

Fourth Wave Feminism, Shadow Feminism, and the Explicit Body in the Performances of Kate  
Durbin, Ann Hirsch and Faith Holland

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A Thesis  
in  
The Department of Art History

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of Master of Arts (Art History) at  
Concordia University  
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

August 2020

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CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY  
School of Graduate Studies

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**Master of Arts (Art History)**

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## Abstract

Fourth Wave Feminism, Shadow Feminism, and the Explicit Body in the Performances of Kate Durbin, Ann Hirsch and Faith Holland

Eli Larin

This thesis explores fourth-wave feminist art through the critical analysis of three performance-based works in the 2015 online independent exhibition *Body Anxiety*: Kate Durbin's performance *Hello, Selfie!*, Faith Holland's *Lick Suck Screen 2*, and Ann Hirsch's video *dance party just us girls*. I argue that these works speak to four common characteristics of fourth-wave feminism, starting with the dominant use of social media and commonly accessible technology. In all the performances we also see the continuation of the strategies and themes of cyberfeminism, as well as a focus on the apparatus that is central to post-internet art. Both have influenced fourth-wave feminism, a new wave of feminism which is to be understood from within an alternative narrative of waves that is linked to an affective temporality determined by a specific socio-economical context. Another characteristic of fourth-wave feminist art is a critical engagement with “shadow feminism” (antisocial feminism), which queer theorist Jack Halberstam argues provides alternative tools of resistance through negative actions such as failure and refusal. Finally, fourth-wave feminist art is largely influenced by its relation to Internet pornography, the pornification of culture, and the rise of porn studies, which artists Durbin, Hirsch and Holland mediate through the use of the “explicit body” in digital spaces, a concept introduced by Rebecca Schneider to discuss earlier explicit feminist performances of the 1970-1990s. In the discussed artworks, all three artists use the explicit body to gain agency from the binary model of a gendered (male or female) gaze.

## Acknowledgments

My infinite gratitude goes to Dr. Alice Ming Wai Jim for her guidance, support, and helpful criticism. Through her comments and questions, I have become a far stronger scholar than I could have imagined. Essential to the success of this thesis was also the judicious comments of Dr. May Chew, who graciously accepted to be my second reader in the middle of a pandemic. I would also like to thank Dr. Kristina Huneault whose kindness and compassion as Graduate Program Director and professor were a lifeline. Katrina Caruso was a diligent copy editor and her comments were incredibly helpful in the writing process.

I would like to thank my fellow graduate students, notably Sarah Ève Tousignant, whose friendship made our long work sessions together inspiring and encouraging. Similarly, Katara has been the best co-worker while at home during the pandemic.

I want to thank my parents who have always been supportive of my studies and whose love and support have shaped me into the person I am today. Finally, I need to thank the person who has supported and loved me every day for the last seventeen years, my husband Jean-Raphaël Paquet. Without him, I would not be where I am today, and I am eternally grateful for having him in my life.

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## Introduction

“Whenever you put your body online, you are in conversation with porn...,” states web-based artist Ann Hirsch in a 2012 interview about self-representation in social media.<sup>1</sup> Hirsch’s bold statement about the anxieties of online bodies would be featured three years later on the landing page of the independent online group exhibition, *Body Anxiety*, curated by New York-based new media artists Jennifer Chan and Leah Schragar.<sup>2</sup> Hirsch’s comment also points to the “pornification” of North American culture. The term refers to the normalization of pornographic imagery, aesthetics and gestures in Western popular culture. As pornography has become a global industry in the 1990s, thanks to its greater accessibility on the web, porn images proliferate on the Internet alongside the abundance of self-imagery on social media platforms.<sup>3</sup> As Chan writes in her curatorial statement, social media has been used as a tool of harassment towards women, gender-queer folks, and trans\* people. As examples, she points out the massive photo leaks of actresses and singers’ intimate photos in 2014, as well as the existence of hidden camera porn and upskirt shots, which are recorded without the women’s knowledge. She argued that these examples are a source of fear and anxiety for women, gender-queer and trans persons about having their bodies exposed on the web without their consent.<sup>4</sup> Social media has been used to reproduce and distribute sexist and racist archetypes that dehumanize marginalized people and fragment society, in the service of white, supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal, homophobic, and transphobic rhetoric.<sup>5</sup> Online gender harassment has become so widespread and vitriolic that a growing body of scholarship now refers to this new environment as one of ‘mediated misogyny,’

<sup>1</sup>Jennifer Chan, Rozsa Farkas, Ann Hirsch and Cadence Kinsey, “Becoming Camwhore, Becoming Pizza,” *Mute*, November 8, 2012, <https://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/becoming-camwhore-becoming-pizza>.

<sup>2</sup> The still live independent online domain name, <http://bodyanxiety.com/>, is owned by curator Jennifer Chan and is separate from the artists’ websites.

<sup>3</sup> Susanna Paasonen, Kaarina Nikunen, and Laura Saarenmaa, “Pornification and the Education of Desire,” in Susanna Paasonen, Kaarina Nikunen, and Laura Saarenmaa (ed.), *Pornification: Sex and Sexuality in Media Culture* (Oxford: Bloomsbury, 2007) 1-20.

<sup>4</sup> Jennifer Chan, “How We Became Objects,” *Body Anxiety*, January 24, 2015, <http://bodyanxiety.com/jen/>.

<sup>5</sup> Danielle Citron, *Hate Crimes in Cyberspace* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014); Emma J. Jane, *Misogyny Online: A Short (and Brutish) History* (London, Thousand Oaks, and New Delhi: Sage, 2017); Laurie Penny, *Cybersexism: Sex, Gender and Power on the Internet* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013); Bailey Poland, *Cybersexism in the 21st Century* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016); Anastasia Powell, and Nicola Henry, *Sexual Violence in a Digital Age* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); Jessie Daniels, *Cyber Racism: White Supremacy Online and the New Attack on Civil Rights* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009).

to use Jacqueline Ryan Vickery and Tracy Everbach's term.<sup>6</sup> In this misogynistic context, the *Body Anxiety* exhibition showcases works by twenty-one contemporary artists who self-identify as either women, queer, or trans\* who push back against this context and seize the power of social media tools to do so.<sup>7</sup> For the curators, using "[...] the Internet as gender-queer performative space allows artists to question contemporary attitudes towards femininity."<sup>8</sup> The selected works engage with the online self-representation of women, queer folks, and trans\* people. The artists use their art as a means to reappropriate their own bodies. According to Dutch net art critic Josephine Bosma, the exhibition's goals are very much in continuation with the works of cyberfeminists in the 1990s such as the VNS Matrix, whose bold internet art "seemed to herald a new feminist revolution" centred around the notion of "embodiment through and around technology, pornography, gender performance, and using technology as a means of resistance to oppressive sexist ideologies."<sup>9</sup> However, while the legacy of cyberfeminism and new media art history is strongly felt in the *Body Anxiety* exhibition, the artists' use of new digital technologies such as social media apps and self-broadcasting tools speaks to a different feminist era than that of the 1990s: fourth-wave feminism.

This thesis seeks to define fourth-wave feminist art through the critical analysis of three performance-based works in the exhibition, *Body Anxiety*: Kate Durbin's performance *Hello, Selfie!*, Faith Holland's *Lick Suck Screen 2* from her site-specific digital *Porn Interventions* videos, and Ann Hirsch's video, *dance party just us girls*, from her *horny lil feminist* series. Durbin is a well-known L.A. based Internet artist and writer, who works on the objectification of the female body. Holland's work as an artist and curator deals with gender and sexuality in relation to the web, and Hirsch is a video and performance artist who explores the impact of technology on gender. Durbin's *Hello, Selfie!* was first performed on July 26, 2014, during Los Angeles' 6th annual performance art festival, Perform Chinatown. The performers all wore

<sup>6</sup> Jacqueline Ryan Vickery and Tracy Everbach, eds., *Misogyny: Gender, Technology, and Harassment* (New York: Palgrave, 2018) cited in Kaitlynn Mendes, Jessica Ringrose, and Jessalynn Keller, *Digital Feminist Activism: Girls and Women Fight Back Against Rape Culture* (London: Oxford University Press, 2019).

<sup>7</sup> The exhibition opened on January 24, 2015, and remains online to date, featuring work in different mediums ranging from writing, drawing, photography, video, gif art, and performance art by artists Erika Alexander, Hannah Black, Mary Bond, Victoria Campbell, Eduardo Andres Crespo, Kate Durbin, Ann Hirsch, Faith Holland, Georges Jacotey, Marie Karlberg, Nancy Leticia, Alexandra Marzella, Endam Nihan, Aurorae Parker, Randon Rosenbohm, RaFia Santana, Leah Schrage, Saoirse Wall, Angela Washko, May Waver, and Rachel Rabbit White.

<sup>8</sup> "About," *Body Anxiety*, accessed March 20, 2018, <http://bodyanxiety.com/about/>.

<sup>9</sup> Josephine Bosma, "'Body Anxiety': Sabotaging Big Daddy Mainframe, via online exhibition," *Rhizome*, January 26, 2015, <http://rhizome.org/editorial/2015/jan/26/body-anxiety/>.



similar white sports bras and underwear with a cat head drawn on the crotch, shoulder-length pastel blue and pink-streaked wigs with a large red bow and were covered in glitter as well as Hello Kitty and Disney Princesses stickers (fig. 1-4). Durbin wore a nude-colour bodysuit beneath a clear plastic dress, painted with Hello Kitty faces with Apple's company logo for eyes. In these outfits, Durbin and the performers spent an hour in Chinatown, ignoring the crowd gathered while taking selfies, which were uploaded in real-time on the Facebook event page. New York-based Holland uploaded a series of site-specific videos, titled *Porn Interventions* (2014), on the porn website, Redtube, that allows for users to upload their own explicit videos (fig. 5). In her videos, Holland performs what she considers unsexy acts, such as licking the screen as seen in her video *Lick Suck Screen 2* (2014). In a bedroom, the artist is filmed from the shoulders up; she removes her top and bra, then leans forward and licks the camera lens for twenty-one seconds (fig. 6). The video ends with her sitting back down and smiling. Hirsch's *dance party just us girls* is from her feminist and internet pornography series, *horny lil feminist* (2014-2015). The diptych shows Hirsch wearing glasses on one side and a view of her vulva wearing glasses on the other, with Apple's Photobooth 'nose twirl' effect applied to both (fig. 7). She moves around to the chorus of Ariana Grande and The Weeknd's 2014 song, "Love Me Harder," until the music suddenly stops and she bends forward abruptly to end the recording.

I argue that Durbin, Holland, and Hirsch's works speak to four common characteristics of fourth-wave feminism. Firstly, they all emphasize the dominant use of social media and commonly accessible technology in the production, exhibition, and distribution of their performances. Secondly, in all the performances we also see the continuation of the strategies and themes of cyberfeminism and the influence of post-internet art. Thirdly, their works further the third-wave feminist idea of 'shadow feminism' (or antisocial feminism). Queer theorist Jack Halberstam argues that 'shadow feminism' provides alternative tools of resistance, such as failing to perform in ways that are self-affirming and socially-acceptable, and refusing to engage in specific expectations of gender performance to eschew the pressures of fitting in a cissexist and heterosexist gender model. Finally, the three artists' relation to internet pornography is specific to fourth-wave feminism as they address the pornification of culture. They mediate this relation through the use of the 'explicit body,' a concept by Rebecca Schneider developed to discuss earlier explicit feminist performances of the 1970s-1990s. Durbin, Holland and Hirsch use the explicit body in the new context of digital spaces.

Fourth-wave feminism is relatively new, beginning in 2008, and so, most of its critical scholarship is recent.<sup>10</sup> There are only three books specifically on the topic of fourth-wave feminism; *Post feminism(s) and the Arrival of the Fourth Wave* by Dr. Nicola Rivers, a lecturer in English Literature at the University of Gloucestershire; *The Feminist Fourth Wave: Affective Temporality* by Prudence Chamberlain, a Teaching Fellow in Creative Writing and English at Royal Holloway, University of London, both of which I will refer to at length in this thesis; and *All the Rebel Women: The rise of the fourth wave of feminism* by Guardian journalist Kira Cochrane which reads more like longform journalism on feminist UK activism. However, none of the three discuss fourth-wave feminist art. Furthermore, while there are many journal articles on fourth-wave feminism, only a handful focus on visual art.<sup>11</sup> Drawing from the writings of Jennifer Baumgardner, Prudence Chamberlain, Ednie Kaeh Garrison, Ann Brooks, Jonathan Dean and Kristin Aune, and Nicola Rivers, amongst others, I reject the idea of feminist waves as clearly distinctive and based in generational divisiveness. Rather, I embrace the concept of feminist waves as amplifying each other and I argue that they are based in specific historical contexts.<sup>12</sup> These writers are part of the academic literature of fourth-wave feminism, and they underscore its engagement with intersectionality, queer theory, and porn studies.<sup>13</sup> While Brooks and Rivers both reference Halberstam's works, they do not engage with their theory of "shadow feminism."<sup>14</sup> I however argue that shadow feminism is an ideal framework to understand the

10 Nicola Rivers, *Postfeminism(s) and the Arrival of the Fourth Wave* (Cheltenham: Turning Tides, 2017): 22.

11 Francesca Ferrando, "A Feminist Genealogy of Posthuman Aesthetics in the Visual Arts," *Palgrave Communications* 2, no.1 (October 2016), <https://doi.org/10.1057/palcomms.2016.11>; Ruxandra Looft, "#Girlgaze: Photography, Fourth Wave Feminism, and Social Media Advocacy," *Continuum* 31, no. 6, (2017): 892-902, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2017.1370539>; Lauren Fournier, "Sick Women, Sad Girls, and Selfie Theory: Autotheory as Contemporary Feminist Practice," *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies* 33, no. 3 (2018): 643-662, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08989575.2018.1499495>.

12 Ednie Kaeh Garrison, "Are We on a Wavelength Yet? On Feminist Oceanography, Radios, and Third Wave Feminism," Women's Center Dissertation Fellows Colloquium (lecture, University of California, Santa Barbara, April 21, 1999); Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards, *ManifestA: Young Women, Feminism and the Future* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000); Prudence Chamberlain, *The Feminist Fourth Wave: Affective Temporality* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 21-44; Ednie Kaeh Garrison, "Contests for the Meaning of Third Wave Feminism," 185-197, in Stacy Gillis, Gillian Howie, Rebecca Munford (ed.), *Third Wave Feminism: A Critical Exploration* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

13 Ann Brooks, *Postfeminisms: Feminism, Cultural Theory and Cultural Forms* (London: Routledge, 1997), 189-209; Jonathan Dean and Kristin Aune, "Feminism Resurgent? Mapping Contemporary Feminist Activisms in Europe," *Social Movement Studies* 14, no. 4, (2015): 375-395; Rivers, *Postfeminism(s) and the Arrival of the Fourth Wave*; Chamberlain, *The Feminist Fourth Wave*, 46-53.

14 Jack Halberstam, *Gaga Feminism: Sex, Gender, and the End of Normal* (Boston: Beacon Press. Queer Ideas/Queer Action. Kindle Edition, 2012); Jack Halberstam, *Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

aesthetics and practices of fourth-wave feminist art. This perspective makes this thesis unique in its contribution to the sparse scholarship on fourth-wave feminist art.

In locating these works with the recent emerging history of this new wave, my thesis draws from new media art and feminist art histories as well as scholarship that lies at the intersections of these two fields. New media art can be broadly defined through its mediums, which includes film, video, sound art, computer art, internet art, immersive art, virtual reality, and other digitally-born mediums.<sup>15</sup> However, this definition is not uniformly accepted: in *The Language of New Media* (2001), Lev Manovich outlines five principles of new media in order to differentiate what he considers new media from old media, such as cinema and film. He argues that these principles are numerical representation, modularity, automation, variability, and transcoding.<sup>16</sup> He specifies that he avoids using “digital” as a quality of new media, because it is an umbrella term of “three unrelated concepts: analog-to digital conversion (digitization), a common representational code, and numerical representation.”<sup>17</sup> For Manovich, it is only numerical representation, which “turns media into computer data thus making it programmable,” that makes this media truly, radically new.<sup>18</sup> In 1994, Manovich also made a point to distinguish between new media art and contemporary art, suggesting that new media art belongs to what he refers to as “Turing-land,” based on computer pioneer Alan Turing, whereas contemporary art belongs to “Duchamp-land.”<sup>19</sup> In *The Death of Computer art*, Turing-land is defined as new media art that favours technological research over subject matter; that is direct, as in “lacking irony”; and that tackles technology as a serious subject.<sup>20</sup> Duchamp-land is defined as the exact opposite, meaning that it is “complicated”, focused on “content”, ironic, with “often literally destructive attitude towards its material, i.e., its technology, be it canvas, glass, motors, electronics, etc.”<sup>21</sup> He concludes that a convergence between the two cannot happen. However,

15 Curtis L. Carter, Christiane Paul, and Mieke Bal, “Curating: New Media,” in Michael Kelly, ed., *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics* (Oxford University Press, 2014), <https://www-oxfordreference-com.lib-ezproxy.concordia.ca/view/10.1093/acref/9780199747108.001.0001/acref-9780199747108-e-190>.

16 Lev Manovich, “Principles of New Media,” *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001): 49–64.

17 Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, 68.

18 Manovich, *The Language of New Media*, 68.

19 Lev Manovich, “The Death of Computer Art,” Rhizome, October 22, 1996, <https://rhizome.org/community/41703/>; Beryl Graham, Sarah Cook, and Steve Dietz, *Rethinking Curating Art after New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010): 4.

