, I now know my 'best side' and my worst.

During my quest to learn, to practise and to create, I have acquired new gadgets. Indeed, there is still a limitless journey of consumption ahead of me in relation to improving my images, which can never be fully realised, as beauty standards shift, beauty problems to-be-fixed resulting from technological developments are invented, new selfie-poses come to the fore, and my once top of the range camera-phone becomes outmoded and technologically poor against new models.[303] As such, I upgrade my phone, purchase ring lighting, buy numerous beauty products, and so on - in the words of conceptual artist Barbara Kruger, 'I shop therefore I am' - that is to say, in a capitalist society what I buy and own, can apparently improve how I look, how I feel and how I am defined by myself and others. These products

[302] This quote can be found on p.112 of Aimee Song, *Capture Your Style: Transform Your Instagram Images and Build the Ultimate Platform,* New York: Abrams Image, 2016.
[303] 'For example, 'tech-neck': wrinkles and slackness on the skin of the neck as a result of bad postures adopted when using laptops, smartphones, and so on', for more please see: Ana Sofia Elias, Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff, *Aesthetic Labour: Rethinking Beauty Politics in Neoliberalism,* London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, p.30.

do, of course, offer false hope, or to draw upon Italian philosopher Franco 'Bifo' Berardi they provide 'futurability' - they remind us that a better world or self/image lies ahead and work to infer dissatisfaction with the present thereby initiating yearning for a better and improved future.[304] Being led to, or rather working towards, better times suggests a spatial image in the form of a horizon. Berardi uses the phrase 'the horizon of possibilities' to describe a world controlled by 'absolute capitalism' which for him means 'a new cosmos is poised to emerge.'[305] Like Berardi, English philosopher Peter Osborne uses the horizon as a metaphor for the illusion offered by capitalism. The horizon, for Osborne, is a place in the distance that keeps promising but the things on offer never really come to be as the objects of our fancy shift further into the distance.[306] For political theorist Jodi Dean the horizon 'designates a dimension of experience that we can never lose.'[307] The horizon for both Dean and Osborne demarcates what is, or what was, at stake in communism. Osborne conceptualised the 'horizon of expectation' in the aftermath of the loss of 'two particular horizons'- the horizon of communism and that of revolution.[308] Both of which, in Osborne's words, 'offered the possibility of non-capitalist forms.'[309] Dean's horizon, as she writes, 'is not to recall a forgotten future' rather her 'communist horizon' is the possibility of collective organisation towards a future without exploitation by 'communicative capitalism' and a push back against the expansion of mass consumption without limits.[310]

Horizon's change, and with this capitalism markets to us an ever-greater number of products to consume. Osborne calls this an 'horizon of endless accumulation' emphasising the horizon

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[304] Franco 'Bifo' Berardi, *The Age of Impotence and the Horizon of Possibility,* London & New York City: Verso, 2017, writes, on p.3, that 'Futurability is a layer of possibility that may or may not develop into actuality'.

[305] Ibid, 'the horizon of possibilities' can be found on p.27, 'absolute capitalism' on p.28 and 'a new cosmos is poised to emerge' on p.29. I also draw from '"Socio Psycho-mancy and the Horizon of Possibility" - an extract from Franco 'Bifo' Berardi's *Futurability*', *Verso Blog Post,* 17 July 2017 <https://www.versobooks.com/en-gb/blogs/news/3318-socio-psycho-mancy-and-the-horizon-of-possibility-an-extract-from-franco-bifo-berardi-s-futurability> [accessed 12 April 2022], in the intro to the blog the anonymous writer clarifies what Berardi means by 'Horizon of Possibilities' drawing on phrases published in Berardi's book, such as 'absolute capitalism' and 'a new cosmos is about to emerge'.

[306] Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art*, London: Verso Books, 2013, p.182.

[307] Jodi Dean, *The Communist Horizon,* London & New York: Verso, p.1.

[308] Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art*, London: Verso Books, 2013, p.180.

[309] Ibid.

[310] Jodi Dean, *The Communist Horizon,* London & New York: Verso. On p.1 the phrase 'is not to recall a forgotten future' can be found. In my use of 'communicative capitalism, I refer to the title of Dean's book. On p.123, Dean writes 'communicative capitalism is an ideological formation wherein capitalism and democracy converge in networked communication technologies.'

not only in economic terms but also highlighting the 'repetitive sameness at the heart of capitalism.'[311]

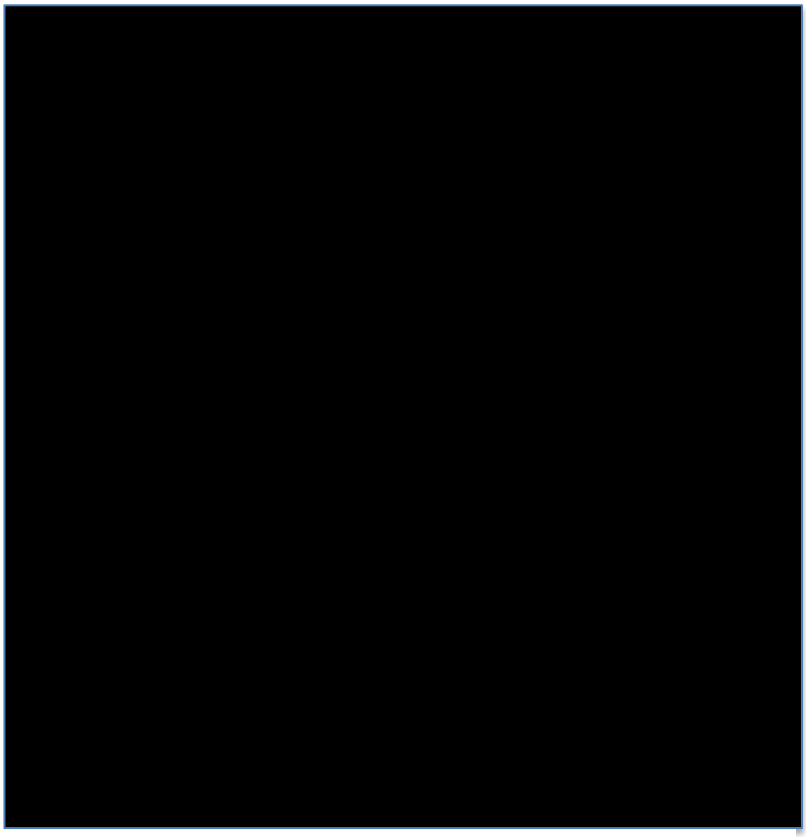

Figure 3.7. Barbara Kruger.
I Shop Therefore I Am, 1987.
Photographic silkscreen on vinyl.
<https://www.artsy.net/artwork/barbara-kruger-untitled-i-shop-therefore-i-am> [accessed 21 January 2024].

Capitalist repetition is highlighted in the moving image and installation works of artist Mika Rottenberg via pedalling, sweating and labouring bodies. The 2004 video work *Mary's Cherries* features a group of women, in a makeshift factory setting, with a beige carpet and walls that could be mistaken for woodchip wallpaper or peaks of royal icing. The women sit at workstations consisting of small tables attached to a push-bike. As they pedal, they clip their long red fingernails, transforming them with their hands into maraschino cherries. Wearing pastel-coloured smocks, with matching make-up and vibrant yellow hats, each worker performs a specific task in the manufacturing of the product. Throughout their protracted shift they produce whilst cycling to mechanical factory sounds. The rhythm of their

[311] Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art*, London: Verso Books, 2013, p.181.

labour seemingly keeps the capitalist system spinning.[312] Their job must be as exhausting as absurd.

Figure 3.8. Mika Rottenberg.
Mary's Cherries (still), 2004.
Single channel video installation, 00:5:50 minutes (duration).
Dimensions variable.
© Mika Rottenberg. Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth.

Laura Castagnini, in her 2015 essay on *Mary's Cherries,* suggests 'a cyclical relationship between food, growth, renewal, and excessive female bodies.'[313] I see this cyclical relationship - or repeated pattern - as emphasising the meaningless condition of production and consumption central to capitalist societies. Osborne uses the phrase 'puncture the horizons of expectation' to articulate how art practice can be used to expose the illusion of

[312] I draw here from Scott Indisek, who writes, 'people churn, pump, crank, stomp, and sneeze in order to keep the world spinning'. See: 'Mika Rottenberg's Seductive Videos Expose Capitalism's Surreal Inner Workings', *Artsy.net,* 5 December 2017, <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-mika-rottenbergs-seductive-videos-expose-capitalisms-surreal-inner-workings> [accessed 15 March 2022].
[313] Laura Castagnini, 'Mika Rottenberg's Video Installation Mary's Cherries: A Parafeminist "dissection" of the Carnivalesque', Philament Journal, 20: Humour, 2015, pp.11-40, (p.12) <https://philamentjournal.files.wordpress.com/2016/01/20_castagnini_150204.pdf> [accessed 15 March 2022].

capitalist transformation.[314] Whilst scholar Lauren Berlant coined the term 'Cruel Optimism' to point to how unachievable fantasies of the good life, with their promises of transformation, hold us back.[315] In Berlant's words, 'a relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing.'[316] The New Yorker, in a 2019 article on Lauren Berlant's cultural criticism, uses the image of the horizon in an analogical response to Berlant's ideas, the writing suggest, 'we dream of swimming toward a beautiful horizon, but in truth, Berlant evocatively observed, we are constantly "dog paddling around a space whose contours remain obscure."[317] The image of being in water, pushing against its volume with our bodies, going nowhere fast, creating ripples, makes life's fruitless struggles, endurances, repetitions and absurdities clear.

Themes of ongoing repetition and absurdity can be located in my own work. Like Rottenberg, I use these motifs to expose the ongoing labour of capitalism, albeit in a visually different way. In my to-camera performances I 'repeat', 'reperform' and 'research' a specific set of words and gestures. 'Re' as a prefix to these terms, indicates, for artist and writer Chantal Faust, 'reiteration', 'retracing' and 'return' suggesting doing something over and over, once more, and again.[318] In *Gestures (for the selfie)* I undertook a sustained amount of labour. However, my work is bodily, aesthetically feminine, and encouraged by the 'cruel optimism' of capitalist transformation, for the image.

The repeated patterns of speaking and gesturing towards a highly prized self/image, which conforms to a limited horizon of femininity set out by the fashion-beauty system taken online and perpetuated by prosumer image-making practices, is indeed absurd. Similarly, or perhaps even more absurdly, is the use of the term "prune" within this process. Surprisingly, saying

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[314] 'The horizon of expectation', as Osborne articulates, keeps promising, whilst the things on offer never really come to be, as the object of our desires shift further into the distance. Osborne goes on to write how 'at its best, contemporary art models experimental practices of negation that puncture horizons of expectation'. Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art*, London: Verso Books, 2013, p.182.

[315] Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism,* Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press*,* 2011, p.1 - this is, of course, also the title of Berlant's book.

[316] Ibid.

[317] Hua Hsu, 'Affect Theory and the New Age of Anxiety: How Lauren Berlant's cultural criticism predicted the Trumping of politics', *New Yorker Magazine,* 18 March 2019 <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/03/25/affect-theory-and-the-new-age-of-anxiety> [accessed 4 February 2024].

