

I am not content: consequences of managing a likable female image in “onlife”

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## i. Abstract

This doctoral inquiry undertaken between 2015 and 2022 investigates the following premise: Women have to be “likeable” to be seen, thus becoming “content” for social media. The investigation employs an interdisciplinary approach, drawing from the fields of visual arts, social media studies, political theory and feminist studies. At the outset of the research, Jodi Dean’s essay *Communicative Capitalism: Circulations and the Foreclosure of Politics* (2005), along with Luciano Floridi’s concept of ‘onlife’ (2012), serve as key catalysts with subsequent writings emerging from a constellation of material feminism used to elaborate critical thinking on LIKES and *likability* as a matter.

This research project employs the concept of “exhibition-as-chapter” (e-a-c), specifically designed for this inquiry. The aim is to drive material artistic experimentation to the fore, as a means to critically disrupt circulation. The e-a-c functions both as a system, and a method. In this approach I delve into the operative nature of the database, establishing a set of rules that physicalises the invisible instructions of the digital. The outcome is three e-a-c’s, that contribute to the creation of a fine-art practice that, whilst rooted in photography, combines with other mediums to draw attention to the developing situations of inequality and imbalance in the arts and wider public life for women artists.

The original contribution to knowledge lies in identifying and developing a theory of LIKES and *likability* as having material consequences, especially for women in ‘onlife’. I propose that the concept of *likability* enables researchers to understand and interpret how women are engaged with as online content. Moreover, LIKES emerge as a significant characteristic of surveillance capitalist production, influencing contemporary art worlds, and shaping artists’ livelihoods. The final submission of complementary writing makes an original contribution to scholarship in the fields of expanded photography, visual art, and education, with additional impacts on feminist theory and philosophies of the body.

## ii. Acknowledgments

This piece of work is indebted to my supervisors, Professor Camille Baker, Dr Francis Summers and Professor Jean Wainwright. It is a product of guidance and some patience, so thank you.

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My immediate family have been a constant source of support, and I am grateful for the time and space that they gave me. Atli, August and Esbern, thank you for caring, making me laugh and for my mostly uninterrupted time in the shed. To my broader family, my mum in particular, thank you for helping where and whenever you could. This process was hit frequently by external factors that did make me question continuing, so Nick—thank you for your steadfast belief and reassurance. Thank you for believing in me. Love always.

### iii. DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, Liv Pennington

declare that this thesis (complementary writing) and the visual catalogue and the work presented in it are my own and have been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
3. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help

Signed:

Date:

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## Glossary of Terms

<i>Glossary Term</i>	<i>Glossary Definition</i>
Communicative Capitalism	Communicative capitalism' designates the way values heralded as central to democracy take material form in networked technologies (Dean, 2002; 2004; 2005). Ideals of access, inclusion, discussion, and participation come to be realized in and through intensification of global telecommunications.' (Dean 2007: 226)
Complementary writing	A piece of writing and documentation that accompanies a practice-as-research (PaR) doctoral submission. "complementary writings are not translations of the artwork but serve to augment the <i>articulating and evidencing of the research inquiry</i> ." (Nelson 2013: 70)
Exhibition-as-chapter (e-a-c)	A term that I have coined in the process of this research inquiry. The exhibition-as-chapter delivers a commitment to Practice-as-Research, and to Robin Nelson's description of "praxis as being theory imbricated within practice" (2013: 05). The e-a-c is not an illustration of theory or to be seen as a summary of the research. It is a system, and a method, where I have approached the operative nature of the database and used this to create a set of rules, by which I produce an e-a-c.
Feminism	There is no single accepted definition of feminism by feminists and its meanings are often contested. Feminisms are multiple, but linked by the premise that the nature of reality is unequal and hierarchical, and a concern with the autonomy of women's bodies.
Feminist Art	There is not a specifically female way of making art, but a feminist art practice "[...] all feminist activity is a calculated optimistic gesture" that targets "things as they are, for things as they are not for us" (Isaak 1996: 4, 27)
Information and communication technology (ICTs)	a diverse set of technological tools and resources used to transmit, store, create, share or exchange information. These technological tools and resources include computers, the Internet (websites, blogs and emails), live broadcasting technologies (radio, television and webcasting), recorded broadcasting technologies (podcasting, audio and video players, and storage devices) and telephony (fixed or mobile, satellite, visio/video-conferencing, etc) (UNESCO, 2009)
Likability	The ability to read a room and to send social behaviour signals that you care, are helpful and are able to share. Importantly you will not upset the group (Prinstein 2017)
LIKES	Understood as a pre-configured online platform link (as is sharing, tweeting, pinning) that acts in this frame to organise relations between users, web objects and content. (IONOS 2017)
Like economy	an infrastructure that allows the exchange of data, traffic, affects, connections, and of course money, mediated through Social Plugins and most notably the Like button. (Gerlitz and Helmond 2013: 1353)