20 Manovich, “The Death of Computer Art.”

21 Manovich, “The Death of Computer Art.”

curator and new media platforms founder Steve Dietz considers this divide as detrimental. In his book with Sarah Cook and Beryl Graham, they aim to bridge this separation in order to centralize art as the main concern. Dietz, Cook, and Graham's 2010 definition points to behaviours, rather than medium, as a crucial point of new media art.<sup>22</sup> Steve Dietz categorizes these new media behaviours as “*interactivity, connectivity, and computability*, which may be present in any combination.”<sup>23</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, I will use the definition provided by Cook, Graham, and Dietz. Theirs is more aligned with the fourth-wave feminist art and post-internet art practices that I detail in this thesis, particularly with regards to the use of social media and self-imagery in internet art.

In support of my arguments, I contextualize Durbin, Holland, and Hirsch's works within the history of internet art. In *Internet Art*, net art critic Rachel Greene periodizes internet art in three periods. Greene considers the first period of early internet art to be from 1993 to 1996, where artists focused on email, web sites, graphics, audio, video, and animation as internet mediums.<sup>24</sup> From 1997 to 2001, she argues that artists lost interest in building web pages and instead explored tactics of appropriation and remixing.<sup>25</sup> The third period is outlined from 2001 and onwards, where the turn of the millennium, the dot-com crash, and 9/11 pushed artists to engage more critically with past cyber utopias, surveillance culture, and identity politics.<sup>26</sup> However, Greene's history was published in 2004 and her periodization has been challenged by other scholars, notably those at *Rhizome*, an important platform of digital preservation, commissions, and exhibition programs for new media art, which was founded in 1996 as an electronic mailing list. *Rhizome* is considered an established reference on digital art and, since 2013, is affiliated with New York's *New Museum*, which features contemporary art. Rhizome's own *Net Art Anthology*, edited by Michael J. Connor, Aria Dean, and Dragan Espenschied,

<sup>22</sup> Graham, Cook, and Dietz, *Rethinking Curating Art after New Media*, xiv.

<sup>23</sup> Graham, Cook, and Dietz, *Rethinking Curating Art after New Media*, 6.

<sup>24</sup> Rachel Greene, *Internet Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2004); Michele White, “The Aesthetic of Failure: Net Art Gone Wrong,” *Journal of Theoretical Humanities* 7, no. 1 (2002): 173–194.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/09697250220142119>; Christiane Paul, “Internet Art and Networked Art,” *Digital Art*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 2015): 111–124.

<sup>25</sup> Jonathan Cohn, et al., “Part Four: Web,” in *Sampling Media*, eds. David Laderman and Laurel Westrup (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 185–246; xtine burrough, Owen Gallagher, and Eduardo Navas, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Remix Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2015), <https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315879994>.

<sup>26</sup> Greene, *Internet Art*.

proposes four periods: early internet art and network cultures from 1985 to 1998; animation and blogs from 1999 to 2005; surf clubs, early post-internet art, and social media platforms from 2006 to 2011; and mobile applications and social media criticism from 2012 to present.<sup>27</sup> Given Greene's periodization is out of date, whereby six years in the context of the rapidly-evolving internet cultures is considered to be practically a lifetime, and that it predates the works selected for this thesis for the purposes of this study, I will be using *Rhizome's* system.<sup>28</sup> Their system also includes post-internet art, which I discuss more in-depth in Section One. However, it should be noted that both historical periodizations locate the cyberfeminists in early internet art and recognize their influence on new media arts.

Early media art histories by women, particularly following the advent of the internet, were influenced by cyberfeminism which can be traced back to Donna Haraway's 1985 "A Manifesto for Cyborgs," to which the all-female Australian art collective VNS Matrix (Virginia Barratt, Julianne Pierce, Francesca di Rimini, and Josephine Starrs) paid homage with their own manifesto, "A Cyberfeminist Manifesto for the Twenty-First Century" (1991). VNS Matrix coined the term "cyberfeminist", although there are many sources that argue British cultural theorist Sadie Plant simultaneously invented the portmanteau.<sup>29</sup> Regardless of the exact origin of the term, both VNS Matrix and Plant have been linked to the initial wave of cyberfeminism, and both have been influenced by Haraway's manifesto.<sup>30</sup> Plant's theory of cyberfeminism has been summarized as:

"[...] an absolutely posthuman insurrection—the revolt of an emergent system which includes women and computers, against the world view and material reality of a patriarchy which still seeks to subdue them."<sup>31</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Michael Connor, Aria Dean, and Dragan Espenshied, "Net Art Anthology," *Rhizome*, June 2019, <https://anthology.rhizome.org/>.

<sup>28</sup> "History," New Museum, accessed on June 28, 2020, <https://www.newmuseum.org/history>.

<sup>29</sup> Mia Consalvo, "Cyberfeminism," in Steve Jones, et al., *Encyclopedia of New Media: An Essential Reference to Communication and Technology* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2003): 108–109; Susanna Paasonen, "Revisiting Cyberfeminism," *Communications* 36 (2011): 335–352, doi:10.1515/COMM.2011.017; Claire L. Evans, "An Oral History of the First Cyberfeminists," *Vice*, December 11, 2014, [https://www.vice.com/en\\_us/article/z4mq88/an-oral-history-of-the-first-cyberfeminists-vns-matrix](https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/z4mq88/an-oral-history-of-the-first-cyberfeminists-vns-matrix); Maria Fernandez and Faith Wilding, "Situating Cyberfeminisms," in *Domain Errors!: Cyberfeminist Practices*, ed. Maria Fernandez, Faith Wilding, and Michelle Wright (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2002): 17–28.

<sup>30</sup> Fernandez and Wilding, "Situating Cyberfeminisms," 17–28.

<sup>31</sup> Caroline Bassett, "With a Little Help from Our (New) Friends?" *mute* (August 1997): 46–49, cited in Fernandez and Wilding, "Situating Cyberfeminisms," 22.

Fernandez and Wilding argue that the VNS Matrix's art is a "humorous and self-ironizing illustration" of Plant's theory.<sup>32</sup>

At times, the negotiations between cyberfeminism and feminism have been difficult, in part because of the "[...] often-contradictory contemporary positions of women working with the new technologies."<sup>33</sup> Cyberfeminist artists and theorists Faith Wilding, Maria Fernandez, Cornelia Sollfrank, Susanna Paasonen, and Lisa Nakamura aimed to bridge this gap between new technologies, feminism, and post-colonial studies in cyberspace. Another difficulty for cyberfeminism is that the web had long been theorized as a disembodied space. Hence, in early cyberculture studies, racism and sexism were not considered to exist on the Internet, and neither did any discussions on the subjects.<sup>34</sup> Donna Haraway and VNS Matrix, as well as Rosi Braidotti, all warned against the dangers of reinforcing a Cartesian separation between mind and body in cyberfeminism. In their art and writings, cyberfeminists also confronted the male dominance of the internet, tackling the lived experiences of gendered web spaces, new biotechnologies, and women's empowerment through technology, using the critical lens of feminist cultural studies and critical race theories.<sup>35</sup>

As well as receiving deserved criticism for its initial lack of inclusion regarding race issues and post-colonial theory, there was also the additional criticism that cyberfeminism often only focused on the experiences of heterosexual women. Janne Bromseth and Jenny Sundén reviewed cyberfeminist literature, and stated that current studies of gender performance are done according to a binary gender model and are limited to heterosexuality, which is part of what they call the "heterosexual matrix."<sup>36</sup> The authors propose that queer theories be applied to subjects that are not "most evidently queer," seeing that gender identity is intrinsically linked to compulsory heterosexuality.<sup>37</sup>

32 Fernandez and Wilding, "'Situating Cyberfeminisms,'" 22.

33 Fernandez and Wilding, "'Situating Cyberfeminisms,'" 19.

34 Maria Fernandez, "Cyberfeminism, Racism, Embodiment," in *Domain Errors!: Cyberfeminist Practices*, ed. Maria Fernandez, Faith Wilding, and Michelle Wright (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2002): 29–44; Lisa Nakamura, *Digitizing Race: Visual Cultures of the Internet* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

35 Fernandez, Wilding, Wright, *Domain Errors!*; Susanna Paasonen, et al., "Defining Gender," in *Women & Everyday Uses of the Internet: Agency & Identity*, ed. Mia Consalvo, and Susanna Paasonen (New York: Peter Lang, 2002): 21–107.

36 Janne Bromseth and Jenny Sundén, "Queering Internet Studies: Intersections of Gender and Sexuality," in *The Handbook of Internet Studies*, ed. Mia Consalvo, and Charles Ess (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011): 282.

37 Bromseth and Sundén, "Queering Internet Studies," 282.

In 1990, semiotics and feminism professor Teresa de Lauretis coined the term “queer theory.” However, her definition maintained a gender division of sexual orientation. In contrast, other theorists such as Sue-Ellen Case and Judith Butler presented queerness as not being limited to “notions of binary opposition of male and female or the homo versus hetero paradigm usually articulated as an extension of this gender binarism.”<sup>38</sup> Butler saw gender identity as “the stylized repetition of acts through time and not a seemingly seamless identity.”<sup>39</sup> For Butler, what we consider as naturally occurring maleness and femaleness are actually created “through certain bodily acts,”<sup>40</sup> which makes gender a “changeable and revisable reality.”<sup>41</sup> She argues that gender performance carries within it the possibility of power and agency. Starting in 1996, queer theory took an anti-social turn, with the publication of Leo Bersani’s *Homos*, which binds the theory in antifuturity and unproductivity.<sup>42</sup> Though recent scholarship observes an anti-anti-relation turn in queer theory, the concept of queer negativity has been retained.<sup>43</sup> Queer negativity embraces negative affects such as depression, unknowing, masochism, etc. as an antithesis to neoliberalism’s toxic culture of positivity, and serves as a useful tool for critical thinking and revealing unsuspected sources of resistance to hegemonic discourse.<sup>44</sup> This negativity is present in fourth-wave feminist art, as we will see in Section Two.

Also integral to fourth-wave feminism is how it approaches pornography differently than previous waves, as it considers how porn functions as a media genre, a question introduced by porn studies—a relatively new field of studies.<sup>45</sup> In *Beyond Explicit*, Helen Hester points to Linda Williams’ *Porn Studies* (2004), Pamela Church Gibson’s *More Dirty Looks: Gender*,

38 Alexander Doty, *Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993): xv.

39 Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (December 1988): 520, July 20, 2020, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3207893>.

40 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York and London: Routledge, 2007), xvi.

41 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xxiv.

42 Leo Bersani, *Homos* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996); Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004); Nishant Shahani, “The Future is Queer Stuff: Critical Utopianism and its Discontents,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 19, no. 4 (2013), doi: 10.1215/10642684-2279915.

43 Halberstam, *Queer Art of Failure*; José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York and London: NYU Press, 2009).

44 Mari Ruti, *The Ethics of Opting Out: Queer Theory’s Defiant Subjects* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2017); Shahani, “The Future is Queer Stuff.”

45 Linda Williams, *Porn Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 4–5, cited in Helen Hester, *Beyond Explicit: Pornography and the Displacement of Sex* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2014): 1.

*Pornography, and Power* (2004), and Peter Lehman's *Pornography: Film and Culture* (2006) as being some of the most influential texts of porn studies. These were only published in the first decade of the 2000s, as popular discourse started focusing on the pornification of Western culture. Also differently referred to as "pornographication," "pornification," "porno chic," and the "rise of raunch culture" by academics, journalists and professionals, "pornification" – or the phenomenon of the normalization of pornography is an acknowledged reality by both porn studies theorists and antipornography feminist scholars.<sup>46</sup> The issue of the pornification of culture and the emerging field of studies resulting from it have greatly influenced fourth-wave feminists' views of pornography, hence consideration and discussion of these are included in this thesis.

My methodology also uses concepts drawn from critical internet studies, critical race theories, feminist cultural studies, feminist art history, and queer studies. Foundational feminist art history texts, in particularly Linda Nochlin's "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" (1971) and Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975), are important to my analyses. They were amongst the first texts to address the systemic sexism present in art and art history, tackling topics that are still debated today within feminist theory and art. They are also important to an understanding of the exhibition *Body Anxiety* as co-curators Chan and Schragar reference these texts in their curatorial statements. Both the curators discuss the male gaze, a concept introduced by Mulvey, for which the pleasure of looking is modeled along the sexual imbalance of male/active and female/passive. Women are objectified

<sup>46</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, I will use the more commonly used term "pornification." Paasonen, Nikunen, and Saarenmaa, "Pornification and the Education of Desire," 1. On "pornographication," see Brian McNair, *Mediated sex: pornography and postmodern culture* (London: Arnold, 1996) and Susan Driver, "Pornographic Pedagogies?: The Risks of Teaching "Dirrty" Popular Cultures," *M/C Journal* 7, no. 4 (2004), [http://journal.media-culture.org.au/0410/03\\_teaching.php](http://journal.media-culture.org.au/0410/03_teaching.php). On pornification, see Pamela Paul, *Pornified: How Pornography Is Damaging Our Lives, Our Relationships, and Our Families* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2006) and Don Aucoin, "The Pornification of America: From Music to Fashion to Celebrity Culture, Mainstream Entertainment Reflects an X-Rated Attitude Like Never Before," *Boston Globe*, January 24, 2006, [http://archive.boston.com/news/globe/living/articles/2006/01/24/the\\_pornification\\_of\\_america/](http://archive.boston.com/news/globe/living/articles/2006/01/24/the_pornification_of_america/). On "porno chic," see Brian McNair, *Porno? Chic!: How Pornography Changed The World and Made It A Better Place* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2013) and Linda Duits and Liesbet van Zoonen, "Headscarves and Porno-Chic: Disciplining Girls' Bodies in the European Multicultural Society," *European Journal of Women's Studies* 13, no. 2 (May 2006): 103–117, doi:10.1177/1350506806062750. And, and on the rise of raunch culture, see Ariel Levy, *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture* (New York: Free Press, 2006).



by being looked at, while men are voyeurs who fetishize the female body.<sup>47</sup> I will look further into the limitations of this understanding of the gaze in Section Two. Nochlin's text, along with Dietz's "Why Have There Been No Great Net Artists?" (1999), form the theoretical basis of Chan's 2011 essay "Why Are There No Great Women Net Artists?". Dietz's essay is about the lack of interest in new media by art historians in their canon. Nochlin's essay is about the lack of women artists, due to systemic sexism which blocked their access to the art world. Chan combines the conclusions of both texts to understand the challenges that women net artists face in the 2010s and how this influences their art. To consider how the works of Durbin, Hirsch and Holland respond to gender expectations, I integrate Chan's understanding of the double-bind, which she defines in her curatorial essay "How We Became Objects" as a form of oppression that forces women into a performance of femininity which is in equal parts enforced through social pressure and denigrated (discussed further in Section One).<sup>48</sup>

There are three objectives to this thesis. The first objective is to propose an understanding of fourth-wave feminism in relationship to contemporary art. I will do this by developing a theoretical framework that situates Durbin, Holland, and Hirsch's art between the spectrum of cyberfeminism and post-internet art, which also takes into account the specific socio-economic conditions of fourth-wave feminist artists. The second objective is to study "shadow feminism," which Halberstam defines as valuing negative actions, such as passivity, silence, unbecoming, undoing, refusal and failure. They draw from queer anti-social theories, as well as post-colonial and Black feminism, in order to provide an alternative to heterosexual and capitalist models of success, which are based in wealth accumulation and biological reproduction.<sup>49</sup> As an example of shadow feminism in performance art, Halberstam points to Yoko Ono's 1964 performance *Cut Piece*, where Ono uses passivity and silence, by kneeling and letting the audience cut off pieces of her clothing, to confront the viewers with their own sadistic and racist impulses (fig. 8).<sup>50</sup> I'm interested in the negative actions of refusal and failure—the first is present in all three performances, while the latter is seen in Hirsch and Holland's work. The third objective is to

47 Caroline Evans and Lorraine Gamman, "The Gaze Revisited, or Reviewing Queer Viewing," in *A Queer Romance: Lesbians, Gay Men and Popular Culture*, ed. Paul Burston, Paul Burston Nfa, and Colin Richardson, (London: Routledge, 1995): 20-23.

48 Jennifer Chan, "How We Became Objects," *Body Anxiety*, January 24, 2015, <http://bodyanxiety.com/jen/>.

49 Halberstam, *Queer Art of Failure*, 2.

50 Halberstam, *Queer Art of Failure*, 137-139.

apply Rebecca Schneider's notion of the "explicit body" on performances in cyberspace. The explicit body is a term coined by Schneider to indicate performances who use the body to reveal the "layers of signification" around "bodies in social relation."<sup>51</sup> I use Schneider's definition to understand the performances of my three selected artists as being in continuation of the works of feminist performance artists such as Carole Schneemann and Annie Sprinkle and argue that the concept is still current to fourth-wave feminism due to the impact of pornography on fourth-wave feminism.

I also integrate critical race studies within my analyses in order to point out how the success of self-representation is also very much rooted in the white privilege of Durbin, Holland, and Hirsch. I use the writings of Manthia Diawara and bell hooks to point out flaws in the "male gaze" and "female gaze" theories.<sup>52</sup> There are a variety of definitions for the female gaze, which range from artworks made from the point-of-view of a woman to works where one must adopt a female perspective to understand its meaning.<sup>53</sup> The female gaze will be further expanded on in Section Two, along with the male gaze. The issue of how self-representation and power relations of the gaze are experienced differently by non-white artists is one that deserves further study. Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of this thesis, though I will point out some of its key elements in discussing the exhibition *Body Anxiety*.

To establish this theoretical framework, I have analysed the literature listed above, as well as supplemented it with book reviews, interview transcripts with the writers, online recorded conferences, and attended the GEM LAB SYMPOSIUM at Concordia University in 2020.<sup>54</sup> For my case studies, my research tools have been the consultation of primary sources, such as the artworks of the artists, widely available and some harder to find interview transcripts

<sup>51</sup> Rebecca Schneider, *The Explicit Body in Performance* (London: Routledge, 2010), 2.