[318] I draw here upon Chantal Faust's lecture on absurdity, in which she discusses the prefix 're', which indicates repetition. See: Chantal Faust, 'Absurdity: Colouring the Void'*,* live lecture, 28 May 2018, *The RCA Visual Cultures Events Series*, Royal College of Art, Gorvy Theatre, Dyson Building.

the word “prune”, or its plural, “prunes”, during portrait photography, is not a new phenomenon.

Photography enthusiast Michael Zhang states, in his 2012 article on the history of smiling in photographs, that the practice of saying “prunes” to the camera can be traced back to the late 19th and early 20th Century British photography studio. Zhang, whose writing was published by the online photography and camera news website *Petapixel.com,* describes how photographic etiquette over a century ago was not to smile during the portrait session, rather sitters approached being photographed with a stoic seriousness, and the required deadpan expression was created by saying the word “prunes” to the Victorian photographer’s slow, formal, and cumbersome plate camera. Zhang articulates within his writing that “prunes” led to a pursing of the lips, which revealed nothing of the sitter's teeth, at a time when dental care was expensive, rudimentary and not accessible to all. He goes on to explain how by the mid-20th century, with the advent of faster, lightweight and more easily accessible cameras, there was a shift to casualness within photography, which caused photographers to adopt the instruction “say cheese” to form mouths and faces into a smile-like expression.[319] The online encyclopaedia Wikipedia lists around thirty countries who likewise use the method of sounding out particular words to create the desired facial gesture - a grin - for photographic portraiture. Interestingly most of the words on the list are terms for foodstuffs, tasty (or not so tasty, depending on your preferences) things to consume from patata (potato in Spanish) to zele (cabbage in Bulgarian) and 茄子 (aubergine in Cantonese) as well as, sýr (cheese in Czech).[320] However, for the photographic portrait, the actual consumption of the foodstuff is denied. So, rather than taking the sustenance into the body, sýr, prunes or patata is instead utilised for the attainment of a dream-self, and a promise of a conceivable future-image.

Anecdotally I have encountered the terms “sausage”, “sausages” and “silly sausages” in the photography studio, which in their ridiculousness encourage not just a smile, but also accompanying laughter. I have been advised that saying the word “prawn” is effective for

[319] Michael Zhang, ‘Say ‘Prunes’, Not ‘Cheese’: The History of Smiling in Photographs’, *Peta Pixel*, 2012 <https://petapixel.com/2012/11/04/say-prunes-not-cheese-the-history-of-smiling-in-photographs/> [accessed 23 September 2021].
[320] ‘Say Cheese’, *Wikipedia the Free Encyclopaedia,* 2006, online <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Say_cheese> [accessed 3 February 2022].

mastering the “fish-gape”, a selfie-pose that requires an open mouth.[321] Both terms, along with cheese and prune are drawn upon within *Gestures (for the selfie),* with “silly-sausage” being the most fun to perform. It is interesting, and rather unpleasant to note, that the term prawn, according to the website Urban Dictionary, is a derogatory word for describing someone who has a desirable body, but an undesirable face.[322]

Aimee Song, and her not so contemporary counterpart, the Victorian studio photographer, utilise the word “prune” and its plural “prunes" which evokes or implies a type of fruit, or rather more specifically, a dried plum, with a purple-ish black hue, and a wrinkled yet plump and squidgy appearance. Yet, the sticky, sweet and chewy prune, along with its juice, has somewhat of a reputation, which, in 2001, led the formerly known Californian Prune Board, to change their name to the Californian Dried Plum Board (CDPB). In the same year, ABC News reported a representative from CDPB as saying, ‘unfortunately, the stereotype among the women that we are retargeting is of a medicinal food for their parents, rather than ahealthful [sic], nutritious food for women who are leading an active lifestyle’.[323] The renaming of the board, along with the rebranding of the fruit, was for Californian plum/prune producers, an effort to change public perception of the fruit as being a thing to consume in order to relieve constipation. The description of a shrivelled, inky, purgative fruit is an apt reference point for a term that, when spoken, creates a puckered mouth shape, anus like in form, becoming a rather more curious choice of word when used to galvanise - as set out by Aimee Song - the quality of an adorable pout.

Stretch your style

Within my videos I perform in an intentionally sexualised way. My embrace and expression of sexual suggestiveness is a direct response to the presentation of sexiness in the original

[321] Chelsea Peng, ‘News Flash: The Duck Face Has Been Replaced by the Fish Gape: what a time to be alive’, Marie Claire, 1 October 2015 <https://www.marieclaire.com/beauty/news/a16150/fish-gape-pose-trend/> [accessed 3 February 2022].
[322] The Urban Dictionary states that a prawn is ‘a person with a hot bod but isn’t that pleasant to the eye; keep the body but throw away the head. Please see: ‘Prawn’, *Urban Dictionary,* 2004, online <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=prawn> [accessed 3 February 2022].
[323] ‘FDA Approves Prune Name Change’, *ABC News,* 1 February 2001 <https://abcnews.go.com/Health/story?id=117656&page=1> [accessed 3 February 2022].

selling selfies, as discussed in Chapter One, as well as, the guidance given by Song, to create and own a pout - an expression that projects or protrudes the lips to try make oneself look sexually attractive. However, my adoption of sex appeal as a template for posing and performing femininity is over-amplified. Indeed, this depiction of myself undertaking aesthetic labour to create an exaggerated sexual identity is important. Through repeated, extended, and overstated gestures, the template for posing becomes augmented, this move to the increasingly bigger, better and longer can be understood as an ongoing attempt to get closer to the horizon. Yet by performing so obviously, I shatter the illusion or rather 'puncture the horizon of expectation', making the sexualised image-template farcical, in the tradition of slapstick comedy.

The slapstick humour of actors from the silent-film era (c.1895 to 1929), which included Charlie Chaplin, Mabel Normand, Buster Keaton, Alice Howell, The Marx Brothers, Marion Bryron and Anita Garvin, and Laurel and Hardy, to name but a few, was a physical, visual, and overstated kind of humour.[324] In a 2012 article on slapstick humour and physical comedy in Kurt Vonnegut's novels, writer Günter Beck, describes slapstick humour in the following way, '[it's a] boisterous, body-centred comedy to convey humour: silly faces, exaggerated gestures, pratfalls, slapstick, pantomime, clownery, parody, ridicule, the grotesque, nonsense and even caricatures [known for its] strong visualisations of physical features and bodily motions.'[325] In lieu of speech or the material presence of actors in the round, appearing instead mute and on a screen, performers over-dramatised smacks to the head, pokes to the eye or slipping on banana peel, to the soundtrack of accompanying piano-music, which ensured the desired action or visual message was clearly communicated to the audience.

'Slapstick tactics' as artist Laresa Kosloff conceptualised in her PhD thesis, can be defined as, 'overinflated expressive gestures, for comic effect, to navigate technological developments and spatial parameters.'[326] Kosloff, employs such tactics in her 2006 video-work *Spirit &*

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[324] 'Silent Film' *British film Institute*, n.d.<https://www.bfi.org.uk/bfi-national-archive/look-behind-scenes/introduction-bfi-collections/silent-film> [accessed 23 March 2023].
[325] Günter Beck, 'Slapstick Humour: Physical Comedy in Vonnegut's Fiction', *Studies in American Humour*, 3(26), (2012), pp.59-72, (p.59) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23823832> [accessed 23 March 2023].
[326] I borrow here from, and paraphrase, Laresa Kosloff whose PhD thesis titled: *Slapstick Tactics: Staging a Performance of Video in Contemporary,* analyses some of the strategies performers use for navigating the challenges of new technologies. Her writing explores the similarities between early cinematic slapstick and examples of contemporary video art that feature the performing body. Kosloff articulates her PhD focus and experience in: Laresa Kosloff, 'Doctoral research Around Slapstick

Muscle, within which a female performer, who can only be identified as a pair of human legs, inhabits a giant geometric form. For four minutes thirty-nine seconds the shape with legs undertakes a series of uncoordinated movements in a tightly constructed space, which looks like a make-shift artist's studio. Liza Vasiliou in her 2006 essay on *Spirit & Muscle* describes the performances as 'intentionally blur[ing] the distinctions between modern dance, gymnastics and yoga: movements representative of the balance between strength and vulnerability, poise and awkwardness, masterful control and uncertainty.'[327] The resulting nine-minute video-performances are both ridiculous and funny.

Figure 3.9. Laresa Kosloff.
Spirit & Muscle (still), 2006.
Video, 00:04:39 minutes (duration).

Tactics', in *Doctoral Research in Art,* ed. David Forrest (North Melbourne, Victoria: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2018), pp.151-156.

[327] Liza Vasiliou, 'Spirit and Muscle', catalogue essay for NEW '06, *ACCA Melbourne*, (2006) pp.10-15, (p.10) <https://files.cargocollective.com/c999316/Liza-Vasiliou--Spirit-muscle-.pdf> [accessed 5 April 2022].

Like Kosloff, my performances speak to how the human body is negotiating new spatial parameters at a time of technological development.[328] Furthermore, we both insert our bodies into physical images. In Kosloff's case, paintings, that is to say, her graphic costumes refer to non-representational paintings of the modernist era. As Vasiliou notes in her writing, '[Kosloff] uses her body as a canvas, literally inserting herself into the modernist canon.'[329] Whilst I source images from the digital realm and mould my body to fit the template of femininity. In this way we draw attention to, disrupt, and question the bodily work involved in trying to attain particular images, through the stretching of gestures to create humour.

Our approach to humour is parodic, as it refers to an original, and is therefore designed to imitate, comment on, and make fun of, a concern. My performances do not seek to poke fun at women. Rather my intention is to ridicule the absurd, unreasonable, and irrational promises and demands of capitalist transformation. Humour, for me, is therefore a way of confronting, expressing and effectuating dissatisfaction. Parodic humour, for writer and academic Jacki Wilson, is used in contemporary feminist performance art 'to send up social expectations and norms as regards the body, gender and social and cultural constraints.'[330] In her writing, she defines, what she refers to as "piss takes", or tongue-in-cheek humour as having the ability 'to make nonsense of the normal and make the normal appear ridiculous.'[331] On these terms, humour in my own work arises through a subversion of the 'normal'. By stretching the required and desired gestures, I take up space and norms are troubled and challenged.

The title of my work *Gestures (for the selfie)* nods to, and borrows from, artist Hannah Wilke's thirty-five-minute single-channel video *Gesture*s, from 1974. Indeed, the framing of the videos, and exaggerated performances within, draws not only from Wilke's *Gestures* but also from Marina Abramović's twenty-three-minute video *Art Must Be Beautiful, Artist Must*

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[328] My sentence and conclusions are fashioned from UQ Art Museum's Facebook post on *Spirit & Muscle,* which notes: 'this work speaks to our present condition, and how we are negotiating new bodily and spatial parameters'. See:'Laresa Kosloff Video', *UQ Art Museum*, *Facebook,* 1 October 2020 <https://www.facebook.com/uqartmuseum/videos/laresa-kosloff/787910898641866/> [accessed 6 April 2022].