Matter	A “dynamic and shifting entanglement of relations, rather than [...] a property of things” (Barad 2007: 224). A central belief of new materialist thinking is that matter is agentic.
Onlife	The new experience of a hyperconnected reality within which it is no longer sensible to ask whether one may be online or offline. (Floridi 2015: 1)
Shadow text	The shadow text refers to the hidden online world of behavioural data that is tracked, mined extensively and aggregated from online but increasingly offline actions. The shadow texts are intentionally kept inaccessible to the public. (Zuboff 2019)
Social Photo	“everyday images taken to be shared” (Jurgenson 2019:8) on social media and social networking platforms. What “fundamentally makes a photo a social photo is the degree to which its existence as a stand-alone media object is subordinated to its existence as a unit of communication.’ (Jurgenson 2019: 9)
Social Plugin	A plugin is a piece of software that supplements a browser, site, or platform to add functionality. For example, plugins can be used to block advertisements or to connect a site to a social media account. (Termly n.d)
Surveillance capitalism	“1. A new economic order that claims human experience as free raw material for hidden commercial practices of extraction, prediction, and sales; 2. A parasitic economic logic in which the production of goods and services is subordinated to a new global architecture of behavioural modification; 3. A rogue mutation of capitalism marked by concentrations of wealth, knowledge, and power unprecedented in human history; 4. The foundational framework of a surveillance economy; 5. As significant a threat to human nature as industrial capitalism was to the natural world in the nineteenth and twentieth; 6. The origin of a new instrumentarian power that asserts dominance over society and presents startling challenges to market democracy; 7. A movement that aims to impose a new collective order based on certainty; 8. An expropriation of critical human rights that is best understood as a coup from above: an overthrow of the people’s sovereignty.’ (Zuboff: 2019: i)
Web 2.0	Web 2.0 refers to worldwide websites which highlight user-generated content, usability, and interoperability for end users. Web 2.0 is also called the participative social web. It does not refer to a modification to any technical specification, but to modify the way Web pages are designed and used. (Sharma, M. 2022) The main tools of Web 2.0 are social networks (Facebook), social media platforms (YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok) search engines (Google, Yahoo, Bing), messaging services (email, WhatsApp), blogs and forums

#### **iv. Style notes**

The style of this complementary writing (thesis) complies with the university's regulations regarding house style in all regards. I use Robin Nelson's description of 'complementary writing'<sup>1</sup> this choice is an attempt to neutralise any perceived hierarchy or value difference between written output and visual practice. A number of stylistic devices have been used to increase the level of aesthetic expression in line with the content. My feminist stance is also expressed in stylistic choices. For example, I use her as the generic pronoun, and we rather than they when referring to feminist scholars and artists.

##### **iv.i Fonts**

The complementary writing uses iterations of both the Arial and Times New Roman font. The use of two fonts is to support the reader to differentiate between the thoughts of the researcher (Arial) and the thoughts of selected thinkers and makers (Times New Roman). Arial Bold is used for headings, in various point sizes to reflect the hierarchy of content categories. Times New Roman is employed for quotes specifically in the main body of text and when transcribing responses verbatim in interview documents placed in the appendices.

##### **iv.ii Tense and voice**

The title of this research inquiry makes clear with its subjective use of "I am" that this feminist practice-based inquiry is, in part, personal and autobiographical. This complementary writing uses both the first-person and third-person voice. It is not unusual for feminist researchers to use the first-person voice to present our research (Reinharz 1992) and more recently, practice-based arts and humanities has added weight to its academic acceptability. I make use of the first-person voice in the introduction, to discuss the origins of interest in this project, as well as throughout the exhibition-as-chapter discussion and the conclusion to describe features of the creative practice and to make explicit the personal experience of the research practice. Otherwise, a more detached third-person voice is employed.