<sup>52</sup> Manthia Diawara, "Black Spectatorship: Problems of Identification and Resistance," *Screen* 29, no. 4 (Autumn 1988): 66–76; bell hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators," in *Movies and Mass Culture*, ed. John Belton (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 247–266; Richard Dyer, *White: Essays on Race and Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>53</sup> See Evans and Gamman, "The Gaze Revisited"; Charlotte Jansen, *Girl on Girl: Art and Photography in the Age of the Female Gaze* (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2017).

<sup>54</sup> The GEM LAB SYMPOSIUM, "Porn in Context: Social Media, Platforms, Communities," was held on January 21st, 2020 with Rebecca Holt, Nikola Stepić, Antonia Hernández, and Dr. Susanna Paasonen. While the first three are currently Concordia University PhD students, Paasonen is a Finnish feminist scholar and author of many important publications on porn studies, such as *Carnal Resonance Affect and Online Pornography* (2011) and co-author and co-editor of the cyberfeminist compilation *Women and Everyday Uses of the Internet: Agency & Identity* (2002).

or recorded interviews with Durbin, Hirsch, Holland, as well as co-curators of the exhibition *Body Anxiety* Jennifer Chan and Leah Schrager, the writings of the artists and co-curators, and critics on the exhibition.

## **Outline of Sections**

This thesis is divided into three sections. Section One provides an in-depth contextualization of the exhibition *Body Anxiety* and Durbin's *Hello, Selfie!*, Hirsch's video *dance party just us girls*, and Holland's *Lick Suck Screen 2*. In this section, I point to the influences of cyberfeminism and post-internet art on fourth-wave feminist art and expand on the concept of the wave narrative. From there, I examine the historiography of the current wave, fourth-wave feminism, suggesting a working definition in relation to four recurring characteristics of intersectionality, humour, social media, the 2008 global economic crisis, and post-feminism. In Section Two, I introduce Halberstam's concept of "shadow feminism" as a productive framework to analyze fourth-wave feminist art. I consider how the three works engage with aspects of shadow feminism, by using negative actions such as refusal to engage and technological failure as alternative methods of resistance that offer the possibility to gain agency from gendered societal pressures. I then outline the theory of the male and female gaze and reveal how both concepts offer limiting understanding of artworks. Section Three examines in depth the relationship fourth-wave feminism has with pornography since the 2000s, and how pornification and porn studies have influenced fourth-wave feminism's distinctive understanding of the genre. I then discuss the artworks in relation to Rebecca Schneider's notion of the "explicit body," and ask what the pornographic aspects of the explicit bodies in these works literally *do* for viewers. The thesis concludes with a critical assessment of the exhibition as an example of fourth-wave feminist art.

## Section One

### Fourth-Wave Feminism: Understanding its Influences and the Wave Narrative

This section contextualizes Hirsch, Durbin, and Holland's performances in relation to the art movements that precede them: namely cyberfeminism of the early 1990s to the early 2000s and post-internet movements from 2008 to 2015. As mentioned in the introduction, cyberfeminists were highly influential in internet art history, as they brought a feminist framework to understanding embodiment on the internet, which had before been understood as a genderless and raceless utopia. "Post-internet" is a more recent term in the art world that was first defined in 2008 by former editor and curator of *Rhizome*, Marisa Olson. Along with Olson, the post-internet era was theorized by artist Artie Vierkant, in his manifesto "The Image Object Post-Internet" (2010), Gene McHugh, whose year-long blog "Post-Internet" was supported by the Andy Warhol Foundation Arts Writers Grant Program and later published as a book, and Omar Kholeif, editor of the book *You Are Here Art After the Internet* (2014), which featured *Body Anxiety*'s co-curator Jennifer Chan's chapter, "Notes on Post-Internet."<sup>55</sup> Olson defines post-internet art as a historical period where the advent of the internet is a turning point, which has pushed new media art beyond the confines of the internet, the computer or the screen. She includes in her definition all contemporary art practices that engage with the internet or what new media artist Guthrie Lonergan has called "internet aware art". In such art, the emphasis is placed on artists' ideas about the internet and new media, rather than the mediums themselves.<sup>56</sup> Vierkant defines post-internet as "[...] a result of the contemporary moment: inherently informed by ubiquitous authorship, the development of attention as currency, the collapse of physical space in networked

<sup>55</sup> McHugh is also Ann Hirsch's husband and features in one of her videos from the *Body Anxiety* exhibition, *yuppie life* (2014), during which we see a screen recording of Hirsch looking at their wedding web page and shopping for her wedding registry; see Artie Vierkant, *The Image Object Post-Internet*, 2010, <http://jstchillin.org/artie/vierkant.html>; Gene McHugh, *Post Internet: Notes on the Internet and Art*, 12.29.09 > 09.05.10 (Brescia: LINK Editions, 2011), [http://www.linkartcenter.eu/public/editions/Gene\\_McHugh\\_Post\\_Internet\\_2nd\\_ed\\_2019.pdf](http://www.linkartcenter.eu/public/editions/Gene_McHugh_Post_Internet_2nd_ed_2019.pdf); Jennifer Chan, "Notes on Post-Internet," in *You Are Here: Art After the Internet*, ed. Omar Kholeif, (Manchester and London: Cornerhouse and SPACE, 2014).

<sup>56</sup> Thomas Beard, "Interview with Guthrie Lonergan," *Rhizome*, March 26, 2008, <https://rhizome.org/editorial/2008/mar/26/interview-with-guthrie-lonergan/>.

culture, and the infinite reproducibility and mutability of digital materials.”<sup>57</sup> New-York based art critic Gene McHugh’s blog “Post-Internet,” which ran from December 2009 to September 2010 defines “post-internet” as the translation of digital art into the physical world, much like Vierkant does. All of these definitions point in a similar direction; post-internet art can take on physical art forms such as printed media, sculptures, installations, and performances without the presence of technology as long as they engage critically with internet cultures.

However, in her chapter “Notes on Post-Internet,” Jennifer Chan critiques this hyperfocus of the collapse between the online and the physical world, and instead, suggests focusing on the “post-internet condition,” which is the lived realities of artists following the rise of the internet. She questions what it means to be making art online in this post-internet period, in ethical and political terms. Chan considers moments in art history that made the post-internet movement possible, such as Duchamp’s *Fountain* which brought up questions around authorship and appropriation, which are repeating themes in post-internet art. She also points out how post-internet art differs from 1990s net.art through the use of popular systems, such as social media.<sup>58</sup> Though her definition of the post-internet movement does include the notion of the translation from digital to physical, she also points to other unique characteristics. She writes, “Post-internet art practices are characterized by hybridity and hyper-mediation of existing genres, platform-oriented activity, slippage between formal output of digital and physical environments, and tactical web surfing.”<sup>59</sup> By hybridity, Chan means the “remix,” which is the combination of “pre-existing material in order to create something new.”<sup>60</sup> Tactical web surfing is another term for what semiotics scholar Paule Mackrous calls “pro surfing”. Olson defines it as a “copy-and-paste aesthetic” where internet content is appropriated to both celebrate and critique web cultures.<sup>61</sup> In

<sup>57</sup> Artie Vierkant, *The Image Object Post-Internet*, 2010.

<sup>58</sup> Chan, “Notes on Post-Internet,” 111. A great example of post-internet art that questions authorship that Chan cites in her essay is Oliver Laric’s *Versions* (2012), a video which includes many versions of repeating motifs including Roman copies of Greek sculptures, doctored news images and Disney’s recycled animations between movies.

<sup>59</sup> Curt Cloninger, “Commodify Your Consumption: Tactical Surfing/Wakes of Resistance,” presented at the 3rd Inclusive-net meeting: NET.ART (SECOND EPOCH)—The Evolution of Artistic Creation in the Net-system, March 3, 2009, Buenos Aires, <http://medialab-prado.es/mmedia/2195> paraphrased by Chan, “Notes on Post-Internet,” 110.

<sup>60</sup> Paule Mackrous, “Pro Surfing, Remix, Apparatus: Émilie Gervais and Post-Internet Art,” *ETC MEDIA* no. 108, (2016): 45.

<sup>61</sup> Marisa Olson, “Lost Not Found: The Circulation of Images in the Digital Visual Culture” in *Words Without Pictures* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, November 2007–February 2009), accessed on April 11, 2016, [s3.amazonaws.com/arena-attachments/244548/b8c1a5acd8d1176411565eec85d476ee.pdf](http://s3.amazonaws.com/arena-attachments/244548/b8c1a5acd8d1176411565eec85d476ee.pdf).

her article on Montreal-born post-internet artist Émilie Gervais, Mackrous offers a definition of the post-internet movement that is close to Chan and centred around the concepts of “pro surfing, an awareness of the apparatus, and the remix”.<sup>62</sup> Mackrous’ definition of the apparatus is borrowed from philosopher Giorgio Agamben, who himself draws it from Foucault’s notion of the “dispositif,”<sup>63</sup> where the apparatus is always a controlling element of a power relation.<sup>64</sup>

A combination of what Chan and Mackrous have determined as characteristics of post-internet art most efficiently convey what is distinct about the movement; the remix, the focus on the apparatus, the collapse of the distance between the digital and the physical, and pro-surfing. However, I posit that a post-internet artwork must not necessarily have all these characteristics, just as Dietz’s definition of new media considered that its three categories of interactivity, connectivity, and computability could be present in any combination.<sup>65</sup> Using this definition of post-internet art I will look into its influences on fourth-wave feminist art and the works selected for my analysis. Firstly, I look at cyberfeminism, an earlier influence on fourth-wave feminism and the exhibition *Body Anxiety*.

The *Body Anxiety* artists, such as Durbin, Hirsch and Holland, use many of the same strategies of cyberfeminists by exploring representations of women and gender-queer people on the internet and their embodied experiences in cyberspace in ways that confront sexist behaviours towards femininity. This emphasis on digital embodiment follows what Cornelia Sollfrank considers as being central to Haraway’s 1985 manifesto: an elimination of a binary thinking separating the body and technology.<sup>66</sup> The absence of cismale bodies in *Body Anxiety* is also a strategic separatism tactic, which was used by the cyberfeminists through “women-only lists, self-help groups, chat groups, networks, and woman to woman technological training.”<sup>67</sup> The artists and the curators tackle many of the same themes as cyberfeminism with similar strategies, but they distinguish themselves in part through their more subdued tone. In her 2011 essay, “Why Are There No Great Women Net Artists?” Chan explains that when compared to

<sup>62</sup> Mackrous, “Pro Surfing, Remix, Apparatus”: 45.

<sup>63</sup> Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980): 194–196.

<sup>64</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *What is an Apparatus? and Other Essays*, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009): 2.

<sup>65</sup> Graham, Cook and Dietz, *Rethinking Curating*, 6.

<sup>66</sup> Cornelia Sollfrank, “Revisiting Cyberfeminism,” *Art Papers* (May/June 2015): 30.

<sup>67</sup> Maria Fernandez and Faith Wilding, *Domain Errors!*, 20.

the “deliberatively provocative cyberfeminist statements, net art by women currently appears questionably complacent or complex.”<sup>68</sup> She also compares the feminist video performances of the late 1960s and 1970s, characterized in part by a confessional style of storytelling, to web performances of the 2000s and later and makes the important observation that:

“The difference between the personal sentiments of the seventies feminist performance video and the webcam videos of the now is the increased use of humorous self-deprecation as a device to speak to regimes of representation in popular culture. While some revel in flagrantly queering gender boundaries, others reperform or resexualize gendered performances from pop culture.”<sup>69</sup>

The use of self-deprecating humour and performances that seemingly submit to patriarchal ideals of femininity are part of the strategies of resistance of “shadow feminism,” which I will discuss in the next section. Another difference between the work of cyberfeminists and many of the artworks in *Body Anxiety* is that the latter does not present any technological innovation, as they use now common technology such as smartphones, laptops, computer cameras, and social media tools, as Hirsch, Durbin, and Holland do.

In “Revisiting Cyberfeminism,” Sollfrank laments this lack of formal technological innovation as a characteristic of post-internet art. She also describes post-internet art as being apolitical, apathetic, and acritical, using the internet only for content in traditional physical formats and mediums that satisfy the requirements of art markets.<sup>70</sup> Sollfrank considers that there is still very much a need for more feminist art as there are still battles to be won in the field of information technologies. As examples, she points to the decline of women in IT and software development since the 1980s, the low participation rate of women in open source cultures, and the rampant sexism and misogyny in the gaming world, exemplified by the “doxxing,”<sup>71</sup> sexual assault threats, physical threats, and bomb threats that feminist media scholar Anita Sarkeesian faced.<sup>72</sup> The hatred towards Sarkeesian was also racially motivated, as she is a second-generation

<sup>68</sup> Jennifer Chan, “Why Are There No Great Women Net Artists?” *Pool*, June 2011, 15. <http://pooool.info/why-are-there-no-great-women-net-artists-2/>.

<sup>69</sup> Chan, “Why Are There No Great Women Net Artists?” 33.

<sup>70</sup> Sollfrank, “Revisiting Cyberfeminism,” 33.

<sup>71</sup> Doxxing is the practice of publishing someone’s private information on the Internet, such as their address, phone number and place of work.

<sup>72</sup> Sollfrank, “Revisiting Cyberfeminism,” 33; Nick Wingfield, “Feminist Critics of Video Games Facing Threats in ‘GamerGate’ Campaign,” *The New York Times*, October 15, 2014, [https://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/16/technology/gamergate-women-video-game-threats-anita-sarkeesian.html?\\_r=2](https://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/16/technology/gamergate-women-video-game-threats-anita-sarkeesian.html?_r=2); Chamberlain, *The Feminist Fourth Wave*, 134–139.

Canadian/American-Armenian, showing how sexism is unfortunately compounded by racism. Indeed, racism is just as prevalent in the fields of technology as in other disciplines. In *Race After Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code*, Ruha Benjamin points out that technology “too often reinforce and even deepen the status quo.” Benjamin argues that algorithms and artificial intelligence often mirror harmful racial biases, refuting the idea of a utopian web as being post-race and post-gender.<sup>73</sup> These intersectional concerns are part of the context within which new media arts, such as post-internet works, emerge.

Sollfrank’s criticism of post-internet as apolitical is one that Chan supports. In “Post-Internet Notes,” she states that post-internet art’s lack of “[...] unique goals and unified politics” explains why the term was so easily co-opted to be reduced to meaning “[...] contemporary art inspired by the internet”, instead of art that critically engages with the Internet as a culture and environment.<sup>74</sup> In her conclusion, she calls on post-internet artists to “[...] do something meaningful with your newfound art power. Stand for something.”<sup>75</sup> Ultimately, Chan would come to reject post-internet in a 2015 tweet that read: “Postinternet: I renounce my intellectual contributions to this colonial movement. It’s been a massive ideological jerkoff.”<sup>76</sup> Though Chan did not further comment on this subject, she has also stated that:

“The art world is a white frat house, and most post-internet discussion has been between the academically clustered internet art communities in North America and Western Europe. With emphasis on post-isms come ideas of post-race and post-gender—equitable visions that use of the internet hasn’t achieved just yet.”<sup>77</sup>

It seems then that she has become disillusioned as to the post-internet community’s willingness to engage with post-colonial feminist thinking. The year 2015 marked a decline in post-internet art as other artists also publicly rejected the movement.<sup>78</sup> In his article on post-internet artist Jon Rafman’s self-titled solo exhibition at the Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal (2015),

<sup>73</sup> Ruha Benjamin, *Race After Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code* (Medford, MA: Polity, 2019): 22.

<sup>74</sup> Chan, “Notes on Post-Internet,” 117.

<sup>75</sup> Chan, “Notes on Post-Internet,” 121.

<sup>76</sup> Jeniffer Chan, March 20, 2015, @jenninat0r, accessed July 27, 2020, <https://rematerializationchamber.tumblr.com/image/114123064309>.

<sup>77</sup> Chan, “Notes on Post-Internet,” 120.

<sup>78</sup> Saelan Twerdy, “This Is Where It Ends: The Denouement of Post-Internet Art in Jon Rafman’s Deep Web,” *Momus*, July 9, 2015, <https://momus.ca/this-is-where-it-ends-the-denouement-of-post-internet-art-in-jon-rafmans-deep-web/>.



Montreal-based art critic Saelan Twerdy argues that the year 2015 represents post-internet art's integration into the art market, which makes it more diffused, much like what happened to conceptual art.<sup>79</sup> Regardless of its faults, post-internet art was a unifying theme for a network of exhibitions, art galleries, and artists from 2008 to 2015, and was largely influential on fourth-wave feminist digital art. It created a network of galleries and exhibitions where the *Body Anxiety* artists and curators met and collaborated. They bonded in the safe spaces of women-only private messages and Facebook groups for women curators and artists, such as the invite-only Facebook group Starwave (or ☆~).<sup>80</sup> Other artists from the *Body Anxiety* exhibition were also linked to the post-internet movement, such as co-curator Schrager, as well as artists Hirsch, Holland, and Durbin. We can see the influence of post-internet practices in all three artists' performances through their focus on the apparatus, a characteristic of fourth-wave feminist art.

#### **Fourth-Wave Feminism: Characteristics and The Wave Narrative**

In this next section, I consider what defines this new wave of feminism, but I first argue that the focus on the apparatus, a post-internet practice as explored above, and the double-bind are two characteristics of fourth-wave feminist art present in the works of Durbin, Hirsch and Holland.

Importance is placed on the apparatus in Durbin's *Hello, Selfie!* through the omnipresence of the smart phone in the performance. As the performers refuse to engage with the crowd around them, they continue to interact with their own image and social media through their phones. In Hirsch's work, the apparatus is made more tangible through the inclusion of known visual codes of self-imaging programs on laptops such as the 'nose twirl' effect of Apple's Photobooth. Using this effect, the artist's warps her face and vulva following a central S pattern. In the video *dance party just us girls*, the quality of the sound is poor, as it is recorded straight from the computer's speakers. This lo-fi approach of screen-recording her performance, with sub-par audio, shows a willingness to make the interface of recording on a laptop more evident. In her own performance, Holland sensually interacts with the apparatus of the computer

<sup>79</sup> Twerdy, "This Is Where It Ends."