[329] Liza Vasiliou, 'Spirit and Muscle', catalogue essay for NEW '06, *ACCA Melbourne*, (2006) pp.10-15, (p.2) <https://files.cargocollective.com/c999316/Liza-Vasiliou--Spirit-muscle-.pdf> [accessed 5 April 2022].

[330] Jacki Wilson, '"Piss-Takes" Tongue-in-Cheek Humour and Contemporary Feminist Performance Art: Ursula Martinez, Oriana Fox and Sarah Maple', *n.paradoxa international feminist art journal*, 36, (2015), pp.5-12, (p.5), ISSN: 1461-0434.

[331] Ibid.

Be Beautiful, from 1975. For art historian Catherine Grant by referring to, being influenced by and reimagining feminist histories, in the present, I engage in a 'temporally disruptive conversation across time.'[332] Grant in her 2022 book on reenactment in contemporary feminist art practice, argues that the present moment can only be understood, for many contemporary artists and writers influenced by feminist histories, through an intense, embodied engagement with the past.[333] Therefore, by reworking Wilke's and Abramović's video works, visually and bodily, I am able to think across time, learn from history and become part of a productive and ongoing conversation.[334] Whilst Wilke's and Abramović's artworks were created during a different encounter with feminism, re-imagining the works in the present does not make the past appear strange, out of place or dated, rather these for-camera performances still have resonance today - women still work on their bodies to regulate and improve their image.

In *Gestures*, Wilke faces the camera so only her face and hands can be seen. Her dark hair disappears into the black backdrop. Throughout the performance Wilke manipulates her skin with fingers of both hands. She folds and kneads her flesh like clay, plasticine, or dough. Wilke can be seen pulling her mouth down, pushing her cheeks up, sticking her tongue out and sucking her fingers. Her technique is repetitive and heavy handed rather than light and gentle, which spotlights the discomfort and absurdity of what I perceive to be a nod to feminine beautification-work.

[332] Catherine Grant, *A Time of One's Own: Histories of Feminism in Contemporary Art,* Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2002, p.6.
[333] Ibid, p.5.
[334] Ibid.

Figure 3.10. Hannah Wilke.
Gestures (stills) 1974.
Video tape, 00:35:30 minutes (duration).
<https://alisonjacques.com/exhibitions/166-hannah-wilke> [accessed 21 January 2024].

Similarly, Abramović, in *Art Must Be Beautiful, Artist Must Be Beautiful,* sits facing the camera, directly addressing the viewer. In front of a white wall, with brushes in both hands, she grooms her hair, whilst repeating the words "art must be beautiful, artist must be beautiful." At the beginning of the performance her actions are slow, however, as the artwork protracts, her brushing routine changes pace. Abramović's repetitions become manic and aggressive, and her voice and face reveal the strain and pain of her feminine bodywork.

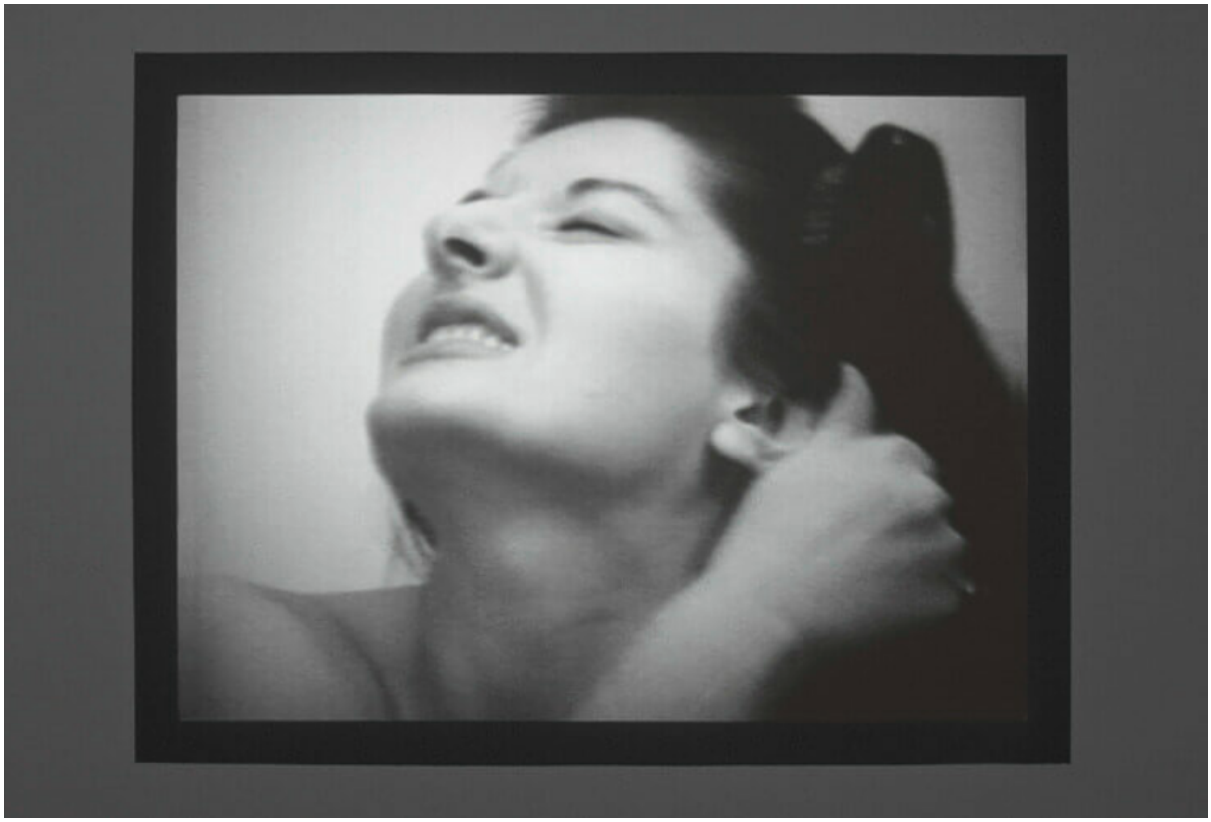

Figure 3.11. Marina Abramović.
Art Must Be Beautiful, Artist Must Be Beautiful (still), 1975.
Video, 00:14:05 minutes (duration).
© Marina Abramović. Courtesy of the artist.

In my videos I follow Wilke and Abramović by facing the camera, so only my head, neck and shoulders can be seen, in this way, the focus is solely on the gestures of my face. However, unlike Wilke and Abramović I do not position myself only in front of plain backdrops, rather I am also seen against varying domestic interiors, which speak to the selfie-images that this research begins with, as well as, the kinds of interiors that are presented to us via social media influencers, or appear on our news feeds via targeted adverts that, as discussed in Chapter Two, draw upon our viewing and buying habits.

In my for-camera performances, there is, like Wilke and Abramović, and Kosloff too, an evident strain to try and accomplish the poses. Strain, repetition, and the stretching of a single enduring gesture is similarly manifested within the performance and video-installation practice of Ragnar Kjartansson. In 2013 Kjartansson performed the song *Sorrow,* with American indie-band The National, however rather than playing the tune once, they recited it over and over, again and again, on repeat for six hours, to a live audience. As the performance protracted, the event became an endurance test for the audience and band members alike and

revelled in absurdity. Arguably, the most absurd moment of Kjartansson and The National's collaboration took place at the end of the gig when they returned to the stage for an encore. Together, they performed, one last time, the song, *Sorrow*. The ridiculousness of coming back on stage to play *Sorrow* again is delightful.

Figure 3.12. Ragnar Kjartansson and The National.
A Lot of Sorrow, 2013-2014.
Single-channel video with sound.
Edition of 10 and 2 artist's proofs.
06:09:35 hours (duration).
Performance took place at MoMA PS1, as part of *Sunday Sessions*, 5 May 2013, 12 to 6pm.
© Ragnar Kjartansson and The National; Courtesy of the artists, Luhring Augustine, New York and i8 Gallery, Reykjavik. Photographs: Elísabet Davids.

The lyrics to *Sorrow* were written by The National frontman Matt Berninger for the band's fifth album *High Violet* released in 2010.[335] In this way, when Kjartansson sings the words to Sorrow, he is repeating the words of another. There is something of Echo at play here. Echo, a figure from Greek mythology, was punished for eternity to speak the last words of others.

[335] For further information about who wrote the song can be found here: Roberta Smith, 'A Concert Not Live, but Always Living', *New York Times Art Review,* 18 September 2014 <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/19/arts/design/six-hours-of-the-national-in-a-lot-of-sorrow.html> [accessed 13 April 2022].

According to myth, Echo over time, physically faded away so that all that remained of her was her voice.[336]

Kjartansson, with The National, in Chantal Faust's analysis, shows us that saying, performing, or doing the same thing, on a continual loop, does not always diminish, rather it can allow for certain moments to manifest. Performing rendition after rendition of the ballad creates a shift in how the lyrics and the music is heard, interpreted and understood.[337] YouTube videos of the event show band-members taking short breaks.[338] As such the musical rendition changes, demonstrating that difference, in the repeated action, is always possible, in a way not too dissimilar to Daniel Rubinstein's conceptualisation of repetition and difference, which I discuss in Chapter One. Likewise, none of my repeated to-camera gestures are ever the same. My facial expressions change with each repetition and the words I say are spoken softer, louder, quicker or more drawn out. Unlike Kjartansson, I perform on my own and not to a live audience. When I drop or mispronounce a word, no one fills in for me. The focus is very much on me, in full-face close-up. Furthermore, the context within which I perform is not that of a music venue, rather as I have previously mentioned, I am positioned within various domestic settings, which sometimes glitch. My sound also lacks consistency. Recorded on my iPad or MacBook and without the help of a sound engineer, background interference is often heard. Such changes, disruptions and ruptures hold the promise of new possibilities. Whilst the emergence of a new rhythm offers a glimmer of hope for an alternative; that a credible replacement to capitalism may be thinkable. I am simultaneously reminded of a statement by cultural critic Mark Fisher, who in turn is echoing the words of Fredrich Jameson and Slavoj Žižek: 'it is easier to imagine the end of the world than an end to capitalism.'[339]

Whilst Fisher's abandonment of hope is rather bleak, freeing ourselves of hope can be both liberating and productive. Similarly, and returning to Osborne's horizon, we need to stop believing in, and chasing capitalist promises, that sit just out of reach. My artworks, like Kjartansson and The National's performance, represent absurdity to bring the system within

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[336] Ovid, *Metamorphoses,* Indiana University Press: Bloomington, 1955, p.68.
[337] Chantal Faust, 'Absurdity: Colouring the Void', live lecture, 28 May 2018, *The RCA Visual Cultures Events Series*, Royal College of Art, Gorvy Theatre, Dyson Building.
[338] Oliver Basciano, 'Ragnar Kjartansson', *ArtReview*, 21 July 2014 <https://artreview.com/may-2014-feature-ragnar-kjartansson-1-1/> [accessed 12 April 2022].
[339] Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, Winchester UK and Washington USA: Zero Books, 2009, p.2.

which we operate into sharp focus, to place a spotlight on capitalism's shifting horizons, so that capitalist promises of self-transformation can no-longer be believed in. Absurdity in my own work is brought to the fore not just through repeated and exaggerated gestures, but through the template method. The template, as I state in the Introduction to this thesis, allows me to do two things at once: follow horizons whilst troubling them. Or to put it another way, the template manifests my desires to self-transform whilst also spotlighting the fact that I find capitalist promises of self-improvement ridiculous.