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<sup>1</sup> The decision to call the written submission complementary writing has elicited the recommendation from my main supervisor that I acknowledge in the written submission that it will be considered a thesis by my supervisors and examiners.

## **v. Ethics: Researcher and the “Researched”**

### **Researcher**

I have designed this study to entail minimal risk to participants. The probability of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research will not exceed that encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests. All personal data related to volunteers is held and processed with the utmost confidentiality, in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998) and the new European GDPR (2018). Digital data is securely stored on a password-protected hard drive and kept in a locked filing cabinet, along with the signed paper consent forms.

As a feminist researcher, I acknowledge my existing set of circumstances and privileges, which will inevitably and implicitly shape the research project and actively drive the process. Being the first in my immediate family to attend University, a feminist in progress, a white European, working class, middle-aged, politically left-leaning, and a mother of three boys, these aspects of my identity will inherently impact the research. It is evident that when examining women's experiences in the world, the bibliography should predominantly feature female thinkers and creators, and most case studies analysed will have been authored by women. I openly declare a personal interest in the research process and, like feminist researchers before me, I aspire for both the research's process and subsequent outcomes to inform and support other women, both within and outside of academia. I am sensitive to the dangers of the power relations around presuming to know, speak for, or advocate for others.

### **The “Researched”**

The issue of how to refer to the specific roles of individuals involved in the research inquiry has been approached with great consideration. Initially, at the beginning of the research, I may have unconsciously referred to someone who utilises networked technology as a ‘user’. However, the research process has changed me, and made clear, as in the words of Professor Don Norman,

Words matter. Psychologists depersonalize the people they study by calling them “subjects.” We depersonalize the people we study by calling them “users.” Both terms are derogatory. (2006: 49)

The researched in my study are:

- **People** - I now do not use the word ‘user’ in my research but instead people or person. I do not refer to people in my research inquiry as participants because after reading texts by Carole Pateman (1988) and Sherry Arnstein (1969) and following their definition of participation it is clear this is not what I am offering people in this inquiry.
- **Myself, the ‘I’** through the use of autoethnography
- **Thinkers and makers**, following Craig Batty and Marsha Berry (2015)
- **Critical friends** those people who provided feedback and engaged in active reflective conversation (Judi Marshall 2016)
- **Attendees**: people who were observed attending exhibitions and talks
- **Hosts** people who looked after my research artworks. I did this to emphasize the social; to refer to computer technology; and make an association with harbouring a parasite.

The primary commitment of the individuals involved in the study was their time and willingness to share personal information, which included personal search engine searches, environmental exhaust data, photographs, reading lists, stories, and views. It is important to note that this data has been anonymised to ensure confidentiality in its publication.

As part of undertaking doctoral research at the University for the Creative Arts, participants were informed that they have the freedom to withdraw from the study at any point, without the need to provide a justification and without facing any negative consequences. In the event of a participant deciding to withdraw their consent, all data pertaining to that individual will not be included further in the project, and all records of their participation up to that point will be securely deleted. The data collected is visual and verbal responses to formal questions, and informal conversations captured through image and audio capturing devices (screen grabs, photography, video and sound recordings) as well as written responses by

participants and note taking by myself. The data gathered informs the creation of practical case studies (artworks) and the complementary writing. The information is used as both full and partial quotes, reconstituted and incorporated with other material to create case studies where the emphasis was on creating observational fictive narratives. The series of artworks that were hosted temporarily in people's personal spaces for the purpose of collecting environmental exhaust data, were photographed using digital means and then the analogue artworks were destroyed. The digital images are displayed as a group and are not attributed to an individual. They remain anonymous unless the person who hosted the image chooses to declare a relation.