<sup>80</sup> Victoria Khroundina, "Digital Artist May Waver Talks Feminism, Intimacy, and the Internet," *Shera Mag*, February 21, 2016, <http://www.sheramag.com/digital-artist-may-waver-talks-feminism-intimacy-internet/>; Johanna Fateman, "Women On The Verge: Art, Feminism, And Social Media," *Artforum* 53, no. 8, April 2015, <https://www.artforum.com/print/201504/art-feminism-and-social-media-50736>.

camera by licking it. The layer of saliva blurring the lens brings to the forefront how her performance is mediated through the camera. While cyberfeminism inspired the *Body Anxiety* artists through their politics, themes, and practices, post-internet art influenced their formal art practices, by bringing a focus to the apparatus, an important aspect of the movement as pointed out by Mackrous. Hirsch, Holland, and Durbin’s interactions with the apparatus are centered around self-exposure. The use of self-imagery and social media tools in their art are characteristics of fourth-wave feminism.

In her curatorial essay, “How We Became Objects,” Chan discusses this question of self-representation to point out that self-exposure, where the woman self-sexualizes in a pleasing manner to heterosexual men, may permit women to be included but it also may inadvertently reinforce sexist stereotypes.<sup>81</sup> This is what Chan calls the “double-bind,” which is at the centre of the exhibition:

“The works in this show involve an explicitly politicized use of the body or an equally blatant response to the capitalization of women’s bodies in media culture. We selected them because they invoked the double-bind of female-as-category, and femininity as a performance that is pleasurable but often derided.”<sup>82</sup>

The double-bind is best explained by American philosopher and radical feminist theorist Marilyn Frye in her book *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory*. Frye offers a definition of oppression that considers the meaning of the word “pressed” as being where one is moulded, reduced, and immobilized. When a certain group faces political oppression, they are thus reduced, immobilized, and moulded “[...] by a network of social barriers and forces which constantly catch them in double-bind.”<sup>83</sup> As examples of double-binds for women, she suggests that the manner of dress for women is either an advertisement of sexual availability or unfeminine, and one’s action and language as either categorizing themselves “[...] as a whore or slut” or a “[...] lady—one too delicately constituted to cope with robust speech or the realities to which it presumably refers.”<sup>84</sup> For Chan, female-as-category is the inescapable gendering of public and online spaces, where the female category is considered part of public property, while

<sup>81</sup> Chan, “How We Became Objects.”

<sup>82</sup> Chan, “How We Became Objects.”

<sup>83</sup> Claudia Card, “Review: Oppression and Resistance: Frye’s Politics of Reality,” *Hypatia* 1, No. 1 (Spring, 1986): 157.

<sup>84</sup> Marilyn Frye, “Oppression,” in *Gender Basics: Feminist Perspectives on Women and Men*, ed. Anne Minas (Brantford, ON: W. Ross MacDonald School Resource Services Library, 2011): 12.

femininity is the performance of feminine markers, that is both demanded from women, as explained by Frye, and ridiculed. The femininity as performance is further complexified by the context of mediated misogyny now on the web.

In her 2011 essay, “Why Are There No Great Women Net Artists?” Chan notes that if the web can be a hostile place to women in general, it is even more so to feminist performances that critique gender and step outside the norms of representation. This keeps most web performances stuck “in paradigms of entertainment.”<sup>85</sup> Though women internet artists control the apparatus and could use their “self-as-subjects” as “possible occasions for resistance and restructuring of agency surrounding relations of the male and female gaze,” they often use visual codes that are pleasing to the presumed heterosexual male viewer.<sup>86</sup> This is very close to Chan’s double-bind of femininity that could be empowering, but remains trapped in pleasing the male gaze.

In the fourth-wave feminist art of Hirsch, Durbin, and Holland, the double-bind that Chan discusses is evident, as all the works feature the artists’ bodies to discuss objectification that can also be objectified through spectatorship. Durbin describes the public’s reaction to *Hello, Selfie!* in this way:

“Passerbys gawked and took pictures and selfies with the girls, and engaged in discourse around what they thought the piece was about. Some engaged in inappropriate touching and made snide remarks about the girl’s [sic] bodies. Others seemed to experience breakthroughs about feminism, the objectified female body, and their own role in the spectacle. Some people had all of these experiences.”<sup>87</sup>

The audience’s reaction includes then an objectification of the performers’ bodies and for some, sometimes simultaneously, a new understanding of what it means to objectify women’s bodies.

Similarly, though Holland’s series of *Porn Interventions* are meant to force the viewer to consider the visual tropes of cam videos, they also become part of the porn landscape. Indeed, one of her three videos in *Body Anxiety* is a fan response of another Redtube user who had written on his hand Holland’s Redtube username *aSuGaRHiGh* and then masturbated with it. In an interview, Hirsch speaks about how the series *horny lil feminist* is intentionally placed in

<sup>85</sup> Chan, “Why Are There No Great Women Net Artists?”

<sup>86</sup> Michele White, “Too Close to See: Men, Women, and Webcams,” *New Media & Society* 5, no. 1 (2003): 7–28, paraphrased by Chan, “Why Are There No Great Women Net Artists?” 26.

<sup>87</sup> Kate Durbin, “HELLO, SELFIE! Project Statement.” *Body Anxiety*, January 2015, <http://bodyanxiety.com/gallery/kate-durbin/>.

relation to pornography to question the co-existence of porn and feminism, but she admits that she also cannot control whether some will masturbate to her videos.<sup>88</sup> As all three performances engage in the question of objectification with the use of their own bodies, a recurring strategy in fourth-wave feminist art, they confront the double-bind of the performance of femininity as defined by Chan. The double-bind and the focus on the apparatus are characteristics of a new wave of feminism that needs to be contextualized within a history of feminist waves in order to be properly understood.

The rise of fourth-wave feminism theory in academia can be retraced to 2011. Though many journalists cite Kira Cochrane's 2013 article in *The Guardian* as marking the arrival of fourth-wave feminism, Jennifer Baumgardner had already written about this new feminist wave two years prior in *F'em: Goo Goo, Gaga and Some Thoughts on Balls* and had dated its starting point as early as 2008.<sup>89</sup> In her chapter titled "Is There a Fourth Wave? Does It Matter?" Baumgardner touches on the challenging nature of the concept of feminist waves and on how their distinctiveness doesn't hold up under close analysis. They merge back into each other and themselves, as waves do. She cites third-wave feminist Ednie Kaeh Garrison's metaphor of the feminist waves as radio waves, where they grow in reach. These waves are tied to a specific historical moment, not to the group age of the feminists.<sup>90</sup> Criticism of the wave narrative is not specific to the fourth-wave. Third-wave feminist Nancy A. Hewitt prefaces in her collection of essays *No Permanent Waves* that its aim is to contribute new perspectives to the "[...] ongoing debates over the adequacy of the "wave" metaphor for capturing the complex history of women's rights and feminism in the United States."<sup>91</sup> Prudence Chamberlain, another prominent fourth-wave feminism theorist, also questions "the wave narrative."<sup>92</sup> She refuses its interpretation as one where the previous waves erase its predecessors, with a "generational and chronological

<sup>88</sup> Jenna Crowder, "Ann Hirsch, IRL," *The Chart* 1, no. 9 (August 2016), <https://thechart.me/ann-hirsch-irl/>.

<sup>89</sup> Kira Cochrane, "The Fourth Wave of Feminism: Meet the Rebel Women," *The Guardian*, December 10, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/10/fourth-wave-feminism-rebel-women>; Nicola Rivers, *Post feminism(s) and the Arrival of the Fourth Wave*, 22.

<sup>90</sup> Ednie Kaeh Garrison, "Are We on a Wavelength Yet? On Feminist Oceanography, Radios, and Third Wave Feminism," (lecture, Women's Center Dissertation Fellows Colloquium, University of California, Santa Barbara, April 21, 1999).

<sup>91</sup> Nancy A. Hewitt, *No Permanent Waves Recasting Histories of U.S. Feminism* (New Brunswick, New Jersey, London: Rutgers University Press, 2010).

<sup>92</sup> Prudence Chamberlain, *The Feminist Fourth Wave: Affective Temporality* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017): 21–44.

separation.”<sup>93</sup> Rather, she offers that waves belong to affective temporalities, more than generations or identities.<sup>94</sup> The use of the affect, according to Chamberlain, is that it is adaptable, bridging the personal and political. This is a particular strength of this theory, as it recognizes that politics are experienced affectively, through the lived experiences of bodies that cannot help but react emotionally to the patriarchy. Feminist waves are then not chronologically limited, but rather amplify each other like radio waves or wave to each other in greetings and are specific to a certain socio-political context and the emotional response it produces.<sup>95</sup>

This understanding of feminist temporality allows for a non-divisive definition of fourth-wave feminism, that does not limit it to certain politics or a single-fixed identity but rather opens the wave to be shaped by events and the swell of public affect.<sup>96</sup> In this way, it is close to Raymond Williams’ concept of “structures of feelings,” a term he first used in *Preface to Film* (1954) and developed further in *The Long Revolution* (1961). He would continue to define this concept throughout the rest of his career.<sup>97</sup> In *Marxism and Literature* (1971), Williams described the term as “social experiences in solution, as distinct from other social semantic formations which have been precipitated and are more evidently and more immediately available.”<sup>98</sup> He perceived of the structures of feelings as an analytical tool to study culture, organizing it along affect and lived experiences in a specific time period linked to a generational division. The concept has been taken on by Laura Berlant, Sara Ahmed, and Heather Love as it is perceived to allow for the experience of the marginalized and subaltern to be heard.<sup>99</sup> Though

93 Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards, *ManifestA: Young Women, Feminism and the Future* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000); Angela McRobbie, *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change* (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 2009), quoted in Chamberlain, *The Feminist Fourth Wave*, 21–44.

94 Chamberlain, *The Feminist Fourth Wave*, 21–44.

95 Nancy A. Hewitt, “Feminist Frequencies: Regenerating the Wave Metaphor,” *Feminist Studies* 38, no. 3 (Fall 2012): 658–680; Kathleen A. Laughlin, et al., “Is It Time to Jump Ship? Historians Rethink the Waves Metaphor,” *Feminist Formations* 22, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 76–135, cited in Chamberlain, *The Feminist Fourth Wave*, 21–44; Laughlin, “Is it Time to Jump Ship?,” cited in Chamberlain, *The Feminist Fourth Wave*, 21–44; Chamberlain, *The Feminist Fourth Wave*, 22.

96 Chamberlain, *The Feminist Fourth Wave*, 41.

97 Sean Matthews, “Change and Theory in Raymond Williams’s Structure of Feeling,” *Pretexts: literary and cultural studies* 10, no. 2, (November 2001): 179–194, doi: 10.1080/10155490120106032; Stuart Middleton, “Raymond Williams’s “Structure of Feeling” and the Problem of Democratic Values in Britain, 1938–1961\*,” *Modern Intellectual History*, (2019): 1–29, doi:10.1017/S1479244318000537.

98 Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977): 134.

99 Middleton, “Raymond Williams’s “Structure of Feeling””; Lorraine Sim, and Ann Vickery, “New Feelings: Modernism, Intimacy, and Emotion,” *Affirmations: of the modern* 1, no.2, (2014): 1–14, <https://affirmationsmodern.com/articles/67/#>.

Williams' focus on generations is at odds with the affective temporality suggested by Chamberlain, I point to the similarities between the two to emphasize fourth-wave feminism's unique impact on the wave narrative as being supported by different theories on temporality.

In addition to the effects of concomitant post-feminist rhetoric, other factors that created the conditions of possibility for fourth-wave feminism are the rise of information technology and the 2008 economic crash which, though not confined to so-called Western contexts, has garnered few studies on cases outside of the US context that resulted in a fourth-wave feminism.<sup>100</sup>

Along with the austerity measures that followed the crash in the Western context, another mainspring to the new wave is the role that new feminist blogs and social media play in educating a new generation of feminists. These blogs and shared social media posts apply feminist theories to recent events and pop culture, making them relatable to those without prior knowledge of feminism. In an interview with *New York Times Magazine*, Jennifer Valenti, founder and editor of the feminist blog *feministing.com*, proposes that “[...] [m]aybe the fourth wave is online.”<sup>101</sup> The internet also provides a new base of organizing feminist activism, as Cochrane notes in her article by citing UK activist movements such as “Turn Your Back on Page Three” campaign in England<sup>102</sup> and the banning of Robin Thicke’s hit song “Blurred Lines” on UK campuses.<sup>103</sup> In North America, similar examples can be seen in the organizing of Slut Walks following a sexist comment by a Toronto police officer in a campus safety forum<sup>104</sup> and the birth of the Black Lives Matter in 2013 through the creation of the Twitter hashtags by Black women activists, artists, community organizers, and writers Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and

<sup>100</sup> Maha Tazi and Kenza Oumlil, “The Rise of Fourth-Wave Feminism in the Arab region? Cyberfeminism and Women’s Activism at the Crossroads of the Arab Spring,” *CyberOrient* 14, no. 1 (2020): 44-71, <https://cyberorient.net/2020/06/30/the-rise-of-fourth-wave-feminism-in-the-arab-region-cyberfeminism-and-womens-activism-at-the-crossroads-of-the-arab-spring/>; Sonora Jha and Alka Kurian (ed.), *New feminisms in South Asia: disrupting the discourse through social media, film, and literature* (New York and London: Routledge, 2018.)

<sup>101</sup> Debra Solomon, “Questions for Jessica Valenti: Fourth-Wave Feminism,” *The New York Times Magazine*, November 13, 2009, <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/15/magazine/15fob-q4-t.html>.

<sup>102</sup> The activist group called for the end of the publication of bare-breasted women on page 3 of the British newspaper *The Sun*, which was done from 1970. In 2013, a Twitter campaign was started and in 2015, the newspaper published its last topless pictures, although it continues to feature scantily-clad women on its page 3. See Jessica Roy, “A Brief History of The Sun’s Controversial ‘Page 3,’” *New York Magazine*, January 20, 2015, <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2015/01/history-of-the-suns-controversial-page-3.html>.

<sup>103</sup> Abby Young-Powell and Libby Page, “Universities ban Blurred Lines on campuses around UK,” *The Guardian*, September 20, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2013/sep/20/robin-thicke-blurred-lines-ban#:~:text=Blurred%20Lines%2C%20the%20song%20by,broadcast%20in%20over%20100%20universities>.

<sup>104</sup> CBC News, “Toronto ‘Slut Walk’ Takes to City Streets,” April 3, 2011, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/toronto-slut-walk-takes-to-city-streets-1.1087854>; Chamberlain, *The Feminist Fourth Wave*, 109–118.

Opal Tometi.<sup>105</sup> There is also of course the #MeToo movement, another Twitter campaign first started in 2006 by Black woman activist Tarana Burke, that resurfaced in 2017 following the New York Times' investigative piece on influential Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein's years of sexual abuse of women in the business.<sup>106</sup> Fourth-wave feminist activist and columnist Laurie Penny goes so far as to write that it is thanks to new feminist online spaces that feminism was revived in the mid-2000s.<sup>107</sup>

A revival means that feminism faced a lull, which is perhaps true in that the fourth-wave is influenced by postfeminist thinking. The academic term "postfeminism" is different from the popular usage of "post-feminism," which is often written with the hyphen. In popular media, post-feminism has typically been equated to anti-feminism, or occasionally, as a claim that all feminist goals have been reached and that feminism is no longer necessary.<sup>108</sup> The academic definition of the term "postfeminism" relates to other "post" terms, such as postcolonialism and postmodernism, which critically deal with the subject matter of which they are connected. Fourth-wave feminism seems to react to both definitions: reasserting the urgent need for critical feminism today, to the point where feminist theorists Jonathan Dean and Kristin Aune indicate that "[...] a commitment to intersectionality, an embrace of humour and skepticism of feminist intellectualism are all mentioned as distinctively fourth wave."<sup>109</sup> In the new wave, this commitment to intersectional thinking has highlighted the importance of trans\* and race issues.<sup>110</sup> This is in continuation of third-wave feminism's embracement of intersectionality, following the naming of the movement by Black feminist writer Rebecca Walker in her 1992 *Ms.* article, "Becoming the Third Wave".<sup>111</sup> The term was first introduced by Black scholar and civil

105 "Her Story," Black Lives Matter, accessed July 5, 2020, <https://blacklivesmatter.com/herstory/>.

106 Sandra E. Garcia, "The Woman Who Created #MeToo Long Before Hashtags," *The New York Times*, October 20, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/20/us/me-too-movement-tarana-burke.html>.

107 Laurie Penny, *Unspeakable Things: Sex, Lies and Revolution* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

108 See Cochrane, "The Fourth Wave of Feminism," and Ann Brooks, *Postfeminisms*.

109 Jonathan Dean and Kristin Aune, "Feminism Resurgent? Mapping Contemporary Feminist Activisms in Europe," *Social Movement Studies* 14, no. 4, (2015): 383.

110 Elizabeth Evans and Prudence Chamberlain, "Critical Waves: Exploring Feminist Identity, Discourse and Praxis in Western Feminism," *Social Movement Studies* 14, no. 4, (2015): 396–409, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2014.964199>, referenced in Dean and Aune, "Feminism Resurgent?" 375–395.