Reconfigure your style

The *Gestures (for the selfie)* videos can be an uneasy watch, not just because of my repeated and awkward attempts at posing, but also due to the feeling of watching a private moment of rehearsal. Likewise, my direct gaze, the duration of the works and the audible licks and smacks of my lips, along with the sounding out of words, which can be heard as whispers or clear statements, make the videos difficult viewing. This could bring on a kind of misophonic reaction - that is, intense feelings towards chewing, swallowing, or breathing.[340]

Photography theorist Eugenie Shinkle has written about how uneasy poses held by models in fashion imagery can communicate with, and physically affect, the viewers of such images. In her 2016 essay, *The Feminine Awkward: Graceless Bodies and the Performance of Femininity in Fashion Photographs*, she describes how photographs containing certain bodily performances 'repel rather than attract' and can be felt on a deeper bodily and visceral level, acting on the viewer as 'a mild torment of body and mind.'[341] I have noted a similar experience of viewing in Martin Creed's 2016 *Work No. 2727: Lily Cole* or in fact any one of the very short films that are included within this body of work. Each of the videos feature a portrait of a woman, some of whom have a personal connection with the artist, his mother, and his partner for example. For one minute fifty-five seconds to two minutes forty-eight the

[340] 'What is Misophonia?' *WebMD*, 18 December 2022 <https://www.webmd.com/mental-health/what-is-misophonia> [accessed 7 April 2022]. At the other end of the spectrum however sits, ASMR, which stands for, autonomous sensory meridian response, which can be understood as a kind of frisson, or tingling feeling, experienced in relation to certain auditory stimuli. See: 'ASMR', *Wikipedia the Free Encyclopaedia,* 2011, online <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ASMR> [accessed 3 February 2022].
[341] Eugenie Shinkle, 'The Feminine Awkward: Graceless Bodies and the Performance of Femininity in Fashion Photographs', *Fashion Theory*, 21:2, (2016), pp.201-217, (p.202), doi:10.1080/1362704X.2016.1252524.

camera slowly moves closer to the person depicted, by turns each portrait becomes increasingly intimate and engaging.[342] But then, as the artworks conclude, something shifts: the sitter opens their mouth to reveal chewed up food. As such, I find myself no longer drawn into, and seduced by, the representation, but rather repelled by it. According to an interview with online magazine, *Studio International*, Creed's intention is to 'really gross people out' and to 'reveal how in life we are at the mercy of feelings that we have no control over.'[343] But, there is more at stake here, indeed the women's performances, which lure us in and then push us away, disrupt the illusion of the sensual. By opening their mouths to show what is inside the erotic becomes puerile and we see something we shouldn't - the interior fleshiness through the external cosmetic mask and TMI.

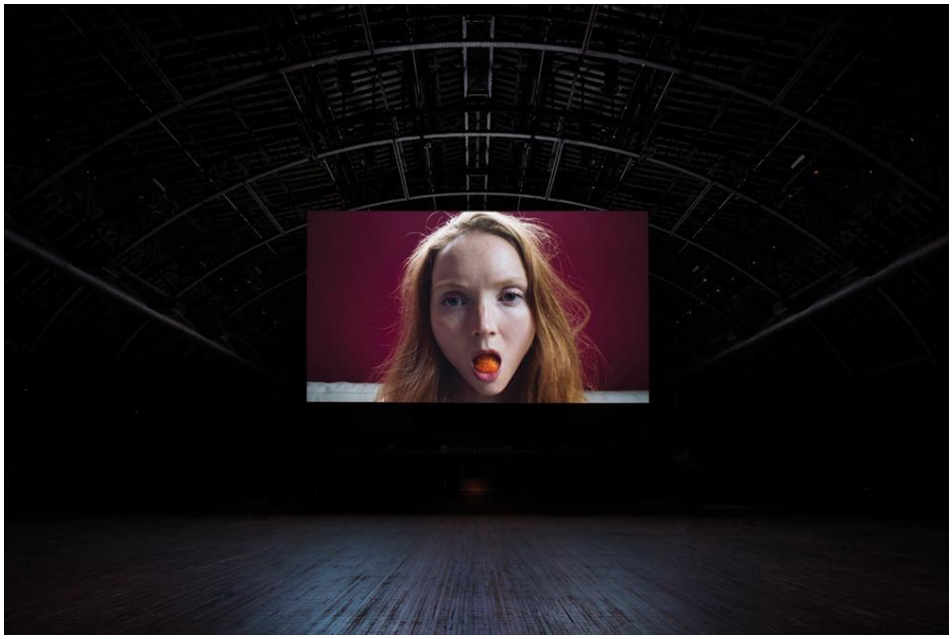

Figure 3.13. Martin Creed.
Work, No. 2727: Lily Cole (still), 2016.
Digital Video, 00:01:55 minutes (duration).
Edition of 3 + 1 AP.

[342] Information on who is in the videos, the length of the artworks and the panning is drawn from: Katy Diamond Hamer, 'Martin Creed, The Back Door', *Eyes Towards the Dove Contemporary Art & Culture,* 14 July 2016 <https://eyes-towards-the-dove.com/2016/07/martin-creed-back-door/> [accessed 7 April 2022]; and Austin Considine, 'Martin Creed', *Art in America,* 26 September 2016 <https://www.artnews.com/art-in-america/aia-reviews/martin-creed-2-62217/> [accessed 7 April 2022].
[343] Veronica Simpson, 'Martin Creed: 'You're at the mercy of these feelings you don't have any control over'', *Studio International,* 10 December 2018 <https://www.studiointernational.com/index.php/martin-creed-toast-review-interview-hauser-and-wirth-london> [accessed 7 April 2022].

In my quest to create an image in the flesh: a pout, a smoulder, a smile and so on, or indeed a cosmetic mask, I present TMI, as I capture all moments of my self-fashioning. Such a notion calls forth social media theorist Nathan Jurgenson's declaration that the 'selfie disclose[s] the unbearable truth that we are always constructing ourselves.'[344] In Chapter One I discuss the highly pointed drag performances of 單Sin 慧Wai 乾Kin to draw attention to how selfies, on social media platforms, can build a portrait of us, that includes 'all the labour left unseen.'[345] Similarly, in my videos I present a protracted portrait which includes all the movements, errors and successes, as well as the before, middle and after moments involved in creating a particular facial gesture for the digital representation. Thereby, my portraits can be considered as ongoing, in process of production, or in terms of 'in the making of.'[346] The latter for philosopher, cultural critic and psychoanalytical researcher Slavoj Žižek 'is the same as that of the magician who discloses the trick without dissolving the mystery of the magical effect.'[347] The disclosure of an unfinished body, in continual becoming, captured in ongoing self-transformation into an image, signals the productive and expansive nature of neoliberal 'aesthetic labour.'[348]

In my endeavour to pursue a dream-image, I create, and add to, an ever-increasing number of images and videos uploaded to the internet every day. According to Google twenty four billion selfies are posted onto their servers annually.[349] As cultural theorist Rosalind Gill in a 2017 interview observes, 'no previous generation has ever been the subject or object of so much visual attention.'[350] This, for Ana Elias, Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff - whose

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[344] Stuart Jeffries paraphrases Nathan Jurgenson in, Stuart Jeffries, *Everything, All the Time, Everywhere: How We Became Postmodern,* London: Verso, 2021, p.66. The original quote by Jurgenson can be found via, Nathan Jurgenson, 'The Selfie and the Self: In Defence of Duckface', *Verso*, 16 May 2019 https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/news/4321-the-selfie-and-the-self-in-defence-of-duckface [accessed 17 March 2022].

[345] Legacy Russell, *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto,* London and New York: Verso, 2020, p.56 as already cited in Chapter One.

[346] Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies,* London & New York: Verso, 2008 [orig. 1997], p.129.

[347] Ibid.

[348] In Chapter One I introduce Ana Sofia Elias, Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff, who in their book, *Aesthetic Labour: Rethinking Beauty Politics in Neoliberalism,* use the term 'aesthetic labour' which refers to the kinds of normalised work undertaken on the surface of the body, and beyond, by women, in the name of self-improvement. Ana Sofia Elias, Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff, *Aesthetic Labour: Rethinking Beauty Politics in Neoliberalism,* London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

[349] Anil Sabharwal, 'Google Photos; One year, 200 million users, and a whole lot of selfies', *Google Blog,* 27 May 2016 <https://blog.google/products/photos/google-photos-one-year-200-million/> [accessed 15 February 2022].

[350] Ian Sinclair, 'Aesthetic labour, beauty politics and neoliberalism: An interview with Rosalind Gill', *openDemocracy,* 24 July 2017 <https://neweconomics.opendemocracy.net/aesthetic-labour-beauty-

book *Aesthetic Labour: Rethinking Beauty Politics in Neoliberalism* I introduced in Chapter One - has had a profound impact on how women see themselves and in turn informs the amount of, and kinds of, 'aesthetic labour' that they subject themselves to. As discussed in previous chapters, this has meant cosmetic procedures, such as surgical interventions and nonsurgical beauty treatments, have become increasingly common, mainstream, accessible, normalised and aligned to the aesthetic appearance of the body on screen or as-image.[351]

During the making of *Gestures (for the selfie)* I became acutely aware of how my face appeared on screen. My intense gaze seemingly magnified my skin, features, and movements. Throughout each six-minute routine, I scrutinised the asymmetry of my face, the prominence of my nose, the teeth that step out of line and so on, and I learnt - to some extent - through my repetitions, how to correct, improve or mask my so-called imperfections. Yet, I struggled to become fully at ease with seeing my face through the built-in lens positioned laterally to the side of the iPad or to the top of the laptop, that I used when creating the video works. The close and wide nature of these lenses visually distorts the face: exaggerating, stretching and elongating features. But it's hard to keep this in mind when looking at one's face on screen, which leads to a great deal of frustration with one's image. Indeed, the effects of camera optics have had a profound impact on how people see, understand, and respond to images of themselves since the move to online working as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2021 The Guardian newspaper reported that the shift from 'away-from-keyboard' meetings to on-screen communications has created a new form of body dysmorphic disorder, which the article refers to as 'Zoom Dysmorphia'. Paraphrasing Dr Shadi Kourosh, a Harvard Medical School professor and dermatologist, the condition has been so named because those attending plastic surgery clinics are requesting nose jobs, the smoothing out of forehead wrinkles and procedures to correct sagging skin in the lower face and neck. The writing goes on to confirm that the medical professor and her team undertook research to determine the source of the perceived problems and concluded that front-facing close-range lap-top cameras were at the

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politics-neoliberalism-interview-rosalind-gill/> [accessed 14 February 2024]. Please also refer to the discussion of aesthetic labour in Chapter One.