## **vi. Table of Methodologies**

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## 1. Introduction

The original aim of this practice-based arts research was to investigate the following hypothesis: **If women and [our] art have to be likable to be seen on social media, does that make us content?**

In response, I have developed a hybrid research methodology, that whilst rooted in the practice and histories of fine art photography, combines with other mediums and activities to underscore the escalating situations of inequality and imbalance in both the arts and broader public life. It is an interdisciplinary mixed-method approach with an emergent design undertaken from a feminist perspective, it includes 1) Practice-as-Research; 2) expanded photography; 3) visual methodologies as a collection of methods used to understand and interpret images and objects made by myself and by other artists and 4) living life as inquiry. This research is grounded in ethnography, referring to the study of individuals within their communities, and visual/autoethnography, as means to examine my identities and relations as a female artist in “onlife”. This submission of complementary writing (as thesis) and the research artworks and exhibitions that were made alongside the writing are meant to communicate and “prove” my hypothesis. I have woven in literature and contextual reviews within each exhibition-as-chapter to maintain the proximity to thinking and making with the community of practice that I am situated within, relevant for a specific place and time during the research.

Over the past decade, the opportunities for bodies, images, and artworks to socially engage through various channels like email, video calling, live streaming, dating apps, online forums, and social networks have significantly expanded. This growth has been fuelled by the increasing accessibility of the Internet and the rising usage of smartphones among specific demographics. The estimated number of global smartphone users in 2022 is 6.6 billion; however, this distribution is not equal between the sexes (Statista 2022). And for some the initial exhilaration of the web has been replaced with concern over how we lost control of our personal data (Doctorow 2022), the spread of misinformation and disinformation, the

implications of targeted political adverts (Berners-Lee 2017), and the embedding of bias in the infrastructure and code (Noble 2018, DAIR 2022, AJL 2022).

This research inquiry grew out of a combination of frustrations that I associated with working on social media platforms and viewing web content in general. Using social media as a work space, and as a place to work, women are expected to; be social yet professional, to expand networks by being useful but without exploiting others, and under the guise of supportive sharing and caring, leverage friends and social networks as marketing opportunities. Additionally, women are expected to compete for visibility and attention while being cautious not to appear too obvious, or show too much skin, all the while anticipating criticism for taking too much attention and being labelled an “attention whore” because “Attention is Power” (Eltahawy 2019: 37). In the art world, an artist's success is closely tied to the concept of visibility, which encompasses various aspects. It could refer to the number of times the artwork is viewed, its popularity in terms of views, or the critical acclaim and recognition it receives from peers.

However, not all views are treated as equal or hold the same value. The dynamics of visibility can be complex and multifaceted, impacting an artist's reputation, income, and standing within the different art worlds. An artist's perceived credibility and likability play significant roles in determining their level of success and is intricately linked to the interplay between an artwork's visibility and its reception within diverse spaces and contexts. In this context, success aligns with the traditional notion of masculine success, encompassing financial prosperity and fame, particularly when pursuing a passion (Banet-Weiser 2018:53). The interplay between visibility, reception, credibility, and likability forms a complex feedback loop that continually influences how an artwork is perceived, valued, and how the artist's reputation evolves within the art community and beyond (Bae et al., 2009). This dynamic process can have a cascading effect, impacting an artist's future opportunities, recognition, and overall success in their artistic career. In the contemporary art landscape, the economies of visibility play a significant role in determining access to opportunities and profit. Interestingly, some artworks' economic success arises from their intentional absence from the general view.

These pieces are often kept by private individuals or stored in freeports, allowing them to evade taxes (Steyerl 2017).

Like many other artists, I desire to find a way to; earn a living from my artist practice, have time to experiment, work in an affordable studio space, and have regular access to spaces in which to share artwork with other people. The web, social media and various digital platforms appear to offer resolutions to these problems. I am compelled to socialise, to parent, to be a citizen and to earn a living using online platforms and websites, they are infrastructures of daily life and increasingly difficult to withdraw from (Zuboff, 2019, Deresiewicz 2020, Doctorow 2022). I live, love and work in neoliberal conditions, in a onlife world (Floridi 2012) under conditions called surveillance capitalism by Shoshana Zuboff (2019), in a territory defined as communicative capitalism by political theorist Jodi Dean (2005, 2007).

I am grateful for Dean's work on solidarity (1996, 1997, 2007, 2016a, 2016b) and in particular for her framework of survivors and systems (2019) that supported the later stages of this research inquiry. Dean considers survivors and systems as two dominant and opposing tendencies in contemporary left activism, which also corresponds to the dismantling of social institutions under neoliberal capitalism and the intensified effects of capitalism through networked, personalised digital media, and informatisation.