111 Rebecca Walker, "Becoming the Third Wave," *Ms Magazine* (January 1992): 41.

rights professor Kimberlé Crenshaw in a 1989 paper on three legal cases related to both racial and sexual discrimination.<sup>112</sup>

However, while theorists of the fourth-wave engage with intersectionality and postcolonial studies, they consciously avoid a clear definition that would hinder its evolution. Rather, they point to the specific socio-political context of the late 2000s in order to define it. Dean and Aune consider that this specific context is a “[...]rapidly shifting socio-economic climate marked by, among other things, economic crisis, austerity, a resurgent far right, shifting geopolitical relations and, to some extent, a backlash against feminist gains.”<sup>113</sup> Along with Cochrane and Chamberlain, they point to the 2008 economic crisis which led to pivotal public protests in Europe and the United States, including the Occupy Wall Street movement, as a large influence of fourth-wave feminism.<sup>114</sup> On the whole, the rise in activism around austerity measures has led to a renewal of energy and momentum for feminist activism, both online and offline. Together these diverse contexts converge to create the fourth-wave-feminist framework within which to consider the works of Durbin, Hirsch, and Holland.

While anti-austerity intersectional activism may have influenced fourth-wave feminism, it does not preclude its art from being accused of being white-centered. The lack of representation of BIPOC and queer bodies in *Body Anxiety* is part of this conversation. As a person of colour, Chan recognized that the dearth of cultural diversity had been one of the exhibition’s failures. She notes:

“Because of their prominence in advertising and Hollywood movies, the white female figures are often interchangeable with the standard representations of a human woman. It’s from talking to women artists who weren’t in the exhibition, who were from these different queer/non-white/trans positions that I discovered they had different ideas in terms of reclamation/subverting stereotypes. What works for feminists who use self-imagery doesn’t work for someone like me who can’t drop the race-fetish stereotypes and has a history of medical and sexual trauma. I think all our approaches are valid as a joined battering ram towards an art world that values men’s work and men’s use of female imagery more.”<sup>115</sup>

112 Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1, no. 8 (1987): 139-167, <http://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8>.

113 Dean and Aune, “Feminism Resurgent?” 375.

114 See Cochrane, “The Fourth Wave of Feminism”; Rivers, *Post feminism(s)*, and Dean and Aune, “Feminism Resurgent?”

115 Charlotte Jansen, “Body Anxiety and a New Wave of Digifeminist Art,” *Dazed*, February 26, 2016, <https://www.dazeddigital.com/artsandculture/article/23717/1/body-anxiety-and-a-new-wave-of-digifeminist-art>.



The co-curator acknowledges in her comment that self-representation as art operates very differently for those who do not correspond to what is considered the norm: in this case, cis-gendered, able-bodied and white. In his 1997 analysis of whiteness, film, and photography, Richard Dyer argues that whiteness is unmarked, as the established norm to which all others are considered deviations: “[...] whites are not of a certain race, they are just the human race.”<sup>116</sup> Sara Ahmed specifies that this is only true for those who “[...] inhabit it, or those who get so used to its inhabitation that they learn not to see it, even when they are not it.” Ahmed considers whiteness through the lens of phenomenology to argue that white bodies do not have to recognize their race, as white spaces, which dominate public life, are seen as habitual.<sup>117</sup> According to Lisa Nakamura, the legitimization and massification of the internet coincided with 1990s colour-blindness in American politics, where discussions about race were avoided in favour of more “universalizing discourse.”<sup>118</sup> Nakamura states that this colour-blind rhetoric “[...] functioned to perpetuate digital inequality by both concrete and symbolic means.”<sup>119</sup> This history must be taken into account when considering the use of self-imagery by people of colour on the internet as real life systems of oppression such as racism and sexism are basically carried into online contexts. This in part explains why out of the twenty-one artists in *Body Anxiety*, only two artists take an explicit queer perspective in their work (Eduardo Andres Crespo and Georges Jacotay), and very few people of colour are present (e.g. Eduardo Andres Crespo, Hanah Black, Rafia Santana, and Endam Nihan). Though the curators were inclusive in their vocabulary to describe the artists, the exhibition did not centre itself around a queer and/or person of colour perspective.

In the beginning of this section, I have shown the importance of technology, the second shared attribute of the works, as well as the influences of cyberfeminism, through the exploration of gendered representation on the web and the use of strategic separatism, and post-internet art with a centring of the apparatus. The works discussed in this thesis were selected for having in

<sup>116</sup> Richard Dyer, *White: Essays on Race and Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 3.

<sup>117</sup> Sara Ahmed, "Declarations of Whiteness: The Non-Performativity of Anti-Racism," *borderlands* 3 no. 2, [http://www.borderlands.net.au/vol3no2\\_2004/ahmed\\_declarations.htm](http://www.borderlands.net.au/vol3no2_2004/ahmed_declarations.htm), quoted in Ahmed, "A phenomenology of whiteness," *Feminist Theory* 8 no.2 (2007): 157, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700107078139>.

<sup>118</sup> Lisa Nakamura, *Digitizing Race: Visual Cultures of the Internet* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 2.

<sup>119</sup> Nakamura, *Digitizing Race*, 3.

common two important themes in fourth-wave feminist art: self-representation and the central importance of information technology, especially social media and image apps. Hirsch, Durbin, and Holland, all white cis-gendered women artists, use self-representation to question images of women in cyberspace and in pop culture. Self-representation is not a recent artistic practice by any means. The difference is that, here, the artists use social media, a technology that is available to them in this historical moment. While these technological innovations are central to the movement, fourth-wave feminism's impact is not restricted to their usage. Fourth-wave feminism reaches much further as it pushes forth a new wave narrative focused on an affective temporality, rather than generational divisions, an idea first introduced by third-wave feminists and that draws inspiration from Richard Williams's structures of feelings. Fourth-wave feminist artists often use self-representation or selfies to question and challenge how women and gender-queer people appear online, to the extent that some of them have dubbed it selfie feminism.<sup>120</sup> The practice of appropriating one's own body through self-representation is one of Schragger and Chan's motivations for curating *Body Anxiety*. The art of Hirsch, Durbin and Holland touches on femininity and sexuality, which brings up the subject of online pornography in relation to women expressing themselves sexually. The question of pornography is central to all three selected works and will be explored in the third section of this thesis. Schragger makes the point in her curatorial essay and in interviews that she is responding to the idea that images of women are often only considered art if they are interpreted through the male gaze or touched by male hands.<sup>121</sup> The notion that a woman artist might paint with her body, as Schragger argues in her essay, is very similar to third-wave feminist Schneider's concept of the explicit body in performance art, which I will expand on in Section Three. The following section delves in ways in which fourth-wave feminism builds on previous waves through its continued engagement with intersectionality and queer theories, in particular shadow feminism.

<sup>120</sup> Aria Dean, "Closing the Loop," *The New Inquiry*, March 1, 2016, <https://thenewinquiry.com/closing-the-loop/>.

<sup>121</sup> Leah Schragger, "The Female Painter," *Body Anxiety*, January 2015, <http://bodyanxiety.com/leah/>.

## Section Two

**Halberstam's Shadow Feminism, Agency, and Selfie Art**

According to Chamberlain, the feminist “wave” is an affective temporality, “[...] in which a specific period of time engages with and produces affect that in turn engages with and fuels activism.”<sup>122</sup> Chamberlain argues that affective temporality relies on a “[...] queering of temporality.”<sup>123</sup> Queer theorists’ understanding of time as non-linear is made possible in part because of their rejection of normative generational modes of transmission through reproduction, as well as their comprehension of the past as being very much alive and affecting our present. A rediscovery of queer history, that was erased by heteronormative hegemony, has impacted today’s queer identities and continues to shape discussions around non-heterosexual and non-cis issues.<sup>124</sup> Through a process of queer negativity, José Esteban Muñoz’s definition of queerness as “not yet here” opens queerness to the future as it “is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world.”<sup>125</sup> For Halberstam queer negativity allows for a new form of feminism: shadow feminism, which belongs to third wave feminism queer and intersectional theories, but which I argue is extremely relevant to fourth-wave feminism. In *The Queer Art of Failure*, drawing from queer, post-colonial, and Black feminism, Halberstam argues that negative actions and attitudes that reject and deconstruct expectations, through acts of submission, refusal, silence, and cutting, are part of the shadow feminism’s arsenal of resistance.<sup>126</sup> For example, in failure, Halberstam sees a liberation from expectations that weigh on women in their gender performance, since success is defined by patriarchal ideals. Failure can also be a way of refusing dominating powers, and it can reveal flaws and vulnerabilities in these structures. In their book, *Queer Art of Failure*, Halberstam cites Roderick Ferguson, who argues that “[n]egation not only points to the

122 Prudence Chamberlain, “Affective Temporality: Towards a Fourth Wave,” *Gender and Education*, vol. 28, no. 3, 2016: 458, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2016.1169249>.

123 Chamberlain, *The Feminist Fourth Wave*, 47.

124 Chamberlain, *The Feminist Fourth Wave*, 46-48.

125 Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 1-2.

126 Halberstam, *Queer Art of Failure*, 1-25.

conditions of exploitation. It denotes the circumstances for critique and alternatives as well.”<sup>127</sup> We see this in the three works *Hello, Selfie!*, *Lick Suck Screen 2*, and *dance party just us girls* as they take advantage of negative actions to resist patriarchal hegemony. This section discusses how those three use tools from Halberstam’s shadow feminism. Specifically, I will examine their works in relation to notions of refusal and failure, as in the refusal to engage in specific gendered expectations and the technological failure to underline the power dynamics inherent in the apparatus.

In Durbin’s work, *Hello, Selfie!* refusal to engage can be seen in Durbin’s use of silence. During the performance, Durbin and the performers do not react to the crowd’s questions, comments, and groping—they focus solely on their cell phones. At the end of the short movie documenting the performance, Durbin includes a clip recorded from her phone, which shows two audience members discussing the performance. One of them is heard saying, “Nothing. That’s what they’re doing. They’re looking at themselves.” The other responds, “They’re looking at their phones and doing nothing... (He laughs along with the woman.) Good! I like it!” However, the performers are not “doing nothing.” They are posing, sometimes with crude gestures, and posting the images on the Facebook event page. Their silence is only towards the audience.

In her text describing the performance, Durbin writes that she is presenting “[...] a new form of passive aggressive performance art, reveling [sic] in teen narcissism and the girl gaze” (fig. 9).<sup>128</sup> In social work specialist Signe Whitson’s article, *The Angry Smile*, she writes that psychologists Jody Long and Nicholas James Long “define passive aggression as a deliberate and masked way of expressing feelings of anger,” and point to the use of the “silent treatment” by teenagers as a classic example of it.<sup>129</sup> As Durbin and her performers employ a passive-aggressive attitude to refuse to engage with the crowd, they underline the gendered expectations of women having to be receptive to interactions whenever in public. In *Cruel Optimism*, Laura Berlant argues that silence can also reveal the distance between what is said in politics and what is actually done. She points to the silent protests of the voiceless speeches of the Suffragettes and

<sup>127</sup> Roderick Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2005): 136–137.

<sup>128</sup> Kate Durbin, “HELLO, SELFIE! Project statement.”

<sup>129</sup> Signe Whitson, “The Angry Smile: Responding to Passive Aggressive Behavior,” *Psychology Today*, December 18, 2017, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/passive-aggressive-diaries/201712/the-angry-smile-responding-passive-aggressive-behavior>.

the Silent Protest Parade of Black Americans in response to lynchings of 1917, as examples.<sup>130</sup>

Commenting on the Silent Protest Parade of Black Americans, Berlant writes:

“Such acts of aggressive passivity always seek to expose the corruption of, or toxic noise within, political speech, as well as to measure the perverse relations between the ideals of the political and the practices of the politics. However, the gesture of the performative withdrawal always goes farther than that too, inducing, as if electronically, new sensual routes for political potentiality from the place where conscience meets knowledge.”<sup>131</sup>

Durbin and the performers use refusal to engage and silence to occupy the public space, confronting viewers to their own expectations of gender performance, and revealing the audience’s role in the objectification of women.

In her series *Porn Interventions*, Holland’s refusal comes in her subversion of the expectations of amateur porn which “interrupt[s] the flow of pornography,”<sup>132</sup> since instead of the typical “free flow of sexualized bodies, porn surfers are confronted with something critical, strange, and not very sexy.”<sup>133</sup> Using only limited means, a single computer camera, and a backdrop of an average-looking room with no professional lighting, the artist thwarts the expectations that she will be seen nude and perform oral sex, as the title of her video, “HOT BBW licks & sucks MMM sticky delicious,” suggests. Instead, Holland obscures the camera with her saliva and the inside of her mouth. This obscuration of the apparatus fails to respect the visual tropes of pornography and thus forces the viewer to recognize those expectations.

Hirsch uses a similar tactic as Holland, as the exposure of her sex is made strange and unsexy with the use of the Apple’s Photobooth ‘nose twirl’ effect on both her face and vulva, along with the addition of the eyeglasses on the vulva. The effect is not meant to give the illusion that there is a failure or glitch in the recording, but rather to twist her image to make it indecipherable. This will be discussed in more depth in the Third Section, when discussing the explicit body. In the meantime, what I want to point out here is the apparatus in helping with the failure and the refusal.

<sup>130</sup> Laura Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011): 223–234. Kindle.

<sup>131</sup> Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 229.

<sup>132</sup> Tish Weinstock, “Investigating Porn with Feminist Artist Faith Holland,” i-D, May 19, 2015, [https://i-d.vice.com/en\\_uk/article/wj5z49/investigating-porn-with-feminist-artist-faith-holland](https://i-d.vice.com/en_uk/article/wj5z49/investigating-porn-with-feminist-artist-faith-holland).

<sup>133</sup> Faith Holland, “Porn Interventions,” accessed June 1, 2020, [http://www.faithholland.com/portfolio\\_page/porn-interventions/](http://www.faithholland.com/portfolio_page/porn-interventions/).

Both Hirsch and Holland's performances use failure to reveal the limits of technologies of representation to make us more aware of their apparatus. In the case of Hirsch, she records the sound coming from her laptop through screen recording, creating a poor sound quality. It also underlines the limits of the recording apparatus, which breaks the illusion that we are staring directly into the artist's space and reminds us that our viewing is mediated through a camera and a screen. This insistence on the apparatus is reinforced by the use of the twirl filter. This strategy is similar to those used by net artists Jodi (a joint project by artists Joan Heemskerk and Dirk Paesmans), Peter Luining, and Michaël Samyn who engage in failure in their website projects, by "shock[ing] the viewer with breakdowns, technological confusion, and illegibility in order to warn the viewer against believing that technology is highly functional." By playing with the expectations of online spectatorship of interactivity and usability, the artists force viewers to adopt a more critical point of view towards their spectator experience and the Internet as a medium.<sup>134</sup> Hirsch does this by underlining the recording apparatus, while Holland reminds the viewers of the physicality of the camera. In her site-specific performance, Holland addresses foremost viewers of amateur porn. By licking the camera sensually, Holland both makes evident the screen separating herself and the viewer, as well as interrupts the viewing experience by placing herself into the viewer's space. This closely resembles Paul McCarthy's 1973 performance of *Press*, which he describes as such: "I pressed my face and upper torso against a sheet of glass with saliva acting as a lubricant against the glass—when viewing the tape, I appear to be inside the monitor pressing against the screen."<sup>135</sup> Amelia Jones uses McCarthy's performance and Lynda Benglis' *On Screen* (1972) to make the argument that:

"Most of all, *Press* and *On Screen* produce McCarthy and Benglis as functions of videographic representation, as bodies produced through (apparently coextensive with) a screen, which thus takes on three-dimensionality, as a kind of body. While McCarthy plays this dynamic out by stressing the flatness through which the screen manifests his body to us, exaggeratedly splaying himself against a pane of glass set before the camera, Benglis's body, stuttered in layers of flesh, *becomes* the plunging interior depths of the otherwise apparently flat surface of the televisual screen."<sup>136</sup>

<sup>134</sup> White, "The Aesthetic Of Failure: Net Art Gone Wrong," 179.

<sup>135</sup> Amelia Jones, "Televisual Flesh: Activating Otherness in New Media Art," *Parachute* 113 (2004): 71.

<sup>136</sup> Jones, "Televisual Flesh," 72.

If in Benglis' performance her mouth becomes the plunging interior, in Hirsch's it is her vulva that acts as such to the viewer's gaze.

### **The Selfie and the Gaze**

The question of agency in relation to the gaze is one of the curators' motivation behind the exhibition *Body Anxiety*. Chan and Schragar decided to launch their exhibition on the same day as the opening of Ryder Ripps' *Ho* exhibition (2015), stating in interviews that they wanted to offer an alternative point of view to Ripps, rather than protest it.<sup>137</sup> For his first solo exhibition, Ripps used digitally manipulated Instagram images of model Adrienne Ho, and hired Jeff Koons' assistants to create large-scale paintings of those images (fig. 10). Ripps describes his work as:

“Abstract passages referencing the heroic gestures of the Action Painters are generated through fingers moving across the decidedly unheroic touchscreen—the new site of aggression and anxiety in the age of the “virtual male gaze”, where the archetypal macho painter has been emasculated.”<sup>138</sup>

Though there was a substantial number of critical responses to the exhibition, few pointed out that the artist, a white man, was appropriating the likeness of a mixed-race Asian woman and reducing her identity to her last name, “Ho”, a derogatory slang word (“whores”) for sex workers. The appropriation of a woman's image is then further complexified by photography's history of Orientalism; an othering of Asian cultures and depiction Asian women in subservient sexual roles.<sup>139</sup> In response to Ripps's *Ho*, Schragar and Chan used their own exhibition to: “[...] promote work in which the artists use their own bodies to push back against an online culture of hidden-camera porn and violently misogynist trolling.”<sup>140</sup> As an alternative to systemic

<sup>137</sup> Of Chan and Schragar's decision, Johanna Fateman wrote, “In recent conversations, Chan and Schragar, both artists themselves, told me they intentionally launched the “Body Anxiety” website on the opening date of “Ho,” not as a protest per se, but as a pointed alternative.” See Johanna Fateman, “Women On The Verge: Art, Feminism, And Social Media,” *Artforum* 53, no. 8 (April 2015), <https://www.artforum.com/print/201504/art-feminism-and-social-media-50736>.