[351] Ana Sofia Elias, Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff, *Aesthetic Labour: Rethinking Beauty Politics in Neoliberalism,* London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, discuss the normalisation of 'aesthetic labour, and Meredith Jones, 'Media-bodies and screen-births: cosmetic surgery reality television', *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies,* 22(4), (2008), pp.515-524, conceptualises how skin is taking on the appearance of the screen. Please see Chapter One for further information.

root of the issue. The writing also states that there are clear differences between Zoom dysmorphia and Snapchat dysmorphia, the latter being a disorder that I discuss in Chapter One. Dr Kourosh describes how Snapchat dysmorphia patients wish to be altered in-line with their heavily filtered images, whilst with Zoom dysmorphia people ask to be enhanced in similar and specific ways that relate to distortions of the face created by the angle and view of laptop cameras. Also, unlike Snapchat dysmorphia, there is an unawareness, on the patient's behalf, that some level of dysmorphia is occurring, with Zoom dysmorphia patients are seemingly unaware that their bodily distortions are occurring as a result of their laptop cameras.'[352] So, as Dr Kourosh sets out, we have come to make judgments about our image not only by looking at ourselves through lenses that warp our features but also via new forms of looking, and being looked at, in the digital age, that is, seeing ourselves on a screen, alongside others, who also stare back at us. This is, for some, instigating the need to redesign the flesh. The danger here, however, is once the face has been re-sculpted to account for perceived 'disfigurements', another rapid technological development is likely to occur. Such an evolution could, yet again, shift how we see ourselves, and how we think others see us on screen, meaning that once more our desired image will sit just out of reach and on the horizon, triggering yet more dissatisfaction, yearning and self/image-work.

Own your style

Through her daily selfies Kim Kardashian's image is disseminated on Instagram. Recognisable for her extreme hourglass figure, sculpted by SKIMS shapewear, a fashion brand created by Kardashian herself, she appears hyper-feminine. The women depicted in the images that this research begins with could be considered as 'keeping up with the Kardashians.'[353] Their silhouettes appear exaggerated in their fashioning for, and by, the

[352] In a Guardian article on Zoom dysmorphia, the differences between Snapchat dysmorphia and Zoom dysmorphia are set out in the following way, 'Zoom dysmorphia is different in a keyway. "[With snapchat dysmorphia] patients would come in to see the cosmetic consultant with a photo of themselves that would be heavily filtered, [yet] there's an awareness on the patient's behalf that there's some dysmorphia going on," says Kourosh. "But with Zoom dysmorphia it's unconscious. People don't know about the distortion that is happening with their cameras." For more, please see: Priya Elan, ''I believe it's a mental health issue": the rise of Zoom dysmorphia', *The Guardian Newspaper*, 1 September 2021 <https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2021/sep/01/i-believe-its-a-mental-health-issue-the-rise-of-zoom-dysmorphia> [accessed 22 March 2022].

[353] I refer here to the American reality TV series 'Keeping Up with the Kardashians (KUWTK), that featured the personal and professional lives of Kim Kardashian, her siblings and parents. The show was aired between 2007 and 2021.

camera. Their curves, like Kardashian's, simultaneously evoke the silhouette of Marilyn Monroe, ancient fertility symbols known as Venus figurines and the many sexualised female video-game avatars with hoisted up breasts, cinched waist and curvaceous hips and buttocks. This image of femininity also aesthetically recalls the amplified bodies that featured in the 1997 Comme des Garçons Spring/Summer collection *Body Meets Dress, Dress Meets Body* - a clothing line that included gingham bodycon dresses padded out in specific areas to emphasise the shape and bulk of the body, as well as Leigh Bowery's built-up silhouettes. Bowery, a 1980s and 90s club figure, fashion designer and performer, created humorous and flamboyant costumes that emphasised and exaggerated his own body and sexuality. Bowery is quoted as saying his flesh is his most favourite fabric.[354] This expression could easily be attributed to Kardashian. However, unlike Kardashian, the shapes that Bowery created, like *Body Meets Dress, Dress Meets Body,* set out to challenge fashion norms and beauty standards.

Fashion theorist Francesca Granata explains the conventions of the time, when she writes, 'the twentieth century fashion body remains one of the most articulate attempts at the creation of a 'perfect' and perfectly contained body restrained and sealed.'[355] Granata also notes in her writing on experimental fashion that Japanese designer, Rei Kawakubo who created *Body Meets Dress* for Comme des Garçons, intentionally set out to 'explore and question assumptions about female beauty and notions of what is sexually alluring and what is grotesque within the Western vocabulary.'[356] Granata goes on, 'this collection, like much of 1990s, experimental fashion, can be understood as a response to the 1980s and particularly to the image of the über-healthy, wholesome and powerful body that was promoted with particular force throughout the period.'[357] Granata suggests a connection between 1980s bodily control and neoliberalism.

Neoliberalism, when considered in relation to the body, requires - as identity theorist Paul du Gay observes - 'the individual to be "enterprising": 'a calculating, self-reflexive, "economic"

[354] Colby Mugrabi, 'Leigh Bowery', *MINNIEMUSE,* 9 June 2020 <https://www.minniemuse.com/articles/musings/leigh-bowery> [accessed 2 March 2024].
[355] Francesca Granata, *Experimental Fashion Performance Art, Carnival and the Grotesque Body,* London, New York, Oxford, New Delhi and Sydney: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2017, p.17.
[356] Ibid*,* p.40.
[357] Ibid, p.36.

subject: one that calculates about itself and works upon itself in order to better itself.'[358] Cultural theorist Rosalind Gill building upon du Gay sees neoliberalism, when taken up by and applied to women as taking on a 'a perennial emphasis upon female attractiveness, and with it the pressures to live up to particular appearance norms at whatever the cost to the self – whether that involves 'stomach sucked in' and 'pushed up boobs' or surgical procedures.'[359]

Figure 3.14. Rei Kawakubo for Comme des Garçons.
Body Meets Dress, Dress Meets Body, Spring 1997.
Photograph courtesy of firstVIEW.

[358] Ibid, p.39 quote Paul du Gay, *Consumption and Identity at Work*, London: Sage, 1996, p.124.

[359] Rosalind Gill, 'The Affective, Cultural and Psychic Life of Postfeminism: A Postfeminist Sensibility 10 Years On', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 20(6), (2017), pp.606-626, doi:10.1177/1367549417733003.

Figure 3.15. Leigh Bowery photographed by Fergus Greer.
Session VII, Look 38, 1994.
© Fergus Greer, courtesy of the artist and Michael Hoppen Gallery.

Cultural theorist and feminist Angela McRobbie's formulation of gendered neoliberalism or rather 'postfeminism', offers women an 'illusion of equality' as 'a new horizon of self-imposed feminine cultural norms' in which 'hegemonic masculinities have removed themselves from the scene and are now replaced by the cultural horizon of judgement

provided by the fashion and beauty system.'[360] McRobbie's horizon is, like those conceptualised by Franco 'Bifo' Berardi and Peter Osborne, connected to capitalism and an ongoing need to purchase to improve. However, McRobbie's horizon – and I paraphrase the cultural theorist here - makes it look like women are freely choosing, taking ownership, and are pleasing themselves,[361] and - in the words of Rosalind Gill - 'not the result of any coercion or even influence.'[362]

The three Instagram influencers mentioned in this thesis, Kim Kardashian, Aimee Song and Mrs Hinch, are but three women online, who bear-out a gendered neoliberal preoccupation with appearance, beauty, and the body in an overt and self-as-brand way. Online, they present a strong 'girl boss' work ethic, with an emphasis on attractiveness.[363] Through their self-fashioning or what we may call *poser-ism*[364] - that is, the owning and styling of one's public image and gestures, Kardashian, Song and Hinch, lead us to believe that they are in control and doing it for themselves, but their self-managed and self-composed lifestyles are nothing but a performative, artificial and unreliable simulation, contrived to make us believe they have reached the horizon of expectation. Their brands market hope, by following their images and advice, we can also reach, attain and maintain a particular image or horizon. Whilst famous influencers transform themselves for their selfies with varying levels of cosmetic enhancement including clothing, lighting and camera angles, artist Gillian Wearing uses prosthetic masks. In 2003 she created a number of portraits in which she reenacted images from her family album inhabiting the silicone moulded faces of her younger self, her brother,

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[360] The phrase 'illusion of equality' can be found on p.63 of Angela McRobbie's book *The Aftermath of Feminism* and 'a new horizon of self-imposed feminine cultural norms' is located on p.68. McRobbie's articulation of franchising hegemonic masculinities to the fashion and beauty system is also discussed on p.68. For more, please see, Angela McRobbie, *The Aftermath of feminism,* London: Sage Publications, 2009.

[361] Ibid, p.68.

[362] Ian Sinclair, 'Aesthetic labour, beauty politics and neoliberalism: An interview with Rosalind Gill', *openDemocracy,* 24 July 2017 <https://neweconomics.opendemocracy.net/aesthetic-labour-beauty-politics-neoliberalism-interview-rosalind-gill/> [accessed 14 February 2024].

[363] A girlboss according to the Urban Dictionary is to make something or someone appear as a feminist idol for profit. I chose the term 'girlboss' as Kardashian uses this herself in a 2017 interview with Harper's Bazaar Arabia. In this interview she simultaneously confirms she is not feminist, and declares herself feminist, whilst insisting she doesn't like labels. This discussion about feminism takes place a year after she published an essay on her website about why she doesn't consider herself feminist. For more please see: 'Remember This: Kim Kardashian's Bazaar Cover Shoot Inspired By Her Ultimate Style Muse Cher', *Harper's Bazaar Arabia,* 30 August 2017 <https://www.harpersbazaararabia.com/culture/culture-featured-news/kim-kardashian-west-september-cover-star> [accessed 15 February 2024].

[364] I would like to thank Professor Johnny Golding for bringing *poser-ism* to my attention, indeed it was Johnny's reading of my video works that catapulted the notion of *poser-ism.*

her sister and of her parents and grandparents. Since then, she has gone on to create a kind of expanded family album, recreating the portraits of well-known artists and photographers. The masks, which resemble flesh, feature expressions fixed by a past photographic moment. Each false face also contains large almond shaped cut-outs, through which we can see Wearing's eyes stare back at us. The layering of faces suggests another self or multiple selves. Creating, for me, a series of unsettling, fascinating and melancholy portraits, that seem to yearn for a different self/image, life, or time.

Figure 3.16. Gillian Wearing.
Self Portrait of Me Now in Mask, 2011.
Framed c-type print, 124 x 98 cm

Wearing's layering or blending of faces recalls the hyper-realistic self-transformations that can happen via face-swapping apps. Reface is one such app, which enables its users to shape-shift into a celebrity. Much like Wearing's portraits, one never fully becomes the image of the other, rather one's face becomes merged with another, rendering the user as at once recognisable, and not. Wearing's photographs both pre-date and sit within a time of face-swap technology. Thereby anticipating, inhabiting, and amplifying the complex relationship between the body and the image, as bound up in acts of trying on, trying out, and trying to fit, different guises and poses, in the digital age.