The framework of survivors and systems has provided both a way of understanding the conceptual territory that I am working within; ***likability with survival – likes with systems*** and when recognised as key characteristics of my research practice, they are approached as being same side of the coin, as **managing a likable female image in onlife**. This research inquiry proposes that a concept of gendered onlife *likability* can enable researchers to understand and interpret how women are engaged with as online content, exposing sex discrimination and oppressive practices that materially impact all genders.

As an artist I make images to understand image making. Personally, photography, has always been about the human body: the body who crafted the camera, the body who holds the camera, the body that is or isn't in front of the camera, the body that processes, the body that prints, the body who curates – the body that looks at photographs. The body and photography are intimately linked through technological developments, vicious cycles of capitalism and virtuous loops of activism. My reading of photography is one that emphasises the materiality of the human and the photographic, of processes rather than focusing exclusively on representation.

This research inquiry is conducted through my everyday life, with little sense of any boundary between the research and the rest of my life;

Living life as inquiry is generally not self-reflection for its own sake, but is adopted to inform action in the world around issues people think matter. (Marshall 2016: xx)

Living life as inquiry, is related to autoethnography, they share resonances such as the concept of embodiment. However, first-person inquiry is more inclined to involve experimental actions (Marshall 2016: 8). While it might seem self-indulgent, its essence is fundamentally relational and interconnected. It provided a means to ask and to imagine what might be emerging, as we are moved to live an extremely online life, in 'onlife.' Luciano Floridi coined the term '**onlife**' in 2012 to describe the impact of information and communication technologies (ICTs) on being human. It names the hybrid world we live in, where the distinction between life online and life offline has steadily faded away due to the pervasive integration of the internet and rapid advancement of technology. Practice-as-Research Scholar Estelle Barrett considers that

Artistic experience therefore, occurs as a continuum with normal processes of living and is derived from an impulse to handle objects and think and *feel* through their handling. (Barrett 2013b: 64)

The concept of living on life as an artistic inquiry supports the imaginative exploration of the material effects of “likes” on the body, and bodies of artwork.

I consider the role of “like”, a small and seemingly innocuous word, to be integral to this research project. It plays a crucial role as the connecting thread throughout the literature from various academic disciplines. Moreover, its etymology establishes a connection between a body and its image. The origin of “like” from the Old English “lic,” meaning “body,” fascinated me;

To an Old English speaker, the word that later became *like* was the word for, of all things, “body.” The word was *lic*, and *lic* was part of a word, *gelic*, that meant “with the body,” as in “with the body of,” which was a way of saying “similar to”—as in *like*.  
(McWhorter, 2016, original emphasis)

as did its association with “image” when used as “similar to.” The word has influenced the English language, giving rise to the “-ly” suffix in words like “slowly.” In grammar, “like” exhibits versatility, serving as a verb, adjective, suffix, conjunction, and noun. However, it has also drawn negative attention for its overuse as a filler word among teens. In this research inquiry, when I mention the action of signalling a like on the Internet, also referred to as a social plugin, along with its impacts, I will distinguish it in the text by capitalising and bolding the word **LIKE**. Additionally, exploring the use of **LIKE** as a circulation technology has prompted the investigation into **LIKES** as an economy characterised by asymmetrical benefits and penalties.

Throughout history, there have been female artists dedicated to bringing into view the particularities of female embodiment, of how a woman’s sense of self is shaped by the interactions her body has with the world. These experiences, whether positive or negative, profoundly impact her body image, sense of self and relations with others. To be a woman is not a homogenous identity or a monolithic experience, and it is impossible to have a universal view point. The feminist artists who inspire me are not primarily interested in technology itself; rather, they are

concerned with the lives of women and conveying their experiences of living in an oppressive society through a range of mediums. There is no singular aesthetic for feminist art, though many women chose to work with the body, and include autobiographical elements. It is also fair to say that not all female artists would consider themselves feminists, but there are particular themes that appear persistent across a feminist art imaginary such as; the role of reproductive, domestic and emotional labour, the ethics of care, patriarchal power, gender as performance, objectification and the male gaze, and, the intersection of sex, gender, class and race. This exploration of *likability* and its relation to the phenomenon of social media **LIKES** cuts across those themes.