<sup>138</sup> Paddy Johnson, “Ryder Ripps Uses Jeff Koons Assistants for His Own Banality Series,” *Artnet*, January 28, 2015, <https://news.artnet.com/market/ryder-ripps-uses-jeff-koons-assistants-for-his-own-banality-series-234987>.

<sup>139</sup> Mary Warner Marien, “Orientalism,” in *Photography: A Cultural History 4th Edition* (Upper Saddle River: Pearson, 2015), 143-145. Edward Said critiques Orientalism – imaginary concepts of the “Orient” by Western scholars and artists, in his book by the same title. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.)

<sup>140</sup> Johanna Fateman, “Women on the Verge.”

misogynist views, the exhibition also decidedly featured the voices of numerous women, gender-queer folks and trans\* people.

Interestingly, in his work's description, Ripps references Mulvey's theory of the male gaze, which she introduced in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975). Mulvey defined the "cinematic gaze in terms of gender which functions on the level of representation, rather than in terms of other types of cultural practice."<sup>141</sup> Mulvey's interpretation of the gaze places all importance on gender as a universal experience. However, her theory has been widely critiqued for ignoring how gender is also largely influenced by race, as well as sexual orientation and queer identities. Along with detailing the criticisms of Mulvey's male gaze theory, I will critique what has been pushed forth by feminists as its alternative: the female gaze. To understand what is at play here, it is essential to comprehend that the gaze inherently suggests a power structure and an element of oppression. As Caroline Evans and Lorraine Gamman explain in their text "The Gaze Revisited, or Reviewing Queer Viewing," the gaze goes beyond the simple act of looking:

"Lacan posits the gaze as a transcendental ideal—omniscient and omnipresent—whereas he suggests the eye (and the look) can never achieve this status (although it may aspire to do so). Indeed, Carol J. Clover argues that 'the best the look can hope for is to pass itself off as the gaze, and to judge from film theory's concern with the "male gaze"...it sometimes succeeds'."<sup>142</sup>

Foucault's definition of the gaze relies on the example of the panopticon, a round prison where the inescapable gaze acts as a tool of surveillance and power.

On the question of the gendering of the gaze, John Berger's often cited passage in his book *Ways of Seeing* comes to mind: "Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at."<sup>143</sup> Though Berger did not use the term gaze, he did discuss the relationship between the "surveyor," an active participant, and the "surveyed," as a passive object. We find an echo of this in Laura Mulvey's theory of the male gaze which categorizes cinematic narratives with a "one-to-one correlation between masculinity and voyeurism and femininity and

<sup>141</sup> Evans and Gamman, "The Gaze Revisited": 14.

<sup>142</sup> See Evans and Gamman, "The Gaze Revisited": 15; see also Kaja Silverman, "Fassbinder and Lacan: A Reconsideration of Gaze, Look and Image," *Camera Obscura*, no. 19, (January 1984): 54–84; Carol J. Clover, *Women, Men and Chainsaws* (BFI Publishing, London, 1992), 210.

<sup>143</sup> John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (Harmondsworth: BBC Publications & Penguin Books, 1972): 47.



exhibitionism.”<sup>144</sup> This theory of the gaze is based on a reductive understanding of gender that does not take into consideration critical race theories.

In response to Mulvey’s argument that “the classical Hollywood film is made for the pleasure of the male spectator,”<sup>145</sup> Malian born cultural theorist Manthia Diawara states that: “[...] the dominant cinema situates black characters primarily for the pleasure of white spectators (male or female).”<sup>146</sup> Black spectators, whatever their gender or sexuality orientation, cannot “[...] enjoy the pleasures which are at least available to the white male heterosexual spectator positioned as the subject of the films’ discourse.”<sup>147</sup> Commenting on this text and on Mulvey’s, bell hooks discusses having developed the oppositional gaze when looking at films as a young Black woman by refusing to “be hurt by the absence of black female presence, or the insertion of violating representation” and instead cultivating “a way to look past race and gender for aspects of content, form, language.”<sup>148</sup> For hooks, this disaffected gaze is the “starting point for many black women approaching cinema within the lived harsh reality of racism,” and one that Mulvey reaches by applying a feminist perspective to her viewing experience.<sup>149</sup>

Criticisms of Mulvey’s theory point out that it doesn’t allow for women’s agency, simply limiting them to the role of being looked at. Other feminist theories took on this challenge by looking at the female gaze and spectatorship.<sup>150</sup> If Mulvey’s text argued that popular cinema allows no agency to women, authors such as Lorraine Gamman and Margaret Marshment (1988) have found examples in popular movies of insurances of the female gaze interrupting “[...] patriarchal discourse, to the extent of disrupting the objectifying erotic gaze at women.”<sup>151</sup> Further expanding this idea of the female gaze, feminist cultural theorists have applied it to fields

144 Elizabeth Wright, ed., *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary* (Blackwell: Oxford, 1998), 448.

145 Manthia Diawara, “Black Spectatorship: Problems of Identification and Resistance,” *Screen*, vol. 29, no. 4 (Autumn 1988): 70–71.

146 Diawara, “Black Spectatorship,” 70–71.

147 Diawara, “Black Spectatorship,” 72.

148 bell hooks, “The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators,” in *Movies and Mass Culture*, ed. John Belton (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1996): 254.

149 hooks, “The Oppositional Gaze,” 257.

150 See Mary Ann Doane, “Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator,” *Screen* 23, nos. 3–4 (September–October 1982); Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn’t: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984); Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989); Deidre Pribham, ed., *Female Spectators* (London: Verso, 1988); Lorraine Gamman and Margaret Marshment, eds., *The Female Gaze: Women as Viewers of Popular Culture* (London: The Women’s Press, 1988).

151 Evans and Gamman, “The Gaze Revisited,” 28.

other than the cinema; such as pop culture, literature, and visual arts.<sup>152</sup> The term has also been used recently in group exhibitions; to name a few: *The Female Gaze: Women Look at Women*, Cheim and Reid, New York, 2009; *The Female Gaze, Part Two Women Look at Men*, Cheim and Reid, New York, 2016; *In The Raw: The Female Gaze on The Nude*, The Untitled Space, New York, 2016; *The Female Gaze*, BASE Milano, Milan, Italy, 2016; *NSFW: The Female Gaze*, Museum of Sex, New York, 2017. The recent surge of the use of the term female gaze in exhibitions was followed by a few texts attempting to define and elaborate on what the female gaze is or isn't. One of the most exhaustive catalogues on the subject to date is Charlotte Jansen's *Girl on Girl: Art and Photography in the Age of the Female Gaze* (2017), with interviews from forty female photographers, including the artist and co-curator of *Body Anxiety* Leah Schragar. In the foreword, *Broadly* magazine editor Zing Tsjeng argues that "[i]f the male gaze is thought to be toxic, the female gaze is a corrective."<sup>153</sup> In an interview with *Vogue Italia*, Jansen spoke about the female gaze as not being a direct opposition to the male gaze, but rather offering a different world vision: "[...] where identity is fluid, and we relate to each other and ourselves in many different ways. It isn't feminine, or something that can only be understood by women."<sup>154</sup> Durbin expands on this idea of the female gaze and makes it more specific in her analysis with the "girl gaze."

Durbin's "girl gaze" is defined by a "teen girl Tumblr aesthetic" that she documented through her Tumblr blog *Women as Objects* from 2011 to 2013 (fig. 11).<sup>155</sup> Durbin would reblog posts by teenage girls in real-time, creating a stream of glitter, pinks, sensual and pornographic images of women, art from all eras featuring women, edgy claims of wanting to kill, be killed, or to self-mutilate, as well pictures and gifs of young female celebrities. According to Durbin and Alicia Eler, these collections of representations (and self-representations) of women's bodies represent a self-aware critical understanding of bodies as "[...] upon which [the teen girls of Tumblr] interface with the world, an audience with a gaze that is constantly watching and

<sup>152</sup> Gamman and Marshment, *The Female Gaze*; Ronald Dotterer and Susan Bowers, *Sexuality, the Female Gaze, and the Arts: Women, the Arts, and Society* (London and Toronto: Associated University Press, Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 1992).

<sup>153</sup> Zing Tsjeng, "Foreword," in Jansen, *Girl on Girl*, 7.

<sup>154</sup> Chiara Bardelli Nonino, "Girl on Girl by Charlotte Jansen," *Vogue Italia*, April 7, 2017, [https://www.vogue.it/en/photography/news/2017/04/07/girl-on-girl-charlotte-jansen/?refresh\\_ce=](https://www.vogue.it/en/photography/news/2017/04/07/girl-on-girl-charlotte-jansen/?refresh_ce=).

<sup>155</sup> Alicia Eler and Kate Durbin, "The Teen-Girl Tumblr Aesthetic,\*" *Hyperallergic*, March 1, 2013, <https://hyperallergic.com/66038/the-teen-girl-tumblr-aesthetic/>.

appraising.”<sup>156</sup> Durbin embraces this aesthetic in her performance by dressing herself and her performers with girly stickers, glitter and pinks. In their refusal to engage with the crowd, the performers turn their gaze onto themselves to define their experience both online and offline, by excluding the world around them and self-directing how they appear in cyberspace.

Along this aesthetic of glitter, the use of Hello Kitty imagery takes a lot of room in Durbin’s performance. The artist wears a custom-designed transparent Hello Kitty themed dress from designer and artist Peggy Noland, along with silver platform shoes with transparent soles covered in Hello Kitty stickers, and a Hello Kitty sticker between her eyes. In the opening scene of the short movie of the performance, we see Durbin playing on her phone, while a high-pitched off-camera voice says, “Hello Selfie,” as Hello Kitty drawings appear on the screen. A repetitive slightly robotic meowing voice covering flute music is then repeated throughout the entire video. We see Durbin handing out large red bows to the performers, part of Hello Kitty’s iconic look, as well as serving a Hello Kitty cake that they eat with their hands. The symbolism of Hello Kitty brings in the issue of how we cannot talk about the female gaze, without acknowledging its failed claims of the universality of the experience of women. As stated by Diawara and hooks, gender is largely determined by race. The use of “Orientalist imagery” by white women in order to push “their own subjectivities” can create caricatures of Japanese femininity. This is the argument that David C. Oh makes in his analysis of the oppressive white woman gaze in the use of “Orientalist imagery of premodern Japan” in Katy Perry’s November 2013 performance of “Unconditionally,” and in Avril Lavigne’s 2014 music video “Hello Kitty” which included Harajuku street fashion and elements of kawaii culture.<sup>157</sup>

Before these performances, Gwen Stefani had her “Harajuku Girls,” backup dancers that appeared in her solo music videos, performances, appearances and interviews during the early 2000s. The singer named them Love, Angel, Music, and Baby, and pretended in interviews that the women were not real, but figments of her imagination. Many journalists reported that the dancers were contractually obligated to only speak Japanese while on tour, despite the fact that they were fluent in English.<sup>158</sup> There were few public reactions at the time: the comedy skit show

<sup>156</sup> Eler and Kate Durbin, “The Teen-Girl Tumblr Aesthetic.”

<sup>157</sup> David C. Oh, ““Turning Japanese”: Deconstructive Criticism of White Women, the Western Imagination, and Popular Music,” *Communication, Culture & Critique*, no. 10 (2017): 365. doi:10.1111/cccr.12153.

<sup>158</sup> Anne Ishii, “English as a Second Language,” *The Village Voice*, December 27, 2005, <https://www.villagevoice.com/2005/12/27/english-as-a-second-language/>. Mihi Ahn, “Gwenihana:

MadTV mocked Gwen Stefani with a musical number “Aren’t Asians Great?” sung by a lookalike and Margaret Cho compared the singer’s “girls” to that of a minstrel show. A more recent article in Times Magazine demanded an apology for the perpetuation of racist stereotypes through her Harajuku Girls and the question of cultural appropriation has reappeared periodically over the years in articles about the singer.<sup>159</sup> Despite these recent controversies, the problematic use of kawaii imagery has however not desisted.

The “Hello Kitty” figure and its global franchise have been part of kawaii imagery from the onset. The toys were first produced by Sanrio, the biggest company that manufactures toys and accessories in the kawaii style. “Kawaii” imagery has a complex history and relation to femininity. The term “kawaii” loosely translates to “cute” in Japanese and is a form of cute femininity. In her essay, “Cute Masquerade and the Pimping of Japan,” Laura Miller argues that the kawaii aesthetic intentionally reinforces a “narrow model of cute femininity,” which excludes other expressions of gender. She says that its objective is to:

“[...] maintain and promote structures of gender stratification. In addition, the global spread and government exploitation of uncomplicated cuteness leads to a facile misreading of the aesthetic of cute (kawaii), and confounds it with a female perspective and its expressions in girl culture.”<sup>160</sup>

Durbin’s use of kawaii imagery is further complexified by the fact that she is a white woman. Had she been Asian the meaning of such use would have been greatly different, as it would not be interpreted as fetishization. Since the kawaii aesthetic conveys cuteness and innocence, it masks the unequal relationship between what is objectified as cute and its consumer, which, in this case, reflects white Euro-American anxieties about East Asia by fetishizing it.<sup>161</sup> David C. Oh, quotes many post-colonial writers, including bell hooks, who states that appropriation “[...]”

Gwen Stefani Neuters Japanese Street Fashion To Create Spring's Must-Have Accessory: Giggling Geisha!,” Salon, April 10, 2005, [https://www.salon.com/test2/2005/04/09/geisha\\_2/](https://www.salon.com/test2/2005/04/09/geisha_2/).

<sup>159</sup> Eliana Dockterman, “Before We Embrace Gwen Stefani's Comeback, She Owes Us An Apology,” Time Magazine, October 20, 2014, <https://time.com/3524847/gwen-stefani-racist-harajuku-girls/>. Wanna Thompson, “Sadly, Gwen Stefani Has Been Problematic This Whole Time,” Vice, November 16, 2018, [https://www.vice.com/en\\_us/article/nepnqq/gwen-stefani-cultural-appropriation-legacy](https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/nepnqq/gwen-stefani-cultural-appropriation-legacy). Adam Wallis, “Gwen Stefani Defends ‘Harajuku Girls’ Era, Denies Cultural Appropriation,” Global News, November 20, 2019, <https://globalnews.ca/news/6193310/gwen-stefani-defends-harajuku-girls-denies-cultural-appropriation/>.

<sup>160</sup> Laura Miller, “Cute Masquerade and the Pimping of Japan,” *International Journal of Japanese Sociology*, Number 20, 2011: 19. doi: 10.1111/j.1475-6781.2011.01145.x

<sup>161</sup> Leslie Bow, “Racist Cute: Caricature, Kawaii-Style, and the Asian Thing,” *American Quarterly* 71, no. 1 (2019): 38–44, doi:10.1353/aq.2019.0002.

is “eating the Other,” commodifying and consuming ethnoracial difference as a “spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture.”<sup>162</sup> In the case of the appropriation “of exotic Japanese femininity,”<sup>163</sup> this is done as a “way of gaining agency at the expense of exoticized others.”<sup>164</sup> Ultimately, Oh concludes that Perry and Lavigne appropriate Japanese cultures in a way to “spice up the subjectivity of Whites, as hooks (1992) might say.”<sup>165</sup> Their performances are not a comment on the complexity of the culture, or a deep meaningful engagement with it, rather “[...] the borrowing points toward the Western performer’s self-interested uses of the culture of the other rather than an elevation of the appreciated cultural artifact, practice, or tradition.”<sup>166</sup> Durbin’s use of Hello Kitty also does not point to an understanding of kawaii’s cultural significance in Japan and its meaning in Western culture as a fetishization of East Asia. However, I am not arguing that Durbin aims to fetishize Asian women or femininity, rather, that her white female gaze fails to take into account the perspective of Asian women’s experiences, as it assumes a universal experience of gender.

Recent criticism of “selfie feminism,” including regularly-featured articles on artists Alexandra Marzella, Arvida Bystrom, Molly Soda, Audrey Wollen, and Petra Collins on *Dazed* and *Vice*, and the *Body Anxiety* artists, critiques this focus on self-representation as excluding all bodies that are not white, abled and cis-gendered.<sup>167</sup> Aria Dean looks at the lack of Black artists in *Body Anxiety* and comments that it’s almost as if Black women and femmes do not take selfies. She writes,

“If feminism in the mainstream remains obsessed with male/female interaction — and if by male/female we are really talking about a pseudo-universal framework well-practiced in masking the fact that its true interest is in the binaristic relationship between cisgendered white men and cisgendered white women, the question is: does selfie feminism hold anything of value for Black women at all?”<sup>168</sup>

When discussing her project, *Scandalishious* (2008–2009), Hirsch recognizes that she benefits from white privilege in her artwork. For *Scandalishious*, an eighteen month-long YouTube

<sup>162</sup> bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 21) quoted in Oh, “Turning Japanese,” 369.

<sup>163</sup> Oh, “Turning Japanese,” 369.

<sup>164</sup> Oh, “Turning Japanese,” 369.

<sup>165</sup> Oh, “Turning Japanese,” 376.

<sup>166</sup> Oh, “Turning Japanese,” 377.

<sup>167</sup> Aria Dean, “Closing the Loop,” *The New Inquiry*, March 1, 2016, <https://thenewinquiry.com/closing-the-loop/>.

<sup>168</sup> Dean, “Closing the Loop.”

performance, she played a character called Caroline, who would dance sexually to songs for the camera, vlog, and interact with her fans. Most comments were aimed towards her appearance, but she notes that: “If I was a woman of colour, there would have been so many racial stereotypes as well.”<sup>169</sup> A female gaze that claims a universal female experience fails to take into consideration how gender is race-specific.

