Love Thy Selfie

Girls, Selfies and Gendered Spaces

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2015

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Abstract

This thesis project, 'Love Thy Selfie', examines the role of the female selfie in consideration of ways we view women's bodies, both IRL and URL. Through a series of performance-based iterations, I employ a series of women to take selfies for extended periods of time, whilst performing and parodying the persona of girl as spectacle. I question whether the selfie is an act of narcissism or whether it has the power to be self-empowering. Does the self-curation of ones image have the potential to transcend the digital gaze or does it perpetuate it?

Introduction

Named the 'word of the year' in 2013 by Oxford Dictionaries Online 'selfie' is defined as "a photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically with a smartphone or webcam and uploaded to a social media website."[1] The term became commonplace with the emergence of social media.[a] Selfies are ubiquitous, and now engrained in our everyday rituals. On Instagram alone #selfie had been tagged 200 million times by September 2015.

The selfie is often understood as being a contemporary take on the long-standing tradition of photographic self-portraiture. Conversely, although the selfie is a type of self-portraiture, this does not make a self-portrait (in the traditional sense) a selfie. Although some consider the first selfies to be taken as early as 1839, I would argue that selfies did not exist prior to the 2000's when they became officially coined as such. Not only does the technology of the smartphone change their understanding, but also their surrounding context. Typically selfies are both seen online and distributed via social media. Due to the context of social media, the selfie requires feedback and interaction, thus making it different from traditional self-portraits.

The selfie has had varied interpretations and understandings. The selfie has often been critiqued for being an act of vanity and narcissism. Or contrarily, the selfie has been positivity portrayed as an affirmative and self-empowering form of self-portraiture, particularly for young women.

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[1] Oxford Dictionaries Online "The Oxford Dictionaries Word of The Year" Accessed 12th August 2015. http://blog.oxforddictionaries.com/2013/11/word-of-the-year-2013-winner/

In chapter one, 'Narcissistic? Self-Empowering?,' I will question whether the selfie is an act of narcissism as I initially believed, or whether it can be considered an act of self-empowerment, by rejecting a male gaze.

While the term 'selfie' first appeared online in 2002, I see Jennifer Ringley's 1996 project 'Jennicam' as a precursor to the type of selfie we encounter today. Jennicam involved Ringley broadcasting live from her college room dorm. The work coincided with developments in technology and self-surveillance, as well as within popular media the 'reality television' show Big Brother. In chapter two, 'Gendered Gazes and Technologies', I will unpack notions of self-surveillance, and question ways women's bodies are viewed online.

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a Beginning with MySpace and Bebo, followed later by Facebook and image based social media sites such as Flickr and Instagram. Currently, selfies are most prevalent on Instagram and Facebook.
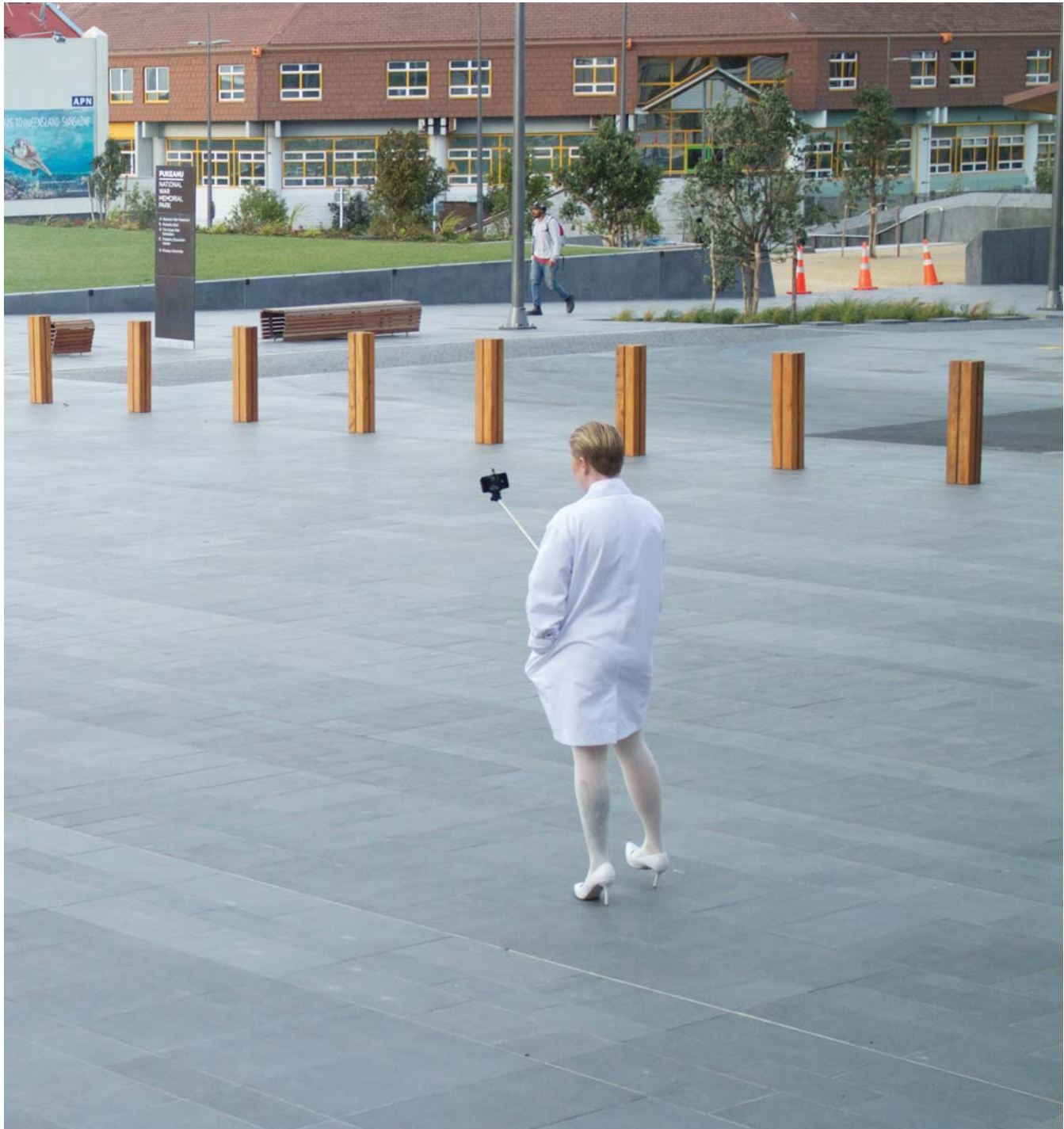
Narcissistic? Self-Empowering?

Fig. 1

Initially I went into my first performance with the assumption that selfies were shallow and narcissistic. I held the opinion that digital technologies were having a negative impact on our minds, behaviours, and social interactions.