Shapeshifting, shape holding and the transgression of borders between self and other is explored in the 2013 performance *Macho Dancer* by choreographer, dancer and visual artist Eisa Jocson. Whilst my own self-performances magnify femininity, Jocson reduces feminine bodily movements and augments a performance of masculinity. According to a Frieze Magazine article on Jocson's practice, published in 2021, she is reenacting the 'highly coded display of erotic masculinity seen in Filipino gay bars.'[365] The writing describes feminine dance movements as requiring height and aerial manoeuvres, whilst macho-dancing masculinity involves slow, low gestures.[366] This, for Frieze, is reflected in Jocson's performance as long-drawn out hip gyrations, bicep flexes and torso undulations.[367] In her routine, Jocson wears the costume of a Filipino Macho Dancer, which comprises of a vest, shorts, belt and boots.

On her Wordpress site Jocson describes undertaking research into macho-dancing by visiting a club near her home in Manilla and asking the macho dancers to become her mentors. She states that she also studied YouTube videos, and scrutinised recordings of herself practising dance movements, reviewing what needed to be improved - a process that took her over a year to master.[368] Discussing the process involved in accomplishing control of her bodily movements and facial expressions for her macho persona, Jocson says:

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[365] Ysabelle Cheung, 'Eisa Jocson Knows the Power of Dance', *FRIEZE*, 8 December 2021 <https://www.frieze.com/article/eisa-jocson-knows-power-dance> [accessed 19 May 2022].
[366] Ibid.
[367] Ibid.
[368] Marlyne Sahakian, 'MACHO MACHO WOMAN: INTERVIEW WITH EISA JOCSON', *Arts Asia Pacific,* 23 April 2014 <https://eisajocson.wordpress.com/2014/05/22/arts-asia-pacific-article-macho-macho-woman-interview-with-eisa-jocson/> [accessed 19 May 2022].

> I went to the gym! That made a huge difference in how I approached macho dancing. I became aware of my muscles and how to engage them in movement. I learned a whole new body language—posture, stance, walk, gestures, gaze, ways of gyration and undulation—all through the physical quality of my body and my muscles.[369]

In my mirroring of women shaping their faces into agreeable expressions, I gained an understanding of the degree of control that women must have over their bodily movements. Saying "prune" over and over 'for that cute upturn of the mouth' made me aware of my facial features, bone structure and muscles, as well as my mouth shape, accent, and enunciation, and how I am supposed to engage these things into certain patterns of movement, or sound and pitch, for the required outcome set by others. Admittedly, my performances lack the technical precision of Jocson's, as such my ability to maintain the desired image, results in slippages and failures.

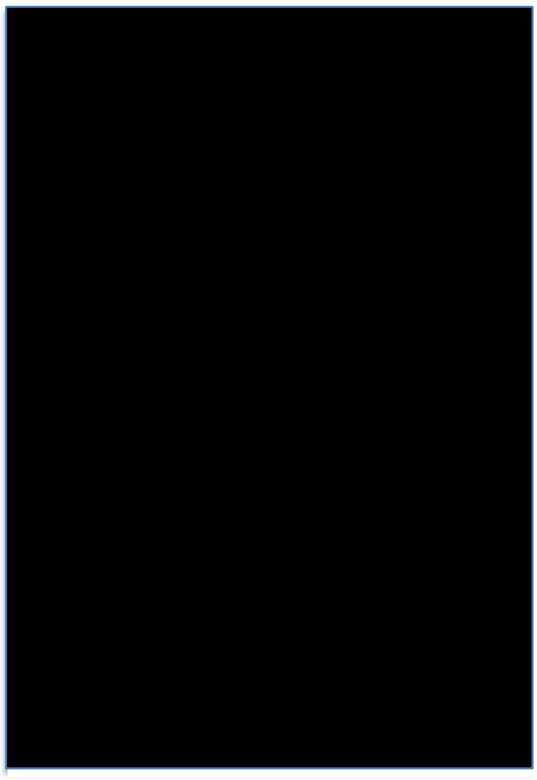


Figure 3.17. Eisa Jocson,
Macho Dancer, 2013,
Photographic still of live performance.
<https://eisajocson.wordpress.com/works/macho-dancer/> [accessed 21 January 2024].

[369] Ibid.

In *Gestures (for the selfie)* I focus on the alteration of the face to simultaneously adapt to, and unsettle, (self-)imposed gendered expectations upon appearance, movements, and expressions. By participating in, and mirroring, the present situation in which women work on their image, for the image, I cast doubt on capitalist promises and horizons. By imitating gestures, repeating words and deconstructing fantasy-images that sit out of reach on the horizon I present conflicting positions under capitalism. I at once believe in the horizon and work towards it, whilst recognising its absurdities and discounting its spurious claims of transformation.

What this process ultimately bears-out is our unremitting consumption and production behaviours. It also spotlights our fascination with self-transformation, our dedication to follow shifting horizons, and the impulse to repeat this routine, over and over, and again and again.

Writer Emma Dabiri in her 2023 book *Disobedient Bodies* calls for a refusal of the European beauty landscape which, as she articulates, is traditionally thin, white, straight, ableist and not working class. In her writing on beauty, she takes into account the opportunities and wider horizons enabled by social media. This includes body positivity and the diversity of people. She also acknowledges how online platforms and mobile phone cameras, which she describes as miniature production and broadcast devices, have exacerbated a preoccupation with appearance. In an age where our image is created not just for our own but also other peoples' consumption, she calls for new ideas of beauty, for different ways of being with ourselves and each other. She writes 'while there may be nothing new under the sun, there are, in the words of Octavia Butler, 'new suns.' The light of these other suns is hidden from us by Western discourse which positions itself at the normative centre.'[370] I wholly agree with Dabiri's formulation. We can create a greater range of images if we look beyond our current standards.

Simply put, we vitally need to expand our horizons.

[370] Emma Dabiri, *Disobedient Bodies.* London: Wellcome Collection, 2023, p.29.

Conclusion

The Image as a Template for Posing, this thesis, has offered an examination of some of the labour undertaken by women in the pursuit of self-transformation into a fantasy-idea or 'idea(l)-image'[371] for the self(ie)-representation. It has taken, as its departure point, a set of prosumer images originally sourced from internet marketplaces. These images, which I discussed in detail at the start of this thesis and referred back to at varying points throughout the writing, function on the digital feed as both selfies and as DIY adverts. They depict women who use their bodies like shop mannequins to model the clothing they are selling online. Most hold a camera-phone in front of their face. Others crop out their heads using the edge of the mirror they stand in-front of. Each photograph reveals aspects of the selfie-maker's lives at the point of creating the portrait - an ironing board propped-up here, make-up strewn there, socks drying on a radiator. This is the changing room at the back of the theatre, an endlessly fascinating although mundane space, where preparation takes place. Whilst centre stage the women perform seemingly well-rehearsed poses for their camera-phones - breasts pushed forward, hips cocked, one foot positioned in front of the other. In my research, the selling-site images have provided me with an opportunity to create my own self(ie)-portraiture, for the study of everyday ubiquitous do-it-yourself prosumer image-making practices.

In the creation of the artworks that have framed the chapters of this thesis, I have worked with the women's images to varying extents. As I articulated in Chapter One, in the photographic series *Modelling Selfies (In Paper Outfits)* I reimagined the marketplace images creating paper-attire from them, which I attached to my own body and used as templates for fitting and following. The body shapes and postures of others guided not just my pose but also the positioning of my camera-phone - usually held at head height, pointed slightly downwards and portrait in orientation. Whilst, I didn't explicitly co-opt, or refer to the selling-site selfies in the video works that are discussed in Chapters Two and Three, a link can be traced between the art pieces and the women's photographs, in that I continued to take-shape in the form of an image in order to interrogate the skill-set women are encouraged to learn, and then draw upon at the moment in which they point their cameras towards themselves.

[371] Here I reuse a term, first mentioned in Chapter One, in a discussion that draws on Rebecca Coleman's ideas of images of transformation.

Looking at images online, repeating the poses bodily and imaginatively, extending and reimaging what I see to create photographic and video self-portraits, doing this over and over, has articulated the processes, patterns and performances of prosumer self-portraiture, calling attention to online and offline consumptive and productive systems of exchange as well as image/body relations, in the digital age, and how these converge with new modes of subjectivity.

The thesis has shown that a great deal of work is done by women for the self(ie) image. I have discovered, through appropriations and (re)performances of contemporary prosumer imagery, that this labour encompasses many forms including aesthetic, creative, affective and digital. In the body of photographs that led Chapter One I participated in an image-exchange that involved simultaneously producing and consuming images at the site of the phygital. To reiterate, I appropriated and reenacted images sourced online, reimagining them offline, before returning them to the digital in a newly reconfigured state. As I discussed in detail within the first chapter, my working process allowed me to pay attention to my affective relations with images, which in turn uncovered some of the bodily, creative and digital labour undertaken by women for the self(ie)-representation. In the writing I suggested that women's service to the image is instigated by a neoliberal imperative to self-improve and self-transform into an image-ideal for the next image. Arguing that there is a desire, for some, to become, or be, an imagined screen-based image, in the flesh, by turns demonstrating how the boundaries between the 2D and 3D have become connected and blurred in the digital age.

In Chapters Two and Three I continued to explore the body's connections to the image, to further understand the work done by women for the self(ie)-representation. This time I specifically focused on a set of terms - "prune", "prawn", "cheese" and "sausage". As I explain in my writing, these are words used in photographic portraiture for the attainment of particular facial gestures. In my artworks I practise saying the terms within a body of video performances, rather than photographic portraiture. In Chapter Two, I say the words to a speech coach, who corrects and guides my pronunciation, and in Chapter Three I work on my own, mobilising my mouth and face, trying again and again to attain the correct expressions. As I articulate in the thesis, in the video-performances, I am preparing for the future portrait, presenting myself as a work in progress, moulding my idealised form. Through this I spotlight the learning and improvement behaviours, as well as the mouldings and repetitions of bodily labour.

My image-appropriation and (re)-performances also spotlighted the digital labour of internet prosumers, which was introduced in Chapter One to address capitalism in the age of cyber consumption and production, with a specific focus on online and offline image-appetites. Chapter Two extended the discussion, examining how prosumers are controlled and exploited by online corporations, with particular emphasis on informational exchange, free labour and data harvesting, for the gain of vast monopolies.

The template method, which can be understood as a practice of dressing as image and practising and performing facial gestures to hold and represent dual and conflicting positions, is the key outcome of this research. Through it, I contribute to contemporary thinking about prosumer 'self-portraiture' at the intersections of subjectivity, gender studies and performativity. Chapter One offered a detailed examination of how I have used images as templates for posing, whilst Chapters Two and Three explored verbal templates for being. As explained within the first chapter (and restated above), in my photographic series *Modelling Selfies (In Paper Outfits)* I created templates for posing from images sourced online, which I printed and attached to my skin before attempting to hold my body within the boundaries of the cut-out paper forms. My modelling to fit image-templates enabled me to follow, reconstruct, and amalgamate with the figures of other women. The marketplace images guided not just my pose, they also informed my framing choices and the setting in which I photographed myself. In bedrooms, hallways and bathrooms I replayed the sellers' selfies, transforming and reinterpreting what went before.