Furthermore, this gaze also maintains a heterocentrism with a binary understanding of gender. Similar criticisms were made about Mulvey’s “male gaze” theory, arguing that she failed to take into account the representation and desires of lesbians and gays.<sup>170</sup> Mulvey takes for granted that all men looking upon women do so with desire, which erases the experiences of non-heterosexual men, women who are attracted to other women, and everyone who doesn’t fit within either of these categories. Mulvey’s theory also presumes that the categories of women and men are universally understood. Evans and Gamman critique this categorization by citing feminist professor Diana Fuss:

“If you talk about women as ‘objects’ of the male gaze it presupposes that you know what a man is, and what a subject is. These categories obviously are not challenged in everyday life, but in feminist practice the ontological category of ‘woman’, for example, is frequently challenged in order to reveal the stereotypes underlying constructions of ‘natural’ sexuality as well as ‘natural’ gender.”<sup>171</sup>

The female gaze reinforces a binaristic relationship between genders that excludes queer genders and race. The male gaze is also built on a binary model, where the presumed male viewer holds the power to objectify the subject, but the subject cannot gaze back. However, as we will see in the next section, the explicit body can permit the performer to gain agency and reclaim their own gaze.

169 Emine Saner, “Digital Artist Ann Hirsch on Why Her ‘Singing Vagina’ Empowers Women—and Terrifies Men,” *The Guardian*, March 21, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2016/mar/21/digital-artist-ann-hirsch-singing-vagina>.

170 See de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn’t*; Dyer, *White*; and Doane, “Film and the Masquerade.” See also Mark Finch, “Sex and Address in *Dynasty*,” *Screen* 23, nos. 3/4 (September–October 1982); Mandy Merck, “Difference and its Discontents,” *Screen*, vol. 28, no.1 (Winter 1987); Jackie Stacey, in Gamman and Marshment, *The Female Gaze*; Teresa de Lauretis, “Sexual Indifference and Lesbian Representations,” *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 2 (May 1988).

171 See Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference* (New York and London: Routledge, 1989); Evans and Gamman, *Gaze Revisited*, 38.

## Section Three

### Pornography and the “Explicit Body”

Firstly, this section argues that pornography is as central to all three works as it is to fourth-wave feminism, and secondly, that Hirsch and Holland’s performances use the same tactics as explicit feminist performances of the 1970s to the 1990s as a means to reclaim a certain agency.

#### The Emergence of Porn Studies

Pornography has often been discussed in feminist circles as an oppressive representation of women. In the mid-1980s, pornography was the focus of passionate debates that were dubbed the “feminist sex wars,” with opposing camps calling themselves “sex positive,” “pro sex,” or “anti-censorship” versus the anti-pornography radical feminists. Influenced by these feminist debates, Hirsch, Holland, and Durbin use pornography and the “explicit body,” as defined by Schneider, to critique sexist representations of women and confront gendered expectations through self-representation.

Holland’s series, *Porn Interventions*, derives much of its critical context from being a site-specific performance on Redtube, which allows for the upload of porn videos by users. Holland’s videos were uploaded using pornography keywords, such as “solo girl,” “BBW” (which stands for big beautiful woman), “amateur,” etc. The themes of pornography, technology, and their intersections are recurring themes in her work. At Vassar College, she studied pornography in her cinema studies and worked on an erotica magazine called *Squirm*. She cites Linda Williams’ *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the Frenzy of the Visible* (1989) and the art of performance artist, pornographer, porn actress and sex educator Annie Sprinkle as foundational in her own practice.<sup>172</sup> Both Holland and Hirsch copy the aesthetics of camgirls, by using easily accessible technology to record themselves in an intimate or explicit manner in the privacy of their bedroom. Hirsch’s series *horny lil feminist* acts as a self-representation of a woman on the internet, much like her series *Scandilishous* did for 2008, “with the glaring difference been the

<sup>172</sup> Tish Weinstock, “Investigating Porn with Feminist Artist Faith Holland.”

abundance of pornography, which brings this juxtaposition of your body with the pornographic body.”<sup>173</sup> While Durbin does not directly address pornography in *Hello, Selfie!*, the costumes of the performance were inspired by the teen-girl Tumblr aesthetic that Durbin described as being:

“[...] bloated with more bodies than a porn video warehouse — the girls’ own bodies, and the bodies of other girls, from celebrities like Kim Kardashian to former porn star Sasha Grey to other Tumblr girls and the above-mentioned art history nudes.”<sup>174</sup>

Durbin and Eler’s comment point to the impact of the pornification of popular culture on the construction of this mediated girlhood that Durbin and her performers emulate. Durbin and Eler argue that these collections of objectified women reflect the teenagers own experience with constant objectification and their practice of “radical self-objectification.”<sup>175</sup> Ultimately, my point is that pornography is also a factor that Durbin takes into consideration as she addresses objectification and the gaze in her performance.

In a way, it is not surprising these three artists have made porn an important part of their performances, as the pornification of Western popular culture since the early 2000s had prompted a resurgence of anti-pornography feminist activism and the emergence of porn studies. Between the anti-pornography and pro-sex camps, a very stagnant and binary discussion of porn is perpetuated. The young academic field of porn studies has tried to push beyond this by focusing on how pornography functions as a media genre. Susanna Paasonen’s definition of pornography emphasizes that we need to see porn as a diverse genre in order to understand the affect it can have on its viewers:

“Porn is both material and semiotic: it involves fleshy intensities, conventions of representation, media technologies, and the circuits of money, labor, and affect. Pornography—whether visual, textual, or audiovisual—routinely involves elaborate and detailed depictions of body parts, bodily motions, and bodily fluids. Through minute anatomical realism, it tries to mediate the sensory and to attach the viewing body to its affective loop: in porn, bodies move and move the bodies of those watching.”<sup>176</sup>

173 Alice Newell-Hanson, “Ann Hirsch is a ‘Horny Lil feminist,’” i-D, June 11, 2015, [https://i-d.vice.com/en\\_us/article/evna9j/ann-hirsch-is-a-horny-lil-feminist](https://i-d.vice.com/en_us/article/evna9j/ann-hirsch-is-a-horny-lil-feminist).

174 Eler and Durbin, “The Teen-Girl Tumblr Aesthetic.\*”

175 Eler and Durbin, “The Teen-Girl Tumblr Aesthetic.\*”

176 Susana Paasonen, *Carnal Resonance: Affect and Online Pornography* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011): 2.



In Paasonen's description, the bodies in porn hold a power to affect the viewing body, which opens pornography to possibly be empowering.

Paasonen has also written on the subject of pornification. With co-authors Kaarina Nikunen and Laura Saarenmaa, they define it as operating on three levels: the symbiotic relationship between the innovations of media technology and the growing of the porn business into a billion dollar global business; the loosening of government and media regulations on the production and distribution of pornography; and the growing acceptance of a diversity of sexual experiences, referred to as porno chic, a term borrowed from Brian McNair's *Porno? Chic!: How Pornography Changed The World and Made It A Better Place*.<sup>177</sup> As the obviously celebratory title states, McNair considers that pornography has brought about positive change, in part because it has helped with the democratization of desire, through an easier access to a variety of sexual representations. Such a positive point-of-view reveals a bias in porn studies, which has been built on "anti-antipornography perspectives," a problem that Helen Hester and Paasonen underline in their writings.<sup>178</sup> Both authors consider that the discipline's focus on largely queer and independent pornography gives an incomplete view of porn as a subversive and liberating genre, while ignoring more mainstream heterosexual pornography, which display no clear queer readings or political engagements. In their books they propose news avenues of reflection that are not marred by "defensiveness and binary logic."<sup>179</sup> In this context, we can understand Chan's comment in her curatorial essay:

"Somehow, every feminist who critiques porn has to explain whether they are pro-porn or anti-porn. If you've seen my work (lol) or read any of my interviews you will discover I've had a fluctuating relationship with porn. My short answer is: if an ethical way to do it was widely adapted and porn stars didn't carry everyone's shitty baggage with having sex for money, then I'd be crazy pro-porn."<sup>180</sup>

Influenced by porn studies, fourth-wave feminists aim to think of porn beyond a binary logic, to see the genre of porn has one that is diverse and thus has different impacts depending on its content, much like any cinematic genre does. In Hirsch and Holland's performances, the artists

<sup>177</sup> Paasonen, Nikunen, and Saarenmaa, "Pornification and the Education of Desire."

<sup>178</sup> Hester, *Beyond Explicit*, 2-9; Paasonen, *Carnal Resonance*, 4-6.

<sup>179</sup> Paasonen, *Carnal Resonance*, 27.

<sup>180</sup> Chan, *How We Became Objects*.

consider the stylings of camgirls to critique porn consumption, while Durbin's aesthetics reflect on the influence of Tumblr's porn imagery on teen girls' construction of self.

### **The Explicit Body**

This final part then discusses how the double-bind of the explicit bodies in the works of Hirsch, Durbin, and Holland could be read in another way. I compare their works to the explicit feminist performances of the 1960s to the 1990s, as analyzed by Schneider in *The Explicit Body in Performance* (1996), to go beyond the deadlock of the male or female gaze, and a binary understanding of gender embodiment. In explicit body performances, Schneider argues that the female authors become both object and subject as they self-direct our gaze and often look back at the viewer. She defines the "explicit body" as work that reveals "bodies in social relation," exposing the body or "unfolding" it to expose how it is not only flesh. She writes,

"[...] the explicit body in representation is foremost a site of social markings, physical parts and gestural signatures of gender, race, class, age, sexuality - all of which bear ghosts of historical meaning, markings delineating social hierarchies of privilege and disprivilege."<sup>181</sup>

By revealing their bodies in all their specificities, the artists underline their uniqueness, and thus subjecthood. Their bodies are not those of a generic woman, but their own, marked by their experiences.

Schneider looks at explicit feminist performance art from the 1960s to the 1990s, with Carolee Schneemann, Shigeko Kubota, Ann Magnuson, Veronica Vera, Scarlot O, Carol Leigh (a.k.a. Scarlot Harlot), Annie Sprinkle, Charlotte Moorman, Hannah Wilke, Martha Wilson, and others. Former porn performers Veronica Vera and Annie Sprinkle went on to make explicit performance art that helped blur the distinction between art and pornography and threatens to erase any distinction between the two. As these explicit body performances confuse the limits between art and pornography, they cause "binary terror," a term Schneider borrows from Vivian M. Patraha.<sup>182</sup> Schneider cites Lynn Hunt who states that pornography as a "category of understanding" is a mid-nineteen century concept introduced to regulate the population's

<sup>181</sup> Schneider, *The Explicit Body in Performance*, 2.

<sup>182</sup> Vivian M. Patraha, "Binary Terror and Feminist Performance: Reading Both Ways," *Discourse* 14, no. 2, (Spring 1992): 163–185. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41389223>.

consumption. As culture became more democratically accessible through mass reproduction and print media, pornography was made to be a clear category with fixed boundaries as a form of public control.<sup>183</sup> The transgressive material was not what was worrisome, but rather, who got to see it. It was an issue of agency, which was mostly aimed to control more vulnerable and marginalized groups including as women. Schneider believes that the collapse of the divide between porn and art presents a threat to art contexts as they have:

“[...] traditionally been considered the domain of the symbolic form and thus afforded an aesthetic distance of “disinterestedness” Pornography threatens the myth of disinterestedness, flooding the field with a ribald literality marked by porn’s immediate and “interested” aim toward sexual or visceral effect.”<sup>184</sup>

After all, if we recall Paasonen’s definition, this is what porn tries to do: it aims to reach the viewing body through sensory input in order to bring it into its “affective loop” so that the bodies moving in the representation move the viewing body.<sup>185</sup> This does not allow the same critical distance or “disinterestedness” that we might be used to in traditional art contexts, which is not to say that it collapses the distance totally, rather that it complexifies the act of looking.

Hirsch’s performance is a strong example of a reduction of the critical distance, as it appeals to affect, by exposing something that is still buried in shame: the vulva. Many feminist scholars note that the vulva and vagina are a source of deep social discomfort, and this taboo has led to an absence of representations which is “materially and psychically dangerous for women.”<sup>186</sup> Hirsch admits in other performance videos and interviews that she put her vulva on screen, because her art is about confronting her own fears:

“All of my art is about pushing the boundaries of what I’m comfortable with and getting over things I’m ashamed about. That was why I decided I had to put my vagina on the Internet. I follow all these sexy Instagram girls, camgirls, and it’s all about a kind of allure, embodying sexy tropes. So, I decided to put my body on the Internet in this kind of disgusting, real way.”<sup>187</sup>

183 Lynn Hunt, *The Invention of Pornography, 1500–1800: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity* (New York: The MIT Press, 1996).

184 Schneider, *The Explicit Body in Performance*, 16.

185 Paasonen, *Carnal Resonance*, 2.

186 Michaela Frischherz, “Affective Agency and Transformative Shame: The Voices Behind the Great Wall of Vagina,” *Women’s Studies in Communication* 38, issue 3 (2015): 252. See also: Ros Bramwell, ““Invisible Labia: The Representation of Female External Genitals in Women’s Magazines,”” *Sexual and Relationship Therapy* 17, no. .2 (2002): 190.

187 Rachel Wetzler, “Keeping Track of the Real Ann Hirsch,” *The Brooklyn Quarterly*, accessed July 20, 2020, <http://brooklynquarterly.org/keeping-track-of-the-real-ann-hirsch/>.

She intentionally showed her vulva in an “unflattering way,” that is not usually seen online.<sup>188</sup> Her work originates from her strong feelings about her body, and she uses her body not to sexualize herself, but in order to discuss feminist issues. Hirsch states that she is decisively sex-negative and does not believe in empowerment through self-imagery.<sup>189</sup> However, she addresses the same issues as artists such as Sprinkle and Schneeman did, by using similar methods.

In her analysis of Sprinkle’s 1990 *Post Porn Modernism* performance, Schneider describes the experience of the scene “Public Cervix Announcement” where the artist inserts a speculum in her vagina and then invites spectators to step up closer and to look at her cervix with a flashlight (fig. 12-13). In Schneider’s retelling of the experience of gazing into Sprinkle’s cervix, she describes what Paasonen would call the fleshy intensity of the pink cervix, along with the impression that the cervix was gazing back.<sup>190</sup> Schneider explains how “white women are emblematic of the vanishing point of vision,” inscribed as passive objects that can look back at the viewer, but only insofar as to note that they are being looked at.<sup>191</sup> Here, Sprinkle twists this scopic field, by showing her body as a particular woman, rather than symbolizing all women, and by inviting spectators to an act of extreme voyeurism. Her performance makes a mockery of the vagina as the vanishing point.<sup>192</sup> Here, the vagina and its owner look back.

In Hirsch’s diptych, *dance party just us girls*, the vulva also looks back, as the artist gives it eyes by posing glasses on it. The fact that the artist also stares back at us in the other half of the screen mimics Sprinkle looking back at the spectators. Hirsch is also looking at her own genitalia, within the diptych and as the author of the artwork. This is also similar to Schneemann’s experimental film *Fuses* (1964), where the artist filmed herself having sex with James Tenney. Schneider wrote,

“Here, the viewing eye is Schneemann’s, but the vulva made public is also Schneemann’s. The formula of co-identity between viewer and vanishing point is made literal, though in that literalization the distance between viewer and viewed is radically collapsed onto the person of the artist/object herself [...].”<sup>193</sup>

<sup>188</sup> Crowder, “Ann Hirsch, IRL.”

<sup>189</sup> Crowder, “Ann Hirsch, IRL.”

<sup>190</sup> Schneider, *The Explicit Body in Performance*, 54–55.

<sup>191</sup> Schneider, *The Explicit Body in Performance*, 28.

<sup>192</sup> Schneider, *The Explicit Body in Performance*, 65.

<sup>193</sup> Schneider, *The Explicit Body in Performance*, 74.

In this act of self-exposure, Schneeman takes on the role of both object and subject, threatening the binary system that would keep them separate.

For Schneider, the presence of “scratches, glitches, and breaks” on the film is a way to interrupt or “cut Oedipal narrative ties.”<sup>194</sup> While there are no visual elements of scratches or cuts in Hirsch and Holland’s performances, Hirsch’s screen is marked through the twirl effect and Holland obscures it with saliva. Holland and Hirsch’s work then tackles similar themes as the explicit body performances of the 1960s to the 1990s, by confronting the binary of porn and art, and the object-subject binary. They however apply these same themes to the current social context of the ubiquitous presence of pornography on the web and the mediated misogyny that is so prevalent on the internet. Even Hirsch’s often quoted comment on how to put one’s body online is to put it in conversation with pornography seems almost borrowed from this quote by Schneider: “Arguably, any body bearing female markings is automatically shadowed by the history of that body’s signification, its delimitation as a signifier of sexuality—either explicitly (literally) in porn, or implicitly (symbolically) in art and popular representation.”<sup>195</sup> As the artists of fourth-wave feminism reflect on Internet pornography, they engage with the history of porn and react to the pornification of North American popular culture; the emergence of porn studies; as well as past explicit feminist performances. As mentioned earlier, fourth-wave feminism’s difference from previous waves should not be read as a clean-cut departure, but rather a back and forth conversation. While Hirsch, Durbin and Holland may take on the same themes as the explicit performances of Sprinkle and Schneeman, they do so using new technologies that did not exist in the 1990s and redefining the scope and margins of this conversation to address the realities of online sexism and new understandings of pornography as a genre in popular culture and cyberspace. The works of these fourth-wave feminist artists are organized around the gaze contextualized by the new realities of the internet and what it means to address it through self-authored works.

<sup>194</sup> Schneider, *The Explicit Body in Performance*, 75.

<sup>195</sup> Schneider, *The Explicit Body in Performance*, 17.

## Conclusion

Through this thesis, I show how the online performances of Hirsch, Durbin, and Holland are part of fourth-wave feminist art practices, which have been influenced by cyberfeminism, post-internet art, and explicit feminist performances of the 1970s to the 1990s, using new digital technologies such as smart phones and social media. I argue that the artists use tools of resistance favoured by Halberstam's shadow feminism, such as silence, failure, and refusal, as well as the use of the explicit body to gain agency from the male gaze through their self-representation.