The project aims to develop research that will be useful for feminist consciousness raising across a range of settings, such as but not limited to academic institutions, feminist groups, community festivals, youth groups and art institutions. Feminism's major contribution to the production and structures of knowledge is,

Its necessary reliance on lived experience... [e]xperience is of course implicated in and produced by various knowledges and social practices. (Grosz 1994: 94)

From the outset of the research process a feminist perspective was taken to engage with the key concepts of *likability*, the **LIKE** economy and circulation in the practical context of an expanded photographic practice and the implications of not wanting to create *likable* works. For many feminist artists, there is an understanding that content is inseparable to form, Donna Haraway argues that;

it matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with (Haraway 2016: 10)

The approach of the artist is in sharp contrast to that of the information and communication engineer, where the meaning of the message does not matter as it is treated as “information [as] an entity that could be separated from the meaning that could be made of it” (Terranova 2004: 12). Tiziana Terranova in her 2004 book *Networked Culture: Politics in the Information Age* addresses two misconceptions

about informational dynamics, the first being the belief that information is solely the content of communication, and the second asserting that all information lacks materiality. This research inquiry considers **LIKES** are material, and as active matter they permeate everyday onlife, shaping bodies, and above all female bodies in ways that benefits fraternal patriarchal capitalism.

The treatment of women in society has varied significantly throughout history and across different cultures. However common themes and issues persist including but not limited to; gender inequality, disproportionate target of violence and abuse, lack of representation in decision-making positions, gender pay-gap, access to reproductive rights and health, double burden of work (responsibilities in both the workplace and the household), access to education, and the perpetuation of harmful beliefs through media and societal stereotyping, reducing women to narrow roles and appearance. Traditional roles often portray women as nurturing, empathetic, and accommodating. These stereotypes and the socialisation of girls from an early age to prioritise being polite, friendly and non-confrontational reinforces the idea that women should be *likable* and well-liked by others. **Women should be content.**

In the fields of art, poetry and writing, content is considered to be the emotional or intellectual message of a work and is generally treated as inseparable from form. I use the word “**content**” in the title of this complementary writing, and in the hypothesis playfully and with knowledge that it has two main meanings. The first meaning, as defined by the Cambridge Dictionary, is a feeling of being satisfied; to be “pleased with your situation and not hoping for change or improvement” (Cambridge University Press 2021). The other meaning is connected to learning and knowledge: “the ideas that are contained in a piece of writing, a speech, or a film” (Cambridge University Press 2021). I used the two main meanings of the word content to start guiding the research process, and to help design experiments.

Firstly, I asked myself: Am I so pleased with my situation that I do not hope for change or improvement? The answer was a resolute “**no**”. I had observed the digital social environment that I worked and socialised in becoming increasingly toxic and misogynistic for women.

Secondly, I asked: What happens when artworks that are self-generated images of women are encountered as content, detached from their original context? It seems doubtful that we can view artworks depicting women on social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok without making judgments based on whether the women's appearance and behaviour align with social norms.

Thirdly, if an essential determinant of artists' livelihoods is their positioning within web search engine ranking systems and their availability as content providers to be appreciated on social media platforms, they inherently become participants in the **LIKE** economy. Digital media scholars Carolin Gerlitz and Anne Helmond conceptualise the **LIKE** economy as:

an infrastructure that allows the exchange of data, traffic, affects, connections, and of course money, mediated through social plugins and most notably the “like button (2013: 1353)

In responding to these questions through the use of word association maps and doodles in my notebooks, I identified that I was looking to explain a **continuity** and **change** in my own historical time.

**The continuity** is the stubbornness of traditional gender stereotypes and continued structural inequalities between the sexes, and genders. It is not a new idea that the personal, private, professional and political experience of the majority of all women remain more likely to be ignored, suppressed, erased or dismissed than that of men (Wollstonecraft 1792,2004, Wolf 1991, Grosz 1994, Criado-Perez 2019, Menendez 2019). Women are expected to be *likable*, and the advent of the

**LIKE** button appears to have amplified both the rewards for women who appear to behave in accordance with gender-specific expectations (Arruzza et al 2019, Menendez 2019, Banet-Weiser 2017, 2018) and the punishments for women who do not (Eltahawy 2019). When women deviate from fulfilling the role of functional infrastructure (Plant 1997), which sustains the reproduction of the social order that empowers men to have agency, to be in control, and to serve as the organisers, while relegating women to the role of operators, they are perceived as bugs in the system and are considered a challenge to be rectified through discipline and consequences. Essentially, this involves processes of reformatting and reprogramming.