I understood the selfie as being a symptom of our times, where we live in a culture of self-involved, shallow individuals, constantly attached to our devices. *"… the technology has become like a phantom limb…"*[1] as Sherry Turkle describes our dependence on cell phones in her book *Alone Together: Why we Expect More From Technology and Less From Each Other*. I believed that growing up with greater technological fluency has made my generation lazy and thus even more dependent on digital technologies. Much like the way Joel Stein describes millenials in his Time magazine article, *Millenials: The Me Me Me Generation*, where he describes people born from 1980 to 2000 as being 'lazy, entitled, selfish and shallow.'[2] Although 25 myself, and included in this age bracket, I agreed with him. At this stage in the project I could see advancements in technology not simply benefitting us, but potentially leading to our demise.

Recently I was on the bus playing games on my phone as a way to pass the time. Not only taking selfies, I admit I spend a very large amount of time on my phone playing games, texting, checking Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat etc...

…and for a moment I realised every other person on the bus was doing the exact same thing. Every single person had his or her phone out. I mean, this is nothing out of the ordinary but it still startled me.

Turkle insightfully describes this phenomenon: *'…it was clear that what people mostly want from public space is to be alone with their personal networks. It is good to come together physically, but it is more important to stay tethered to our devices.'*[3]

Developing from my view that the selfie was primarily self-centred and individualistic, I began to consider having a group of individuals coming together, retaining isolation from one another while taking their selfies. I was heavily influenced by what I noticed from people around me, and the way we engaged with each other. We would exist in the same physical spaces, yet we were elsewhere on our phones.

I was intrigued by this idea of individuals coming together via their common interest in self-interest.

A trio of performers including myself, were dressed in white lab coats adorned with pink *Love Thy Selfie* patches, white shirts, pink ties, white stocking and glossy white high heels, strutted about the newly opened *Pukeahu National War Memorial Park*. For a twenty-minute duration, *armed* with selfie sticks, we shot images of ourselves. I instructed that we were to keep a straight face, and to look as though we were undertaking a very serious exercise.
I wanted us to "become" workers; we were not to appear distracted, concentrated on the given task.

fig 2.
fig 3.

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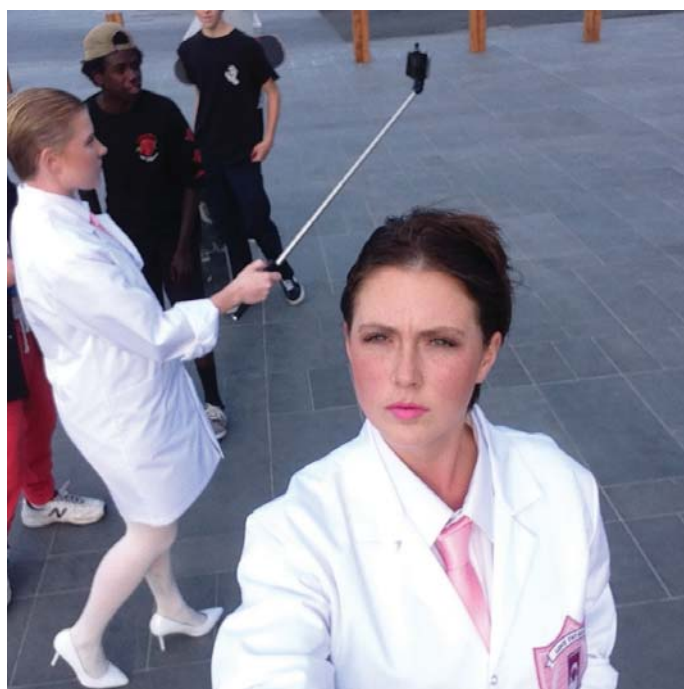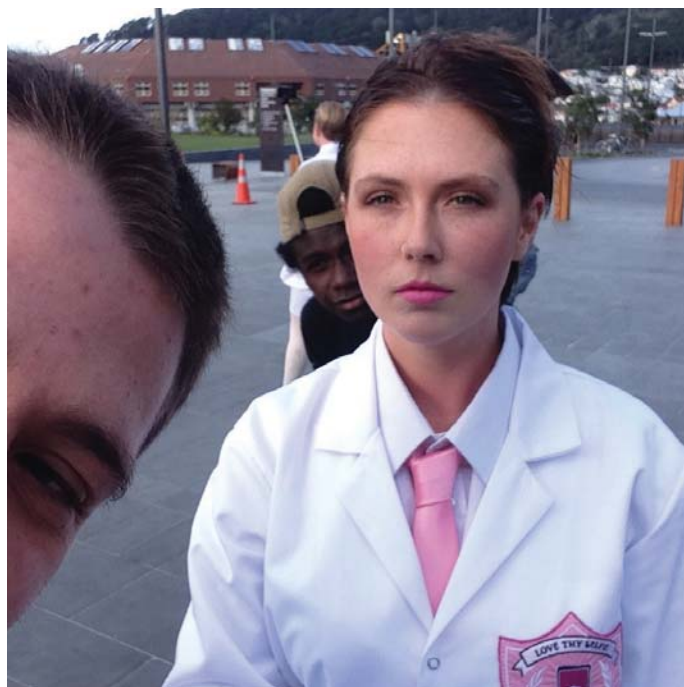
Technology had evolved so much it had taken over our lives, and now, we were merely slaves to our machines. We were the modern day Narcissus, drowning in our own reflections on our iPhone screens.

We did not interact with each other, and were to ignore passers-by and the audience, which was actually more challenging than initially anticipated. A car full of men pulled up and began to provoke us saying things such as *'Can we get a picture with you?'* We ignored their advancements and eventually they got fed up and left. Next, two of our male classmates and a group of young skater boys tried to try put us off what we were doing. They would try getting in our photos and were continually asking questions, assuming we would break our silence.

I came away from this performance with a completely new sense of direction. It was significant that everyone who tried to directly intervene with the performance was male. They all asserted control over our interaction, either by provoking us verbally or physically intruding our personal space by intentionally "photobombing"[a] us. I then felt a sense of angst from them when we refused to engage. Out of this provocation a gendered power dynamic became evident among the performers and the audience. As we would not respond directly to their remarks or their attempts to gain our attention, we became the ones with authority. I felt a definite sense of self-empowerment both during and after the performance.

Your gaze hits the side of my face, but I'm too busy looking at my own face.

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a) Photobombing is a term used to describe the action of spoiling a photo by appearing in it when you were not supposed to.
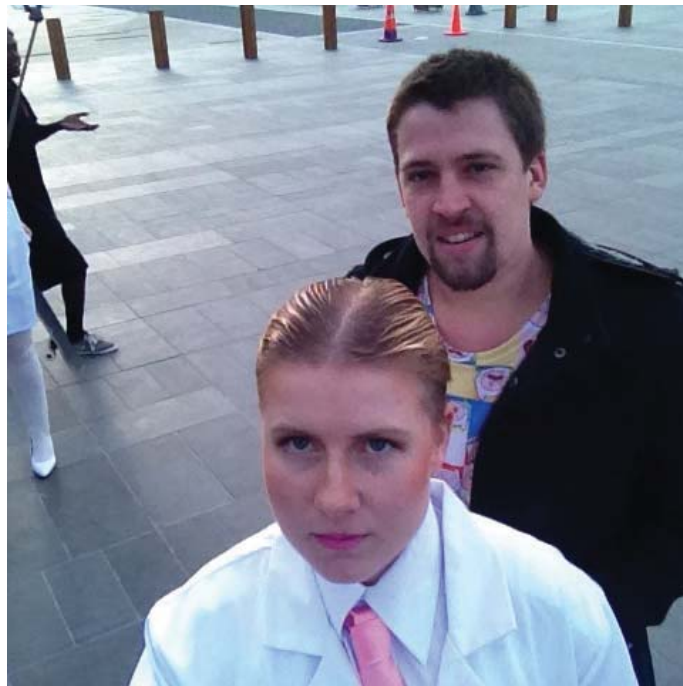
fig 4.