I touched on the artistic influences for fourth-wave feminist art in cyberfeminism's legacy, felt through its themes, such as online gender embodiment, and the exploration of the lived experiences of women and gender-queer folks in cyberspace, as well as tactical separatism. Another influence is the centring of the apparatus within web performances by post-internet art, and the community of exhibitions and online groups that the movement created and in which artists and curators met. I explained in Section Two that in order to understand fourth-wave feminism, we need to understand affective feminist temporality. In this temporality, feminist waves do not erase each other, rather, they are in a dialogue, with each new wave providing amplification. These waves are linked to specific historical contexts, rather than generational divisions. For the fourth-wave, this historical context is the rise of information technologies, 9/11, and the resulting dramatic rise of surveillance culture, as well as the 2008 economic crash, and the austerity measures and injustices that led to online and real-life activism such as Occupy Wall Street, Black Lives Matter, #MeToo, and Slut Walks. As well, intersectionality is important to this new wave of feminism, which we see through its engagement with queer theories, such as queer timekeeping and queer futurity, both elements of the anti-anti-relation turn in queer theory, of which Halberstam's shadow feminism is a prime example.

By applying Halberstam's theory to Hirsch, Durbin, and Holland's performances, we can understand how their acts of refusal, silence, and failure offer alternatives to Western feminism's notion of success. Success cannot escape the patriarchal dominance that feminists aim to dismantle, since it is rooted in capitalist and patriarchal ideals of wealth accumulation and biological reproduction. In the artists' refusal to engage with the public or to respect gendered expectations of inhabiting a certain space, whether it be online or offline, they underline these expectations and regain agency with regards to the gaze placed on them. Silence, which Durbin

uses most efficiently as another tool of refusal, is a historically political way to impose the performers' presence. Durbin and Holland use technological failures, such as low-quality video and sound, or obscuring the lens of the camera, to underline the power relations within the apparatus, as well as revealing expectations of the porn genre.

Pornography's prevalence is another important frame to take into consideration when discussing agency through online self-representation. Maybe even more so than previous waves, fourth-wave feminism must contend with the pornification of culture, in part thanks to its greater and anonymous accessibility on the internet. As this wave is deeply linked to technological innovations, social media platforms and web cultures, the subject of porn is a central theme. However, just as porn studies aims to push forward the discussion beyond the binary of harmful or empowering porn, even as it struggles with its own biases towards a valorization of the genre, fourth-wave feminists aim to push the conversation towards more productive avenues, such as considering how different porn genres have different effects.

One of the porn studies' challenges has been the definition of pornography, as it was often discussed as a homogenous category, rather than the diverse genre it is, which spans many mediums and sexual preferences. In the case of this thesis, I have chosen Paasonen's understanding of pornography as moving body parts and anatomical realism that is used to affect the viewer's body.<sup>196</sup> Paasonen is also amongst many porn studies theorists to have addressed the pornification of culture. In all three works, this is a central theme. Durbin talks about how porn images on Tumblr influences the aesthetic of teen Tumblr girls, which features as a key aesthetic element of *Hello, Selfie!*. Holland uses the vernacular and tropes of porn to create a performance that disrupts the normal flow of porn viewing. She credits porn studies theorists and explicit body performers as her influences. Holland and Hirsch use an aesthetic that mimics that of other camgirls in order to underline pornography tropes, which makes their performances similar to the explicit body performances of the 1970s and 1990s, in that they blur the line between art and pornography, creating a binary terror.<sup>197</sup> Though Holland, Hirsch, and Durbin take on themes and strategies of feminists and artists that preceded them, they are doing so with today's information technologies. Moreover, their works address contemporary sexism and other

<sup>196</sup> Paasonen, *Carnal Resonance*, 2.

<sup>197</sup> Patraha, "Binary Terror and Feminist Performance."

pressures women and genderqueer folks face that have been mutated and shaped by technology as well as the specific historical context of the 2000s.

All three artists must also contend with the gaze that they confront in their work. While I have shown that the female gaze does not offer a corrective solution to the male gaze, Schneider's definition of the explicit body, as one where the artist can be the object, subject, and director of our gaze, all the while looking back at us through the works, offers a strong alternative for making affirming self-representation. Nevertheless, Hirsch, Durbin, and Holland remain critical of self-representation, as well as pornography, while also offering the opportunity to regain agency within their self-imagery. I have pointed out how self-representation not only is valued differently for those who correspond to white heteronormative beauty standards, but also is still an important tool of resistance for BIPOC and/or LGBTQIA2S+ people. Self-representation can affirm people's presence and existence in the public sphere, even as their lives, rights, and humanity are being threatened and questioned all over the world. In this digital age, within the contexts of a climate crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, feminism has a lot more struggles to fight than ever before. Art and technology are excellent communicators for promoting these intersectional values and pushing back against new attacks.



## Figures



Fig. 1. Kate Durbin, *Hello Selfie!*, July 26, 2014, performance at *Perform Chinatown*, Los Angeles. Photo documentation from Kate Durbin's website, accessed July 26, 2020, <https://www.katedurbin.la/hello-selfie>.



Fig. 2. Kate Durbin, *Hello Selfie!*, July 26, 2014, performance at *Perform Chinatown*, Los Angeles. Screen capture of the performance video filmed by Jessica Nicole Collins and image uploaded to the Facebook event page of the performance.



Fig. 3. Kate Durbin, *Hello Selfie!*, July 26, 2014, performance at *Perform Chinatown*, Los Angeles. Screen capture of the performance video filmed by Jessica Nicole Collins and image uploaded to the Facebook event page of the performance.



Fig. 4. Kate Durbin, *Hello Selfie!*, July 26, 2014, performance at *Perform Chinatown*, Los Angeles. Screen capture of the performance video filmed by Jessica Nicole Collins and image uploaded to the Facebook event page of the performance.

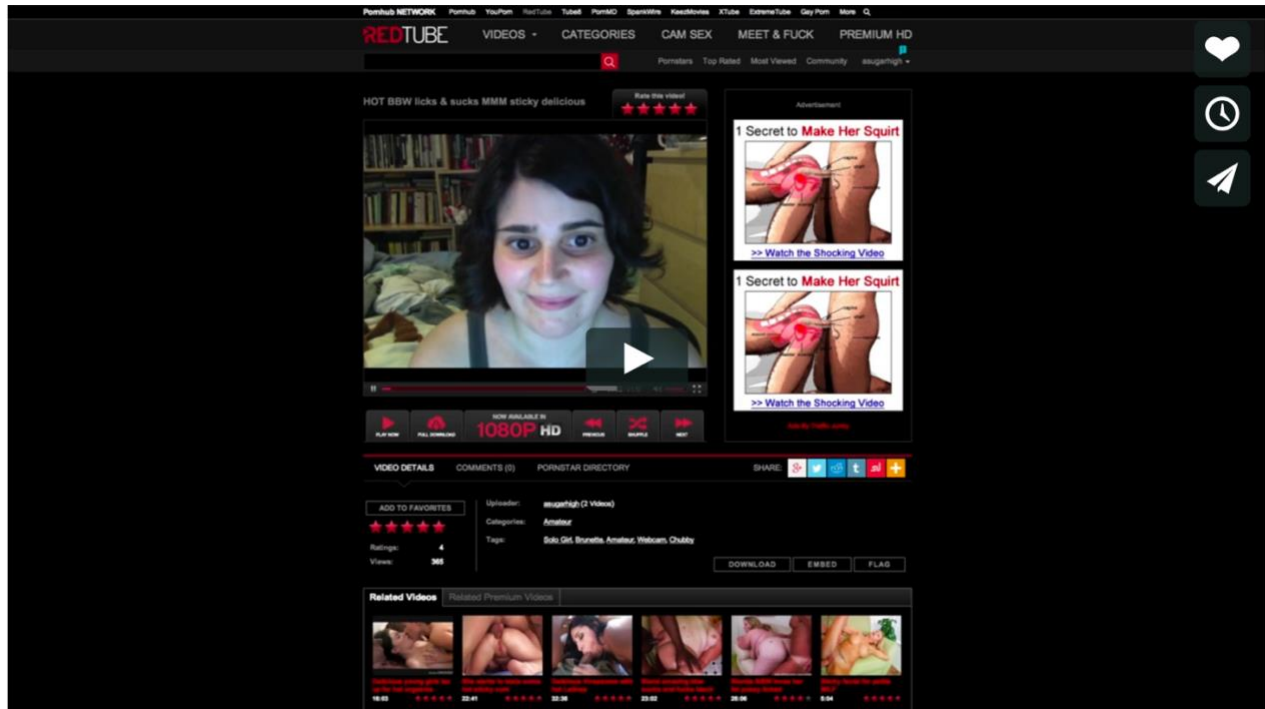


Fig. 5. Faith Holland, *Lick Suck Screen 2*, 2014, site-specific digital video. 1 minute, 7 seconds. Screen capture of the video *in situ* on RedTube.

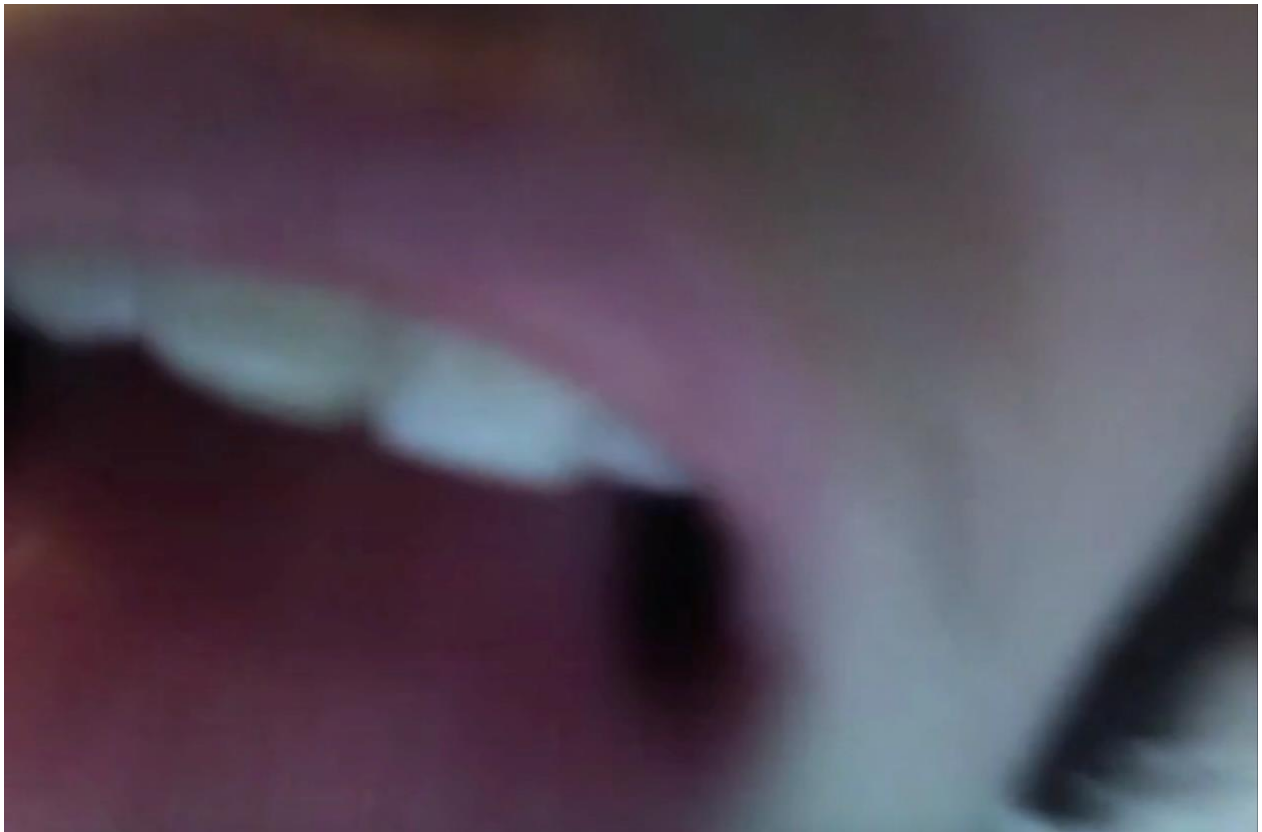


Fig. 6. Faith Holland, *Lick Suck Screen 2*, 2014, site-specific digital video. 1 minute, 7 seconds. Image taken at 41 seconds.



Fig. 7. Ann Hirsch, *dance party just us girls*, 2014, video. 1 minute, 1 second. Image taken at 0 second.



Fig. 8. Yoko Ono, *Cut Piece*, 1964, performance, 9 minutes.

HELLO, SELFIE! by Kate Durbin, presents a new form of passive aggressive performance art, reveling in teen narcissism and the girl gaze. Inspired by surveillance culture, Hello Kitty, Apple products, and the teen girl tumblr aesthetic, the piece exists both IRL and URL.

The IRL aspect of the piece took place in a public space where a large group of female-identifying performers took selfies for an hour straight. They did not directly interact with the audience, instead interacting only with their iPhones. Passersbys gawked and took pictures and selfies with the girls, and engaged in discourse around what they thought the piece was about. Some engaged in inappropriate touching and made snide remarks about the girl's bodies. Others seemed to experience breakthroughs about feminism, the objectified female body, and their own role in the spectacle. Some people had all of these experiences.

The girls' selfies were uploaded to social media and shared in real time.

Fig. 9. Kate Durbin, *Hello, Selfie!* Project statement, 2014, accessed July 26, 2020, <http://bodyanxiety.com/gallery/kate-durbin/>.



Fig. 10. Ryder Ripps, *Ho*, view of the exhibition at Postmasters Gallery, New York, January 24th to February 28th, 2015.

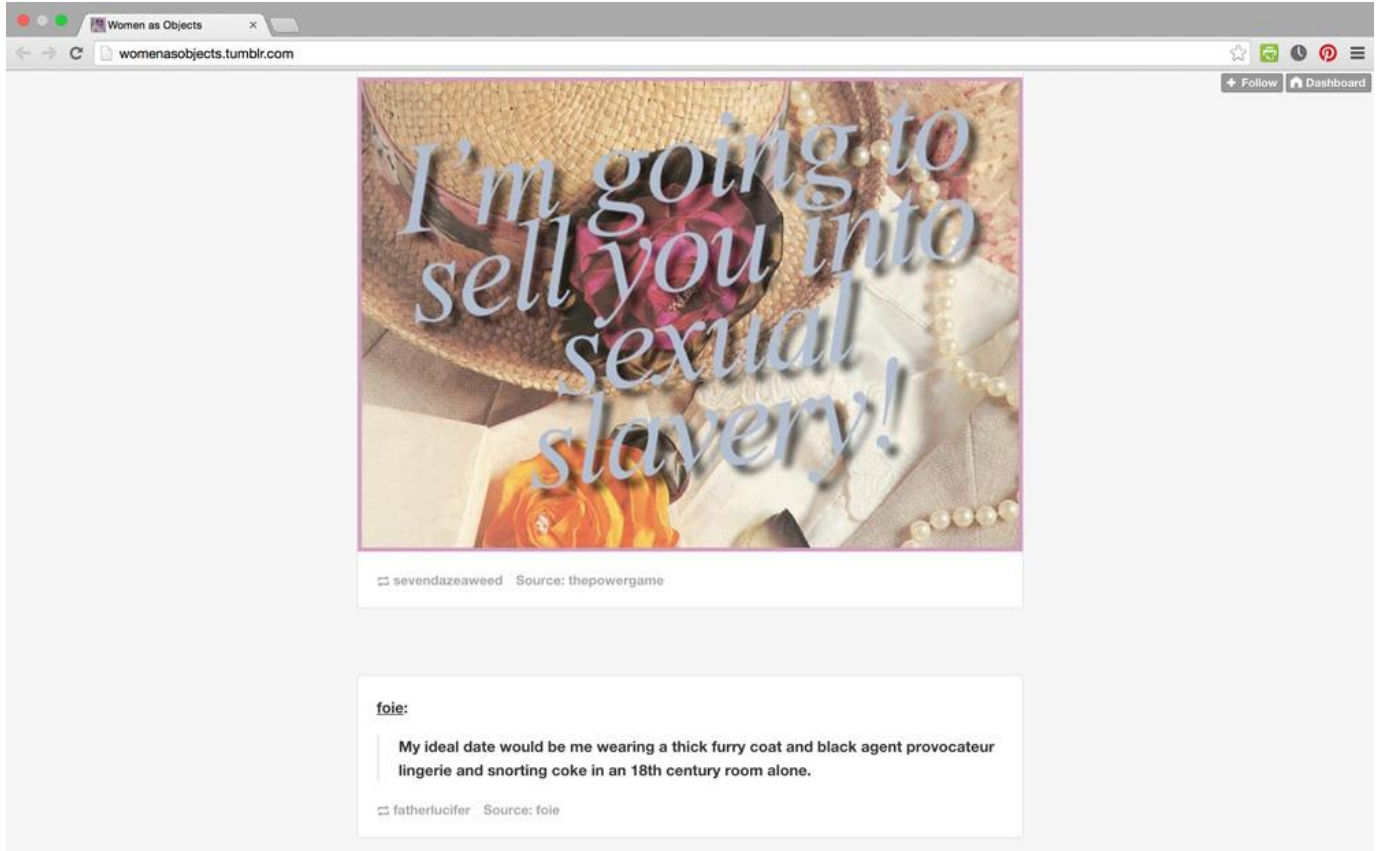


Fig. 11. Kate Durbin, *Women as Objects*, 2011 to 2013, Tumblr blog, accessed May 9, 2018, <https://www.katedurbin.la/women-as-objects/>.





Fig. 12. Annie Sprinkle, *Public Cervix Announcement*, 1990, performance, accessed July 26, 2020, <http://anniesprinkle.org/a-public-cervix-announcement/>.



Fig. 13. Annie Sprinkle, *Public Cervix Announcement*, 1990, performance, accessed July 26, 2020, <http://anniesprinkle.org/a-public-cervix-announcement/>.

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