**The change** has been introduced by the way that social media platforms, web apps and search engines profit from how they generate, track, collect and organise people's data and shape people's behaviour in real time. While social media platforms place an emphasis on communality, as exemplified by Instagram's tagline "Everyone is welcome in our community" (Instagram, 2021) their systems are increasingly understood to be driving rewards into fewer and fewer hands (Vesna 2007, Dean 2016, 2019, Zuboff 2019, Deresiewicz 2020, Tarnoff 2022, Doctorow 2022).

The motivation for this research inquiry was both personal and professional. The fields of art and photography, which are my academic and professional disciplines, exhibit a clear male bias at various levels (Ashencaen et al., 2019; McMillan, 2020). Women have long faced barriers and disadvantages in pursuing education and professional careers, as highlighted in historical works like Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792, 2004) Linda Nochlin's essay, *Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?* (1971) and more recent works such as *The Story of Art Without Men* by Katy Hessell (2022). Reconciling the underrepresentation and undervaluation of women in the arts is challenging, particularly considering the substantial number of women entering education (Hubble et al., 2021) and the increasingly common student experience of being taught by a high number of women at the graduate and post-graduate levels.

Furthermore, the prevalence of social media systems and search algorithms has introduced distortions that shape our online experiences, reverberating into our offline lives. With numerous websites and platforms tailoring content suggestions based on our browsing history, gender, sex, age, location, and other personal data, we might find ourselves confined within a filter bubble (Pariser 2011), shielded from dissenting perspectives and isolated from those who differ from us. Our choices to follow specific individuals on social media have considerable consequences, as they contribute to databases and influence algorithmic personalisation. For instance, this could result in an individual's feed being overwhelmingly populated by posts highlighting women's achievements, creating a sense of hyper-visibility that might inaccurately convey the attainment of equality and render feminism seemingly redundant.

Though the Internet and social media are central to this research inquiry, I do not take the approach of social media artists who make performances *in situ*. I am thinking here of works treated as live online destinations to visit: for example, Petra Cortright's (b. 1986 USA) *VVEBCAM* 2009, Ann Hirsch's (b.1985 USA) *The SCANDALISHIOUS PROJECT* 2009 an 18-month viral YouTube performance, Amalia Ulman's (b. 1989 Argentina) *Excellences & Perfections* 2014 a five-month Instagram performance, and Leah Schrager's (b. 1983 USA) durational Instagram performance *Ona* 2015 – ongoing.

The origin of my practice was my performance to a camera but rarely live to an audience. I am looking to explore and physicalise the effects of the systems and economies associated with being a woman in those spaces through the use of expanded photography. In exploring ideas relating to my own practice, the photograph becomes a performative space, that extends outwards rather than a document of the performance. The expanded photograph as a medium and a method becomes a substitute for my body; it becomes the site of activity, duration and pain. I agree with Griselda Pollock's observation that:

It is the artist's irreducible, irrefutable experience of pain presented in real time, and experienced directly by an audience, which sets performance apart from other forms of representation. (1996:123)

I recognise that for a number of feminist artists making a spectacle of female suffering is seen as a valid form of protest. Nevertheless, I currently see no point in putting myself or other women through extensive conditions to create artworks at a time when violence towards women is well documented to have increased (UN Women Facts and Figures, 2022). I am angered by the misogynistic mainstream image-making practices that portray women as requiring transformation; thus, it is the material image, rather than the body itself, that captures my concern.

An important conceptual and aesthetic element of my artistic practice, and vital to this research inquiry is word-image relationships: images about words, words as image, images with words, words in images and words about images. Language (content and form) is a structured system of communication that enables us to connect with others, give meaning to our experiences, and construct the world we inhabit. Language plays a pivotal role in shaping the boundaries of our reality (Spender 1980,1985). It serves as our tool for organising, categorising, and interacting with the world. Language informs the agreements we enter, including the terms we accept, and has a significant impact on how societies are shaped locally, nationally, and globally (Pateman 1988). In this practice-based research inquiry I routinely use wordplay, and play-on-words as a technique; to exploit the multiple meanings of words, exposing how language can be used to obscure or manipulate information, and with humour to make artworks more approachable and a less confrontational form of critique.