Can selfies be empowering? I began to think so.

In the 1973 photographic series Fully Automated Nikon (Object/Objection/Objectivity) by Laurie Anderson, she experienced sexual harassment from men on the street in New York's Lower East Side.[4] When a man made a rude comment or sexual remark, in response she would take their photo without their permission. Similar to my use of the phone with the selfie stick, her camera becomes a tool of female self-empowerment. Here, the objectification of the woman is reversed, and she in turn retains the power.

> I decided to shoot pictures of men who made comments to me on the street. I had always hated this invasion of my privacy and now I had the means of my revenge. As I walked along Houston Street with my fully automated Nikon, I felt armed, ready. I passed a man who muttered 'Wanna fuck?' This was standard technique: the female passes and the male strikes at the last possible moment forcing the woman to backtrack if she should dare to object. I wheeled around, furious. 'Did you say that?' He looked around surprised, then defiant. 'Yeah, so what the fuck if I did?' I raised my Nikon, took aim, began to focus. His eyes darted back and forth, an undercover cop? CLICK.[5]

Though she is not using self-portraiture to self-empower, she uses the camera to object to the objectification she receives from men. Our chosen mode of photography, selfies, appeared to achieve a similar goal, as we too rejected male dominance over our bodies and thus image.

In a recent talk at Scripps Institute, titled "Selfies, The Past and Future of Photographic Self-Portraits" performance theorist Peggy Phelan discusses the selfie as contemporary form of self-portraiture.[6]

In particular, Phelan considers the work of photographer Cindy Sherman as anticipating the contemporary female selfie. She examines the ways Sherman's work opened up new approaches to female self-representation and the gaze within photographic practices. In *'Untitled Film Stills'*, Sherman disrupts traditional conventions of women in film. She uses the self-portrait to as a means to critique gender roles in Western mainstream film and media. In each film still Sherman performs a role, evocative of 50's and 60's actresses in Hollywood films. We find she is the object of our gaze, yet as the photographer she is in control. She is only *performing* the role of the submissive women, thus her performances highlight the disparity in the ways women are represented, in contrast to men.[7]

Like the selfie, the female self-representation apparent in Sherman's work displaces the male gaze and permits women to *"seize the gaze"* [8], thus allowing women authority over their own image. Self-portraits and selfies alike allow the subject to display oneself as they would like to be seen by others. If we are to consider this notion of "seizing the gaze" and the authority the self-portrait enables, this would then support the idea that the selfie can be an act of self-empowerment.

Kim Kardashian recently released her book *'Selfish'*, with 445 pages filled entirely with her selfies from 2006 to 2014. She is unapologetically self-obsessed. She is easily dismissible as being unintelligent and shallow, but I think she is more interesting that that. She knows of the power of her image, and she uses this at a profit. Kardashian rose to fame after being publicly shamed when her sex tape with ex-lover Ray J was leaked online.

She has now turned this potentially disempowering situation into the Multi-million dollar empire it is today.

As someone whose image in constantly in the media spotlight, her selfies give us another perspective where she is in control of her own image. In another example, nude selfies taken by Kardashian were leaked in the 2014 iCloud hack.[b]

Kardashian comments on why she included these exploited images.

> I wasn't intending to put these in the book but saw them online during the iCloud hack. I'm not mad at them. Lol they are taken with a blackberry and I don't have iCloud… it's all a mystery! [9]

By taking control over images that intend to discredit her, she claims ownership of the images. This could be understood in relation to how Phelan discusses selfies, which allow women to display themselves how they would like to be seen, and gives them the chance to 'seize the gaze.'[10]

Dazed and Confused Journalist, Aimee Cliff comments on Kardashian's production of self-image, explaining,

> She's a woman who controls the production of her own image in a world that consistently tries to steal that right from her. That's unequivocally empowering.[11]

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b) Photobombing is a term used to describe the action of spoiling a photo by appearing in it when you were not supposed to.

Though she may be somewhat empowered, I believe she is still playing in to patriarchal ways of objectifying women. In a recent interview at San Francisco's Commonwealth Club, she admits she does self-objectify, stating,

> I think there's power in that, and I think I have the control to put out what I want and I'm proud of that. So even if I'm objectifying myself, I feel good about it.[12]

This doesn't sit comfortably with me, I find myself questioning whether self-objectifying like this can really be empowering. In the following chapter
Gendered Gazes and Technologies, I will unpack these notions of self-empowerment with regards to how images are disseminated online, questioning *who are these selfies really for?*

[1] Sherry Turkle. *Alone Together: Why We Expect More From Technology And Less From Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 17.

[2] Joel Stein. *Millenials: The Me Me Me Generation.* Time, August 16, 2015.

[3] Sherry Turkle. *Alone Together: Why We Expect More From Technology And Less From Each Other ,*14.

[4] Joanna Lowry. *Negotating Power* (London: Black Dog, 2000).

[5] Laurie Anderson, as cited by Joanna Lowry. *Negotating Power.*

[6] Sophie Fahey. *Who do You Think You Are? Scripps Humanities Institute Begins New Speaker Series.* The Scripps Voice*,* February 7 2015.

[7] Peggy Phelan. *Unmasked: The Politics of Performance.* (London: Routeledge, 1993).

[8] Peggy Phelan. *Unmasked: The Politics of Performance.* (London: Routeledge, 1993).

[9] Kim Kardashian. Selfish (New York: Rizzoli, 2015), 282.

[10] Sophie Fahey. *Who do You Think You Are? Scripps Humanities Institute Begins New Speaker Series.* The Scripps Voice*,* February 7 2015.