In Chapter One I articulated how posing templates have enabled me to get up close to the image, making physical and imaginative contact, which ultimately affected how I saw and experienced myself. Indeed, I perceived myself in new ways, as I noted, I understood myself as both me and not me at the same time - as an entanglement of forms. I also discussed the relationship between my own image-templates and the lenses and filters of the social media messaging application, Snapchat. Outlining in my writing how my own DIY templates and those of Snapchat offer a proprioceptive and an embodied experience of an image, I expressed how Snapchat can glitch and how my own posing-templates rip, curl and become unstuck, arguing that this offers yet another site to reimagine the body (pleasant and welcome, or not). As I explained, the instability of the image-template not only provided a site to further explore the performative self, but it also exposed the different kinds of labour involved in producing

and consuming digital images. Through this I looked at the endurance's women undertake in an effort to become their fantasy-image or indeed image-template.

A verbal-template for being is also a posing-template. As I introduce in Chapter Two and discuss in detail in Chapter Three (and have already referred to above) this particular pattern for posing involves saying particular words to the camera to attain an allegedly desirable facial expression for the self(ie)-representation. Chapter Three explains how I located verbal templates and argued that the work involved in mastering and performing the preferred gestures, instigates a great deal of ongoing work for the women they are aimed at. Moreover, as I put forward, the templates or ideal images offer false hope, and are attached not just to neoliberal aspiration and transformation but also to capitalist repetition, accumulation and illusion. In my writing I used the spatial image of the horizon as a metaphor for the fantasy image that keeps promising but can never be maintained.

As my artworks have shown, and as I have described within this thesis, when I adapt my body for the lens, when I repeated this action again and once more, to master a pose, I augmented the desired postures. Whilst this exaggeration can be a bit cringey to view, it had the intended effect of making the templates I follow appear farcical. As I have argued, exaggeration and unease are important to my performances as they 'puncture the horizon' thereby exposing the narrow range of image-templates followed by women, and the absurd and ongoing condition of production and consumption central to capitalist societies.

As I have demonstrated in my photographic works, the process of sourcing an image from the internet, appropriating and reperforming it, before returning it to the digital, as a new model for being, reconfigures the original. Indeed, through its shift from algorithmic to analogue to electronic again, it becomes exaggerated, troubled, repeated and translated. As I discovered and detailed throughout the thesis this process of reconfiguration has enabled me to participate in, and emphasise, prosumer image-circuits for the purpose of exploring not just the labour involved in consuming and producing images, but to actively modify my own body and behaviour. In fact, this thesis has argued that it's not just the image that changes through the act of redirecting image loops and image/body interactions, I change too. As my artwork and writing has emphasised, I adapt to, and for, the image. That is, I take shape through my encounters with the image.

Throughout my research the image has been referred to, inhabited and re-performed. Each translation, exaggeration and repetition of the image, offers another configuration of self. My transgressions and my inability to perform images exactly, as discussed in detail in the thesis and repeated above, simultaneously exposes the familiar and limited set of image-templates promoted by the fashion and beauty industry and establishes new versions of who we can be.

I discussed the plasticity of the self, and how close and entangled relations between bodies and images, impacts on our very being, offering endless possibilities for shaping our image. I noted how my constant efforts to refine and reshape my image, for the image, spotlights the multiplicity of one's identity, and the will to keep creating new forms, in an attempt to catch sight of 'what I really look like'. I argue that this is of course not possible but, as I discuss, this doesn't stop me from continually adapting my form and chasing unrealistic versions of myself.

In the time it has taken to complete this research a new set of posing-templates such as the 'dissociative pout' also known as 'lobotomy-chic' and new and impossible beauty phenomena, such as the snatched jawline have been introduced via my Instagram feed.[372] Technology has advanced too, Artificial Intelligence (AI) which sits out of the scope of my inquiry, has firmly asserted itself as a tool for generating words, images and more, for anyone that has access to the various AI platforms. I would welcome further research on prosumer 'self-portraiture' at the intersections of photography, performance studies and labour to include AI. I can see the potential for AI in this field as it uses data analysis to recognise patterns, it actively learns from experience and makes predictions. It also misunderstands and makes mistakes which results in the nearly but not quite. Perhaps this will form the framework for my own future work.

[372] Please see, Pesala Bandara, 'The 'Lobotomy-Chic' aesthetic is Taking Over Instagram', *PetaPixel,* 21 December 2022 <https://petapixel.com/2022/12/21/the-lobotomy-chic-aesthetic-is-taking-over-instagram/> [accessed 8 December 2023]; and Hannah Marriott, 'Snatched jawline': how the chin became fashion's new pressure point', *The Guardian,* 10 July 2023 <https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2023/jul/10/snatched-jawline-cosmetic-plastic-surgery> [accessed 8 December 2023].

Appendix

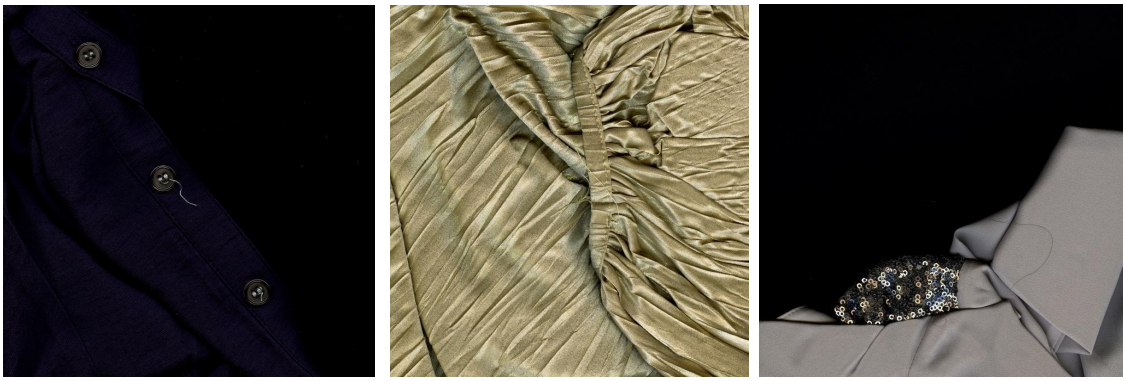
This appendix contains visual explorations made during the research project. The artworks contained within played an important part of the practice-led element of the study. Through them, I made visual notes and connected ideas to theory in an expanded way. Together, on the page, they chronologically chart the development of ideas. There is no further written information about these works beyond this point other than short, dated captions to accompany the visuals.

Downloaded and printed inkjet prints of selling selfies found on internet marketplaces (2017).

Two-metre print of selling selfie sourced from an internet marketplace (2018).

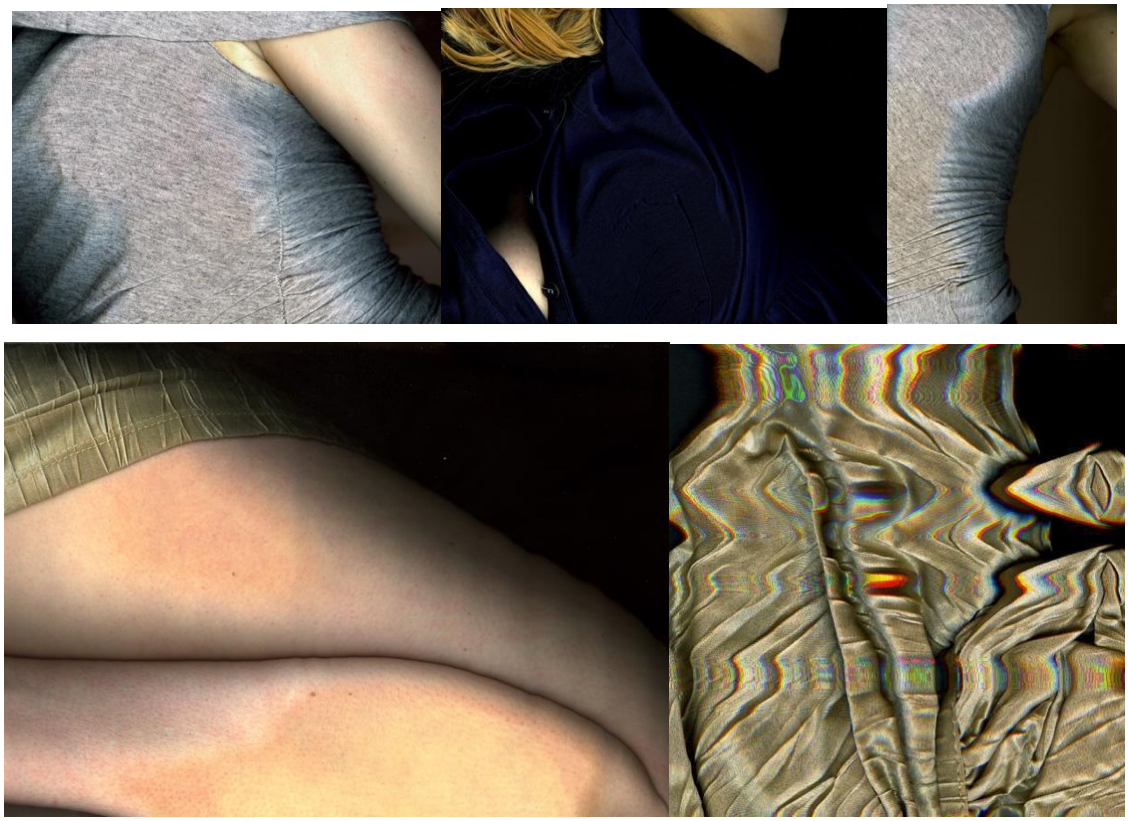
Photograph of a package containing clothing ordered from an online marketplace (2018).

Photographs of packages containing clothing ordered from online marketplaces (2018).



Scans of clothing ordered from online marketplace sellers (2018).

Scans of the artist's hand interacting with clothing ordered from online marketplace sellers (2018).

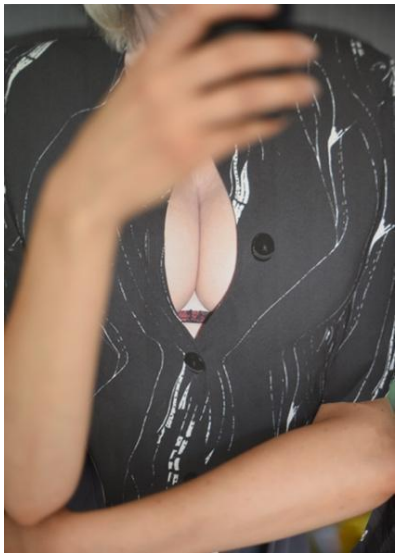


Scan of artist wearing clothing ordered from online sellers (2018).