I am inspired by feminist artists who fearlessly address everyday issues, especially those who use wit to seamlessly integrate text with imagery, incorporate text within images, or transform text into images. Barbara Kruger (b 1945 USA), typifies this approach in *Untitled (Your body is a battleground)* 1989, a large photographic silkscreen on vinyl (284.48 x 284.48cm). This image is both art and protest, it was

produced by Kruger for the 1989 Women's March on Washington in support of reproductive freedom.

Kruger employs personal pronouns such as 'I,' 'you,' and 'your,' to address her viewer. Her language is both straightforward and attention-grabbing, mirroring an approach often seen in advertising and politics. Through her use of pronouns, Kruger addresses both the women featured in her images and her audience. These pronouns extend an invitation to the viewers, encouraging them to reflect on their own viewpoints and their position in the world. In my research artworks, I follow a comparable strategy by integrating personal pronouns, creating a more direct engagement with the viewer. She works with found images, creating large-scale black and white images, then overlays short slogan style statements in bold typeface in black, white or red text bars. I distinguish my work from Kruger's insofar I can appear in my work, and it is domestic in scale. Though I have never worked with what is conventionally defined as found images, I regularly work with images made for me by other people and include text in some form but not consistently, and without a signature style.

Jenny Holzer (b. 1950 USA) works inside and outside of gallery spaces, her work *truisms* started in 1977 where she typed one liners, typeset the sentences in alphabetical order, printed them cheaply and then pasted them up as posters around New York. Truisms include: "ABUSE OF POWER COMES AS NO SURPRISE", "RAISE BOYS AND GIRLS THE SAME WAY", "PROTECT ME FROM WHAT I WANT", AND "MONEY CREATES TASTE". Holzer works with text on: billboards, fleets of LED billboard trucks, LED screens, t-shirts, baseball caps, plaques and projections onto buildings. The influence of Barbara Kruger and Jenny Holzer can be seen in my style of titles, *Like me and Like me more* 2019, *I Don't Want You To Like Me (IDWYTLM)* 2020 and in the development of the *A-Frames* 2019, and *CONTEST* 2021 to include slogan style text.

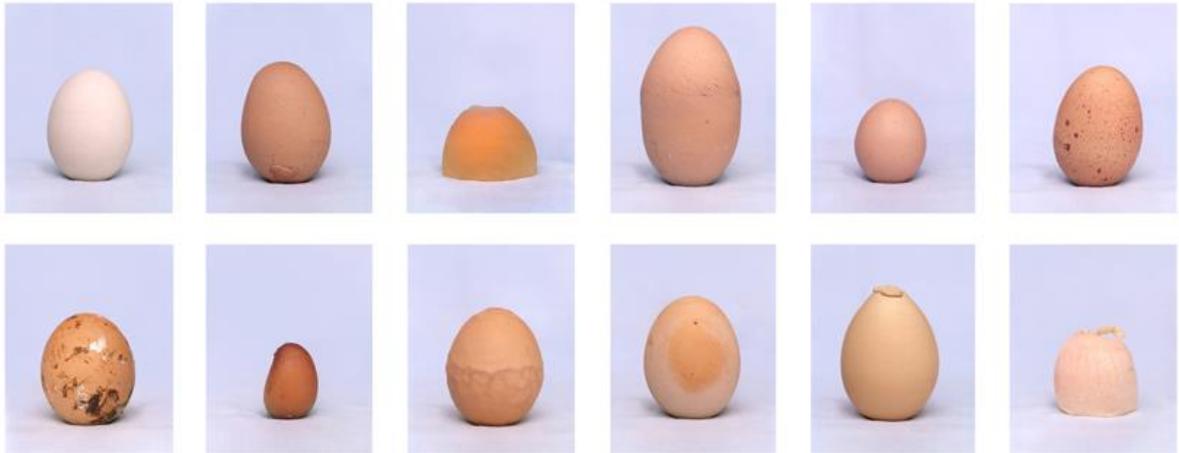
The naming of artworks is an integral part of my creative process. I use titles not just as a form of artistic expression, they are treated as an essential element of my

making process. I regularly use titles as contextual descriptions to offer an explanation or as an elaboration that provides relevant background information for example; *A Dozen