[11] Aimee Cliff, *On Feminism & The Female Body In Kim Kardashian's Selfish.*

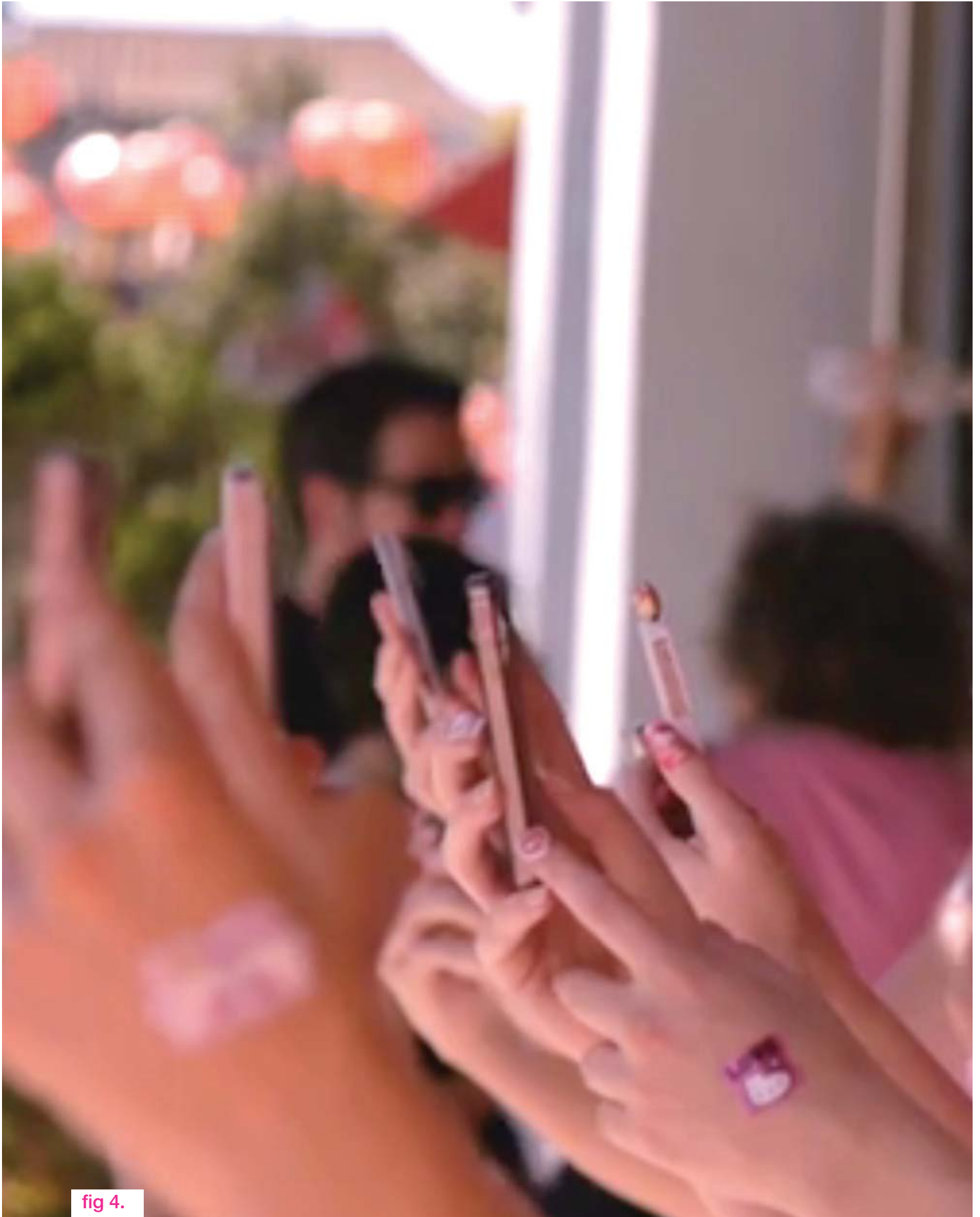[12] http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/06/24/kim-kardashian-objectification-women-media_n_7658446.html

fig 4.

'Hello Selfie'

Performance artist Kate Durbin explores the power of the selfie in public space in her series of performances titled *'Hello Selfie'*. Her work was one of the initial influences in my project, when I was considering how selfies operate in public spaces.

In the first iteration, herself and a group of women take selfies at Los Angeles' China Town for one hour. Her performers can be seen taking selfies with onlookers, posing and pulling faces. The women wear matching blonde wigs with pink and blue highlights, white sports bras and undies with pussycat faces drawn on the genital region, and are adorned head-to-toe in 'Hello Kitty' stickers. Durbin describes the work as "passive aggressive performance art," saying there is some powerful in a large group of women coming together in this way.[1] Although they are not engaging directly with the public, the work is confronting on this scale. Their bodies occupy and reclaim space, both IRL and URL.[a]

The women were instructed not to speak, although she allowed them to meow. In an interview with *Bullett Magazine*, Durbin describes her reasoning for using the Hello Kitty symbol, as a ubiquitous 'signifier of global capitalism and femininity'. [2]

a) Her work was also included in the online exhibition Body Anxiety, curated by Leah Schrager and Jennifer Chan. The exhibition explored ways women artists use their bodies online as a way to push back against male appropriation and sexualization of their images.

My experience with the project is only through its documentation visible on the Instagram and Vimeo page. I was particularly interested in the video documentation that shows the girls getting ready. Adorning their bodies with stickers, pastel lipsticks and wigs the girls are seen devouring a 'Hello Kitty' cake with their hands before the performance begins.

The laborious ritual involved when preparing women's bodies for selfie taking is of great interest to me.
Are these women's bodies commodified?

In the hazy dream-like treatment of the video there is a certain fetishisation and voyeurism that occurs when observing girls in their bedroom. The private space of the bedroom is made public spectacle, not dissimilar to that of *Jennicam* and webcam girls. There is a tension between being sexual and innocence, they play up to the camera, meowing and pawing as embodiment of the Hello Kitty persona. This feels uncomfortable in the domestic bedroom space. Seeing twenty-something's dressed like children, acting seductively, edges on the side of creepy.

[1] Jessie Askinazi, *Kate Durbin On Her Performance Art Project 'Hello Selfie'.*
         Bullett Media, October 10, 2014. 8