Photograph of the artist wearing clothing ordered from online sellers (2018).

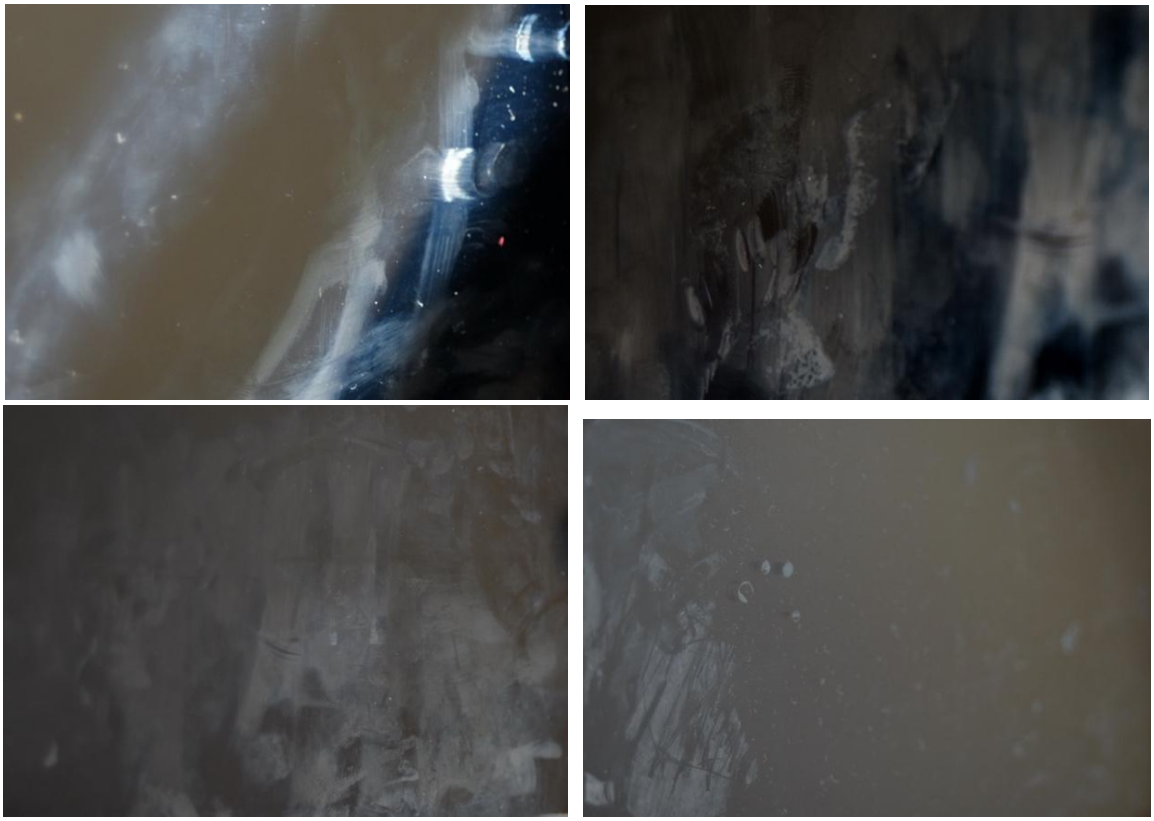




Photographs of the artist inhabiting the online marketplace sellers' selfies (2018).

Collages made from objects appearing in the backgrounds of online marketplace seller's selfies, stuck together using magic tape (2018).



Marks left of an iPad screen after viewing online marketplaces (2018).

Marks left of an iPad screen after viewing online marketplaces (2018).

Collages created from online marketplaces seller's selfies (2019)

Collages created from online marketplaces seller's selfies (2019).

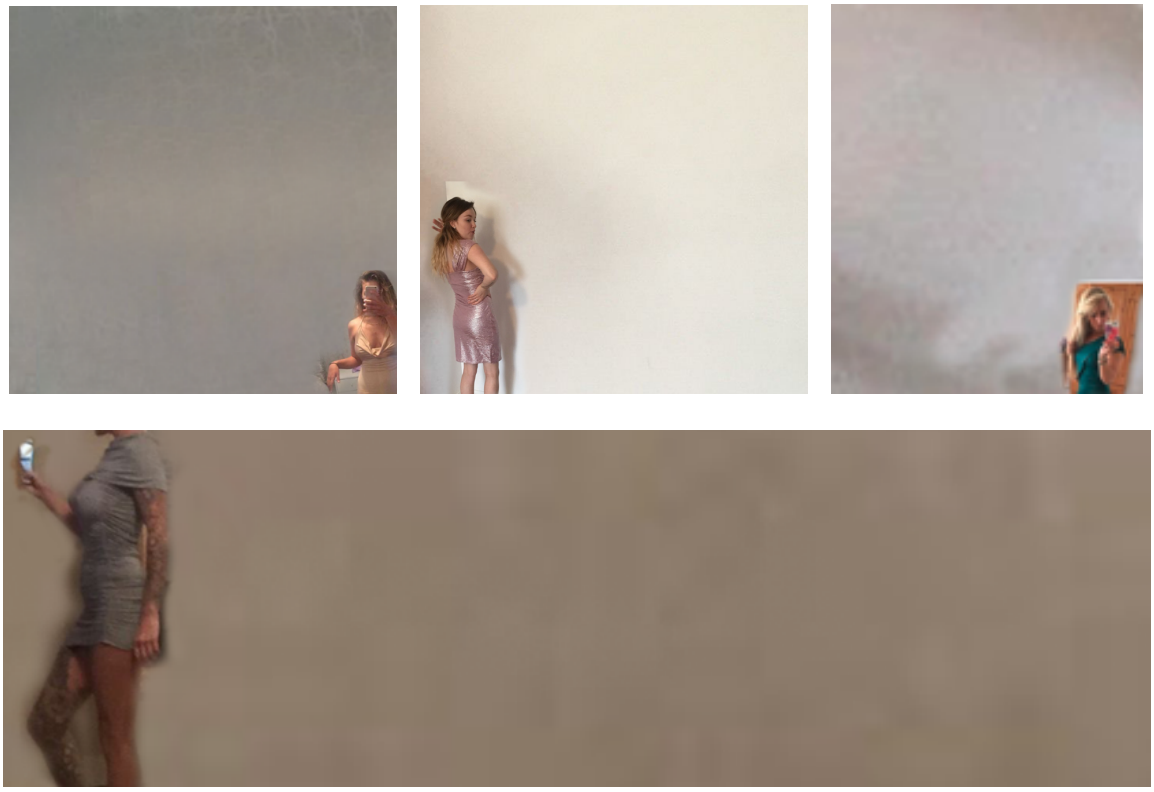
Collages created from online marketplaces seller's selfies (2019).

Collages created from outfits cut out of online marketplace sellers selfies (2019).

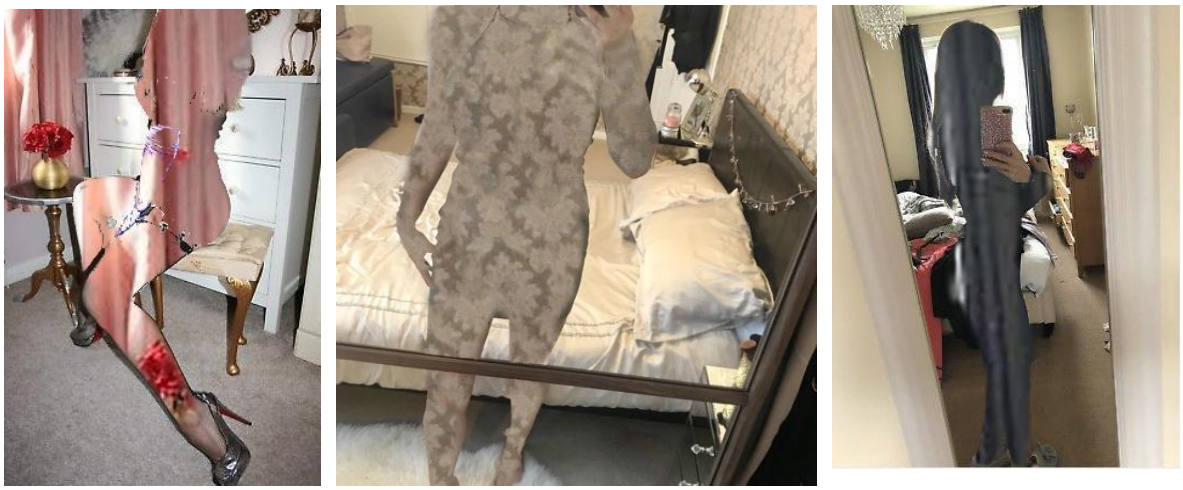
Collages created from outfits cut out of online marketplace sellers selfies (2019).

‘Nailfie’ wallpaper created from online images (2019).

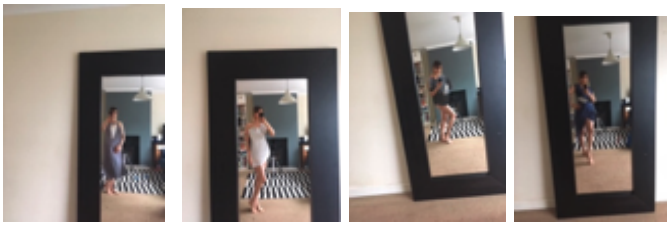
‘Nailfie’ wallpaper created from online images (2019).



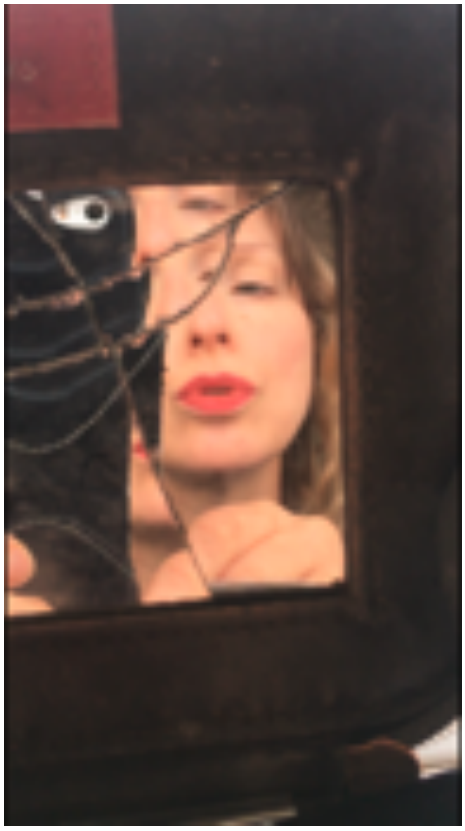
Pasting over background ‘clutter’ with wallpaper or paint colour sampled from the sellers walls (2019).



Covering the figure with furnishings sampled from the online marketplace sellers’ bedrooms (2019).



Initial and incredibly low res, tests for what was to become the photographic series, *Modelling Selfies in Paper Outfits* (2019).



Still from a short test video where the artist repeats the word “prune” over and over (2019).

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What the submission consists of

This submission consists of a single PDF thesis and a body of practice.