[2] Kate Durbin as cited in Jessie Askinazi, *Kate Durbin On Her Performance Art Project 'Hello Selfie'.*
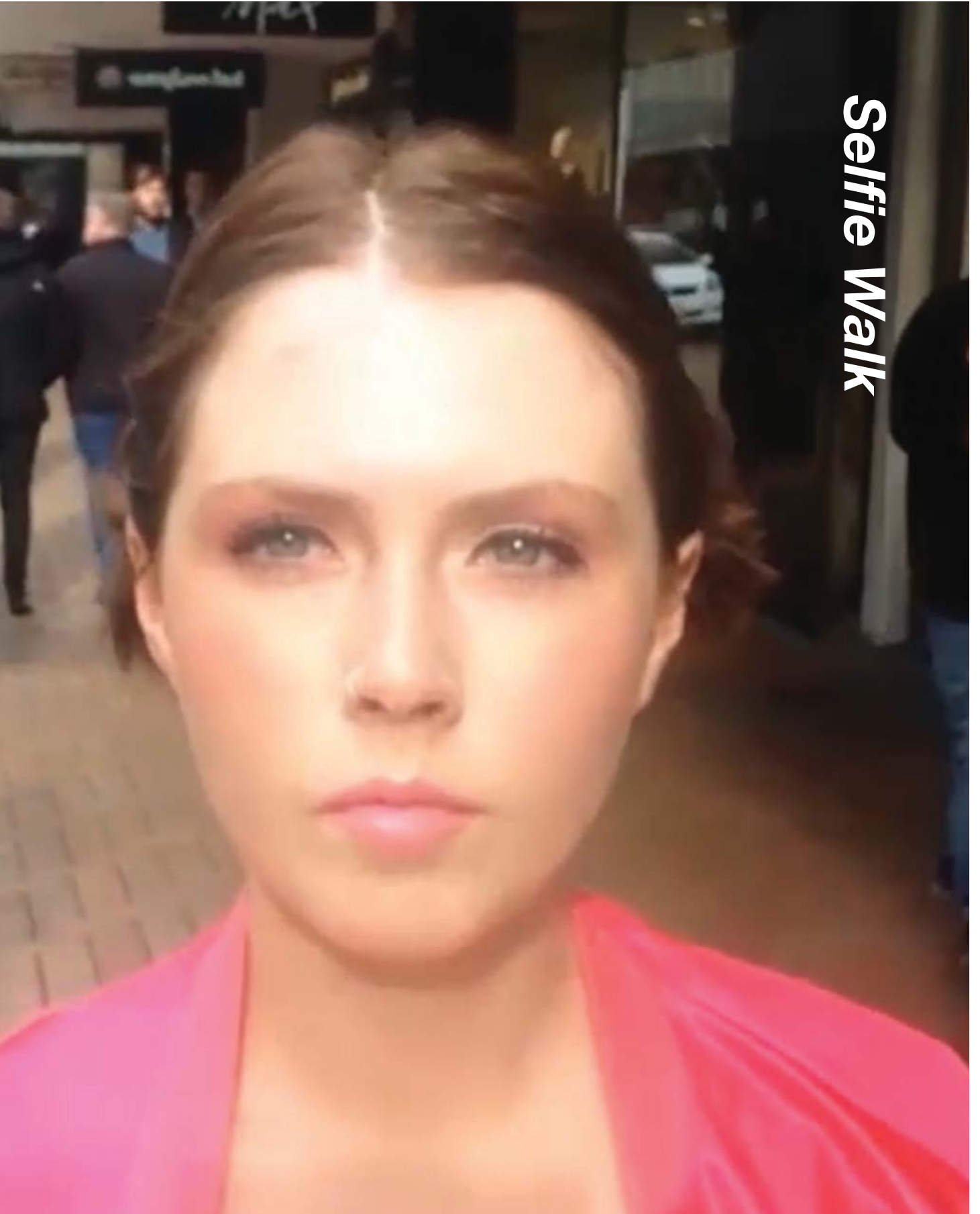   Bullett Media, October 10, 2014. 9

fig 5.

Selfie Walk

In the following work I walked two loops of Lambton Quay at midday July the 2nd, whilst filming myself and peoples reactions to me. This work was later shown in an all female show, *'title, title, what's a title?'* at YES collective in Auckland, curated by Hana Aoake and Mya Middleton.

fig 4.
fig 5.

Here I was walking through the food court and up the escalator onto the street above. I could feel faces watching me, though I could not see them directly.
As I walked I did not shift my gaze from my reflection in the iPhone screen. Mounted on a pink selfie stick, the camera became the eyes in the back of my head capturing the reactions from onlookers behind me.

I was on a mission. All I cared about was myself. I walked with a steady speed, against the flow of foot traffic. People shuffled past me or tried to avoid me as I walked along with blind confidence. Not only could I hardly see where I was walking, I appeared completely oblivious to my surroundings and anyone else around me. I was parodying my own sense of empowerment so that it became absurd. But maybe not absurd enough.

I got some responses, some people giggled and seemed amused. Several women stopped and read aloud the phrase on the back of my jacket, they seemed perplexed by the whole thing. But these reactions aside, and the odd stare or two, people didn't really blink an eye.

Had this kind of behaviour really become the norm?

I was like the tourist with the selfie stick. I was just an annoyance more than anything. I was no longer an absurdity.
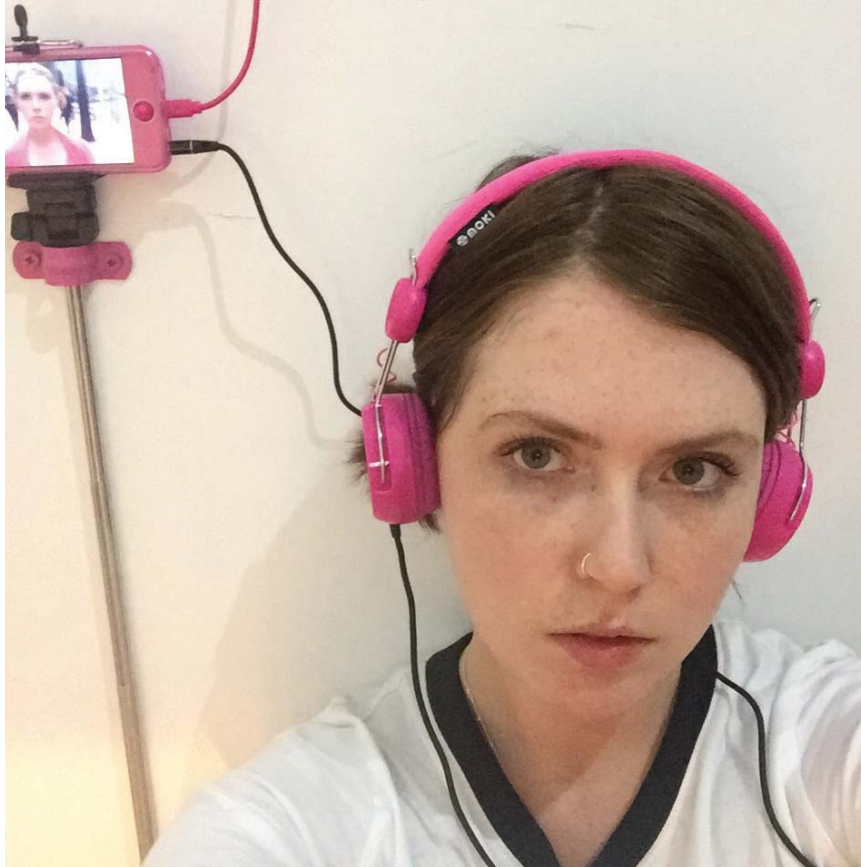
fig 6.

The live event was not the priority in this work; I went into this performance with the sole intention to make a video piece. I became interested in capturing people's reactions to my behaviour, following from the previous work.
In *'title, title, what's a title?'*, the same phone and pink selfie stick that recorded the work, was then mounted on a wall in the gallery space.

Played through pink headphones attached to the phone, the soundtrack repetitively looped the chorus in Nikki Minaj's song 'Feelin' Myself' over and over.

I'm, I'm feelin' myself, I'm feelin' myself, feelin' myself.

The installation and placement of the work forced the viewer to look up at me on the screen, similar to how I was seeing myself when filming the work. I wanted to feel confident and caring solely about myself, thus the song *Feelin' Myself* was intended to get the viewer into the mindset I had while I making the work, whilst being satirical of my own self-empowerment.

Gendered Gazes and Technologies

'The Tea Gardens'

The audience and myself gather in the space, waiting in curious anticipation. The space, previously an old tearoom in the former Dominion Museum, makes for an ambient backdrop. The 1930's style tiled walls, polished wooden floors and floor to ceiling windows inspire a sense of theatricality. The only physical presence is two pink stools within an area taped off with pink tape in the middle of the floor. Approximately two by three metres in area, the section creates the impression of a stage. When it is time for them to take the stage, a door opens and out walks five girls, all dressed in pink, equipped with selfie sticks. In single file they make their way to their positions in the designated area. They sit, stand, and kneel, all with their backs to each other, facing outwards. Silent and focused they don't glance out of their organised cluster as they proceed to takes selfies in rapid succession.

They smile sweetly, puckering their lips and flicking back their hair. They appear youthful yet sexual, innocent yet knowing.

They upload their selfies to Instagram, and we see the live feed as we watch them. *#lovethyselfie, #selfempowerment, #girlpower, #pink, #feelingmyself, #cutie, #babes, #prettyinpink,* and *#whatdoyouwantmetodo*

As they uploaded their selfies, they read aloud 'Hashtag, what do you want me to do?' every few minutes.

We watch and listen, we wonder, whom are they posing for? And who is the 'you'?

I wanted to set up a provocation to the audiences both online and those physically present in the space, that questioned their role as spectator. The rhetoric question, "What do you want me to do?" implicates the viewer, questioning them what *their* needs are, suggesting that the girls are there to perform *for* the audience.

I intended to create a sense of spectacle that mimics, and pokes fun at the idea of *women's bodies to be looked at*. John Berger suggests that a female subject internalizes a male gaze. In *Ways Of Seeing* he likens the expressions of women in classical paintings to those in mainstream advertising images.

> It is the expression of a woman responding with calculated charm to the man whom she imagines looking at her – although she doesn't know him. She is offering up her femininity as the surveyed.[1]

In the context of my work, we can consider Berger's interpretation of the internalized male gaze through the way that the girls in my performances are posing for the camera. Particularly in the context of Instagram, she presents herself to be looked upon, though she doesn't know her audience.

Selfie as an act of self-surveillance?[a]

Berger states,
"Women watch themselves being looked at."[2]
But the performance takes this one step further than
Berger's analysis, The girls are not only literally watching
themselves being watched, but they are also watching
themselves through the lens of their camera phones.
I want the girls to visually appeal to the viewer, I also want
for the girls to indulge in watching themselves and being
watched. As Laura Mulvey states in *Visual Pleasure and
Narrative Cinema,*

> *There are circumstances in which looking itself is a source of
> pleasure, just as, in the reverse formation, there is pleasure in
> being looked at.*[3]

During the discussion following my performances, an issue
was raised as to where the girl's images may end up once
they are uploaded online.

Because of the scopophillic nature of the work, the work
walks fine line between being objectifying and being
empowering. There are moments where they appear to
be in control of their images, and self-curation, yet clearly,
they are still the objects of our gaze. Although they are
the ones who may feel in control and empowered initially,
when they are disseminated online, their images may be
appropriated for potentially disempowering uses.

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a) In 1996, 19-year-old Jennifer Ringley set up a webcam in her dorm room. As one of
the early 'lifecasters'2 she broadcast her life on the internet as '*JenniCam*.' I see this
work as a precursor to the selfie, rather than traditional self-portraiture. The webcam girl
sees her image in real time on the screen, likewise to the front facing camera phone.
She receives instant feedback as she self-surveys.

Where do these images potentially go?

A recent example of how images online can be misappropriated is a series of paintings, titled '*Ho*'[b], based on digitally distorted images of fitness model Adrienne Ho by New York based artist Ryder Ripps. Although her images are not selfies, they have been lifted from her self-curated Instagram account and re-contextualized by the male artist in an often sexually suggestive way. [c] In one particular painting, Ripps distorts an image of Ho, originally showing her drinking from a bottle of juice. Ripps paints a subsequent diptych of images that contort her face to evoke the appearance of a blow up sex doll, and the bottle of juice now appears as a phallic object.

In reaction to Ripps exhibition '*Ho*', digifeminist artists Jennifer Chan and Leah Schrager, launched and curated the online exhibition *'Body Anxiety'*, on the same day as *Ho*, as a pointed alternative. The opening statement by Ann Hirsch gives a glimpse of what to expect from the works:

> *Whenever you put your body online, in some way you in conversation with porn.*[4]

They use their own bodies in works that push back against misogyny apparent online. They self-mediate and self-curate their image, removed from the *'hands of man.'*[5] Anytime a woman posts her own image online she is subject to social scrutiny. Women's bodies online exist in a dialogue alongside pornified bodies, advertising imagery and dating profiles.

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b) Ryder Ripps series '*Ho*' presents images of Adrienne Ho, but also appropriates her name to suggest an overtly sexual subject. Ho becomes Hoe.

c) Important to note New York based artist Richard Prince, notorious for his appropriation of others images. In *"New Portraits"*, Prince appropriates images from Instagram, then enlarges and exhibits the images as his own.

fig 7.
fig 8.

'Body Anxiety' attempts to challenge these male dominated spaces, and to create critical alternatives for viewing women's bodies online.

In a sense there is no knowing where the girl's images may end up once they are uploaded to the internet. I am interested in this loss of control that happened when you put images online. In my work I use Hashtags as a means for the girls to retain a sense of control when uploading their image to Instagram.[d] The hashtags used have ranged from the sweet and seemingly innocuous '#cutie', to the more sharp and direct examples such as '#wehavereceivedordersnottomove.'

Hashtags exist as ways of categorization, a mean to create order. They exist along with selfies, with the potential to rebel against a patriarchal gaze, allowing women a voice and control over their representation.

Some people have questioned whether the live performance is even necessary, suggesting that the online event/documentation may stand alone as a work. I disagree, as I believe the live event is crucial to the unpacking the content my work. Not only does the physical presence of an audience make visible the constant surveillance that girls are under, it also gives the audience a sense of unease because they are looking. *Theatrically banal?*

The live event is theatrical, yet it shows the banality and repetition of the selfie. The works have previously been criticised that are *too* repetitive.

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d) A hashtag is a word or phrase preceded by a hash symbol, used on social media sites such as Twitter and Instagram to classify context by theme or topic.

*Could this be my desired intention, to amplify the boredom
as a way to comment on the banality of the selfie act?*

My work creates spectacles out of the mundane.
The repetitious nature of the performance heightens
the everydayness of the selfie act. In the words of Kim
Kardashian, *"How many pics does it take to get the
perfect selfie?"* [6]

Why do I need the performance/online performance?

The photographic document plays an interesting role in
my work. Not only do the images serve as a proof of the
event, but also they are part of the performance as it is
unfolding.

In the first performance at Pukeahu War Memorial Park
I intended for the selfies to be uploaded to Instagram
as we took them, allowing the audience to view the
images simultaneously to the event. It was not until
moments before the performance did we realise that the
Instagram app camera would not work with the selfie
sticks Bluetooth capability. Since I did not want to disrupt
the 'flow' of selfie taking by retracting our arms every
few moments to stop and upload the images, here I
decided against uploading the images during the event,
allowing me to focus on the live event for this iteration.
At this stage in my project, the priority was on the live
event as performance; *the act of taking selfies.* Later after
the event, I did upload the images to Instagram - but
unlike subsequent performances where I encouraged the
audience to participate in the Instagram feed, there was no
instant feedback occurring.

fig 9.

In subsequent performances, other Instagram users began to follow 'Lovethyselfie2k15' and interact with the images as the live event was still in progress.

The Instagram performance is seen not only by the audience present for the live event, but also reaches another audience online. Therefore, I consider the online documentation of my work as a performance in itself. However the online audience is likely to be unaware of the live performance, and perhaps even unaware of its context and intentions as an *artwork*.

According to Amelia Jones the "body art event" becomes a work through its documents. The photograph serves as the indexical "anchor" in the performance having happened.[e 10]

> *The body art event needs the photograph to confirm its having happened; the photograph needs the body art event as an ontological 'anchor' of its indexicality.* [7]

Jones sees both the event and the document as being of equal importance, devoid of hierarchy. Whereas, Philip Auslander questions the ontological relationship apparent between *'the event preceding and authorizing its documentation'*. [8]

Auslander considers that the documentation can sometimes be the event, not necessarily a testimonial of a preceding event.[9] He argues that the performance document can exist as a performance in itself without necessarily considering the preceding event. [f]

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e) Rosalind Krauss' analysis on the Index of the photograph can be considered here. As discussed in *'Notes on the Index'* 'The photograph is thus a type of icon, or visual likeness, which bears an indexical relationship to its object". Though photographic manipulation has existed since the birth of the medium, this indexical relationship is questionable in the age of digital photography and the internet.

40

In *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance,* Peggy Phelan sees the performance as being defined by the disappearance, contrasting to both Jones' and Auslander's viewpoints. Jones questions the ability of disappearance. The image and "*presence*" of the performance is embedded in *"the memory screen"*, thus memory becoming documentary in its own right. [10]

In the context of my work, I can parallel my ideas alongside Jones and Auslander, but struggle to find comparisons to Phelan's analysis. As Auslander suggests, the documentary aspect of my work is a performance in itself, the audience it receives online does not need the live event as a preceding index. I can also agree with Jones as the document is of equal importance to the live event, they can both inform one another.

In the next section I will examine the work of Italian artist Vanessa Beecroft. She can be considered in relation to Auslander's theory, as many of the images of her work are not images of the actual performance, but are staged before the event. Prior to her performances she creates documents of the work, in the form of staged photographs. These documents become works in themselves. Most people encounter her work through these images rather than through the live performances. It is interesting to note that Beecroft, herself sees both the document and the photograph as being of equal importance to the work.

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f) Auslander also considers photographic works that are performed purely for the documentation. Considering this category as theatrical, he terms this "performed photography", with comparisons to Cindy Sherman, Matthew Barney and Nikki S Lee.

[1] John Berger. *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin, 1972.), 18.

[2] John Berger. Ways of Seeing (London: Penguin, 1972.), 19.

[3] Laura Mulvey. *The Gender and Media Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 59.

[4] Ann Hirsch Chan. *Body Anxiety.* July 25, 2015.

[5] Leah Schrager. *Body Anxiety.* July 25, 2015.

[6] Kim Kardashian. Selfish. (New York: Rizzoli, 2015.), 40.

[7] Amelia Jones. *Art Journal 56*. September 24, 2015.

[8] Amelia Jones. *Art Journal 56*. September 24, 2015.

[9] Philip Auslander. *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art 28.* September 26, 2015.

[10] Amelia Jones. *Art Journal 56*. September 24, 2015.

fig 10.

Vanessa Beecroft

Italian Artist Vanessa Beecroft is most commonly known for her large scale performance artworks - usually including nude women.

She refers to the models in her work as paintings, (and sculpture) but this in turn makes them into objects. Her performances are often described as being reminiscent of Renaissance artworks, this is due to the spatial considerations and her arrangement of bodies in space. However, in encountering her work, the viewer is confronted the presence of bodies in the live performance and they becomes implicated in the objectification of women through their physical presence.

Beecroft self identifies as a post feminist artist and describes her work as a comment on the fashion industry and capitalist culture. [1] In this sense, her work addresses the commodification of the body. Julia Steinmetz rejects the comparisons made by of David Hickney, [3] among others, between the work of Vanessa Beecroft and renaissance painting. Instead, Steinmetz sees a closer resemblance to Yves Klein 'Anthopometrie' series, [4] where the (male) artist instructs a group of female performers, covered in signature 'Yves Klein Blue' paint, to roll on a canvas. Beecroft's performances enact an elaborate spectacle by using female bodies. Similar to Klein's work, Beecroft's work has a signature, branded aesthetic. She reinforces this by titling her works serially ('VB 46' 'VB 47' VB 48' etc) and by providing a strict and authoritative set of instructions for her performers;

Do not talk, do not interact with others, do not whisper, do not laugh, do not move theatrically, do not move too quickly, do not move too slowly, be simple, be detached, be classic, be unapproachable, be tall, be strong, do not be sexy, do not be rigid, do not be casual, assume the state of mind that you prefer (calm, strong, neutral, indifferent, proud, polite, superior), behave as if you were dressed, behave as if no one were in the room, you are like an image, do not establish contact with the out- side . . . alternate resting and attentive positions, if you are tired, sit . . . interpret the rules naturally, do not break the rules, you are the essential element of the composition, your actions reflect on the group, towards the end you can lie down, just before the end stand straight up. [5]

She exerts control over the performers, but at a distance. She does not speak directly to them. As Julia Steinmetz states, [6] Beecroft does not speak directly to the models, instead she relays instructions though a male production manager, putting herself into the role of male authority. However, not only does Beecroft's work critique the objectification of women, but her artwork appears to be complicit in this objectification too.

[1] Vanessa Beecroft, Thomas Kellein, and Kunsthalle Bielefeld. *Vanessa Beecroft: Photographs, Films, Drawings.* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2004.), 20.

[2] Julia Steinmetz, Heather Cassils, and Clover Leary. Behind Enemy Lines: Toxic Titties Infiltrate Vanessa Beecroft, Signs: *Journal of Women in Culture and Society 31* (2005)

[3] David Hickney. *Vanessa Beecroft's Painted Ladies*, http://www.vanessabeecroft.com/DaveHickey.pdf Accessed August 25, 2015

[4] Julia Steinmetz, Heather Cassils, and Clover Leary. Behind Enemy Lines: Toxic Titties Infiltrate Vanessa Beecroft, Signs: *Journal of Women in Culture and Society 31* (2005)

[5] Vanessa Beecroft, as cited in, Vanessa Beecroft, Thomas Kellein, and Kunsthalle Bielefeld. *Vanessa Beecroft: Photographs, Films, Drawings.* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2004.), 20.

[6] Julia Steinmetz, Heather Cassils, and Clover Leary. Behind Enemy Lines: Toxic Titties Infiltrate Vanessa Beecroft, Signs: *Journal of Women in Culture and Society 31* (2005)

fig 11.

Gendered Colours & Feminine Adolescence

My practice utilises aesthetic conventions of hetero-normative gender structures, such as dress codes and gendered colours as a means to pastiche traditional gender roles. Transgressive and fluid gender binaries as described by Judith Butler, among others, will not be addressed as this is beyond the scope of my project.

The first pink girls performance, took part in 'The Pyramid', an indoor courtyard area situated on Massey University Wellington Campus. Located beside the University library and Student Central, students and staff would regularly walk through the space. Here, the five girls all dressed in pink stood in the middle of the space, taking selfies. They uploaded the selfies to the Instagram page as the performance was taking place. Unlike the first performance at Pukeahu Memorial Park and the CBD selfie walk, I instructed them to behave playfully. I did not give them any instructions other than "Do not talk. Do not make eye contact with the audience or engage with them in any way. You may take selfies with each other. And have fun." On reflection, the success in this performance as opposed to the two later ones was the playfulness and the confidence the performers displayed in taking selfies.
It more successfully evoked a sense of youthfulness.

They were at ease in the role of the pretty 'selfie-obsessed' girl. This girl conforms to commercialised Western beauty ideals that are undoubtedly fuelled by a patriarchal system. Yet she wants to feel in control of her gaze. She wants to feel as though she is empowered.[a]

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[a] Ariel Levy challenges this notion of empowerment in her book '*Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture.*' She sees notions such as, empowerment by self-objectification, as 'undoing' progress achieved by 2nd wave feminism.

They take selfies together, pulling silly faces, blowing bubble gum, and sticking out their tongues... infatuated with their own image in the iPhones reflection. They coexist together, together but each alone in their own bubble.

It was overly sweet, the work needed added tension

The following month, I decided to do a 'version 2'. I needed to disrupt the predictability of the works. So I thought, *who don't you see taking selfies?*
So I decided to 'mirror' the previous performance using boys. In a conversation with my sister she said, " It would be so weird seeing a bunch of guys taking selfies together!" Good, I thought to myself, that's exactly what I'll do. I wanted to explore using boys as a way to talk about girls.[b]

In this subsequent performance I gathered a group of five boys dressed identically in denim shorts, blue t-shirts, white socks, and white caps.[c] Situated in the same exact location as the previous, all girl pink performance, this work had a completely different feel. This one felt more like an experiment with technological devices. Here their devices looked like tools or strange contraptions. The performers appeared stiff, awkwardly robotic, much more like the earlier work at Pukeahu War Memorial Park. The boys appeared awkward and uncomfortable with being watched; contrastingly to the ease the girls appeared to have with taking selfies and being watched.

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b) Photographer Collier Schorr uses adolescent men in her work to examine the performative nature of masculinity and hetero-normative adolescent experience. In an interview with Flash Art she recounts, *'You know, people say, "How come you don't take pictures of girls?"* And I say, *"Well I do, I just use boys to do them."*

c) Here, I was influenced by Art Club 2000's American Apparel aesthetic visible in Untitled (Times Square/Gap Grunge II), 1993.

In this iteration I also experiment with spoken word by getting them to read aloud hashtags as they uploaded them to the Instagram page. I assigned each of them a hashtag, for which to tag their images on *Instagram*. The assigned hashtags were all titles of Barbara Kruger artworks, such as *#yourgazehitsthesideofmyface, #mybodyisabattleground, #wewontplaynaturetoyourculture, #wehavereceivedordersnottomove, and #itsallaboutme, #imeanyou, #imeanme.4*

The hashtags *#itsallaboutme, #imeanyou, #imeanme* was an appropriation of Kruger's 2010 cover for W magazine's art issue, featured a naked Kim Kardashian with Kruger's iconic style of text censoring her breasts and genitals.5 Kruger juxtaposes this image of Kim in a classically alluring nude pose with provocative text, which directly challenges the viewer, as spectator and forcing them to question who is in control. Likewise, Kruger uses the personal pronouns '*you*' and '*me*' to both allure and confront, thus pulling and repelling the viewer. Does Kardashian have an active or passive role in her objectification of image through mass media? As addressed earlier in chapter one, Kardashian knowingly self-objectifies her body and uses her image as a valuable commodity.

Kruger focuses on stereotypes and clichés as expressions of power and control. Her work actively engages and confronts the spectator. By subverting the conventional aesthetics and language of mass culture, such as through advertising imagery, she makes social commentaries on how mass culture informs and shapes our ways of seeing.

fig 12.

Likewise to Kruger texts, my use of hashtags mimics the culture of Instagram as a form of contemporary mass media.

Why does it feel absurd to watch men self-objectify?

Ironically, getting men to recite these texts disrupts the expected norm and forces us to question who is in control. Unlike the girls, these boys are not suggestive or invitational. The only moment of suggestiveness appears to be parodic rather than sincere. The actual performance did not go as I had anticipated. The male performers appeared to lack the confidence of their female counterparts in reciting aloud the hashtags, as the audience could barely hear them speaking. Although the images on Instagram were hash tagged as they were uploaded, the balance between their own self initiated expressions and my prescribed instructions felt awkward. The hashtags felt out of place, and out of touch with the medium on Instagram. Seeing Kruger hashtags alongside *#selfie*, *#boyswillbeboys*, and *#justlyingaround* for example, felt contradictory to my intention. The hashtags were intended to provoke ideas of objectification, but the hashtags and speaking felt out of place, lacking sincerity in their delivery.

Was this because the boys felt awkward and lacked confidence? Or was this because they could not personally relate, therefor did not internalise objectification to the same degree as women.

Likewise to both Kate Durbin and Vanessa Beecroft, I use other women to realise my works. After doing two initial performances, I decided to remove myself from being a performer in the works. I suggest that the girls can be a stand in for myself. Beecroft's work has been described as self-portraiture, which is interesting, as she appears so far removed from her work.

As they are performing this role of sexualised adolescent, they can appear to be enacting a younger version of self. How much of this is performed as stereotypes, or how much is re-enacted from personal experience?
I employ women a group of women in their early to mid-twenties in the works. They are not young girls, but I get them to perform as so. I infantilise them making them appear younger than they really are. *Performing* the role of Lolita, she is naïve yet knowing.

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Image List

Figure 1)   Fulford, Lucy. *Pukeahu War Memorial Park Performance.*
                  Digital Photograph, 2015.

Figure 2)   Fulford, Lucy. *Pukeahu War Memorial Park Performance.*
                  Digital Photograph, 2015.

Figure 3)   Fulford, Lucy. *Pukeahu War Memorial Park Performance.*
                  Digital Photograph, 2015.

Figure 4)   Durbin, Kate. *Hello Selfie Screenshot.* Digital Photograph, Spook
                  Magazine, Acessed August 21, 2015

Figure 5)   Fulford, Lucy. *Selfie Walk Performance Screenshot.*
                  Digital Photograph, 2015.

Figure 6)   Adrienne Ho. *Instagram Photograph* Digital photography, 2014.
                  Acessed Oct 20, 2015.

Figure 7)   Ripps, Ryder. *Drink (2014)*, Oil painting on canvas, PostMastersArt,
                  Acessed August 21, 2015.

Figure 8)   Fulford, Lucy. *title, title, what's a title - exhibition selfie*
                  Digital Photograph, 2015.

Figure 10)   Beecroft, Vanessa. *VB 46 (2010)*, Digital Photograph,
                  Vanessa Beecroft, Acessed August 21, 2015.

Figure 11)   Fulford, Lucy. *Girls Pyramid Performance.* Digital Photograph,
                  2015.

Figure 12)   Fulford, Lucy. *Boys Pyramid Performance.* Digital Photograph,
                  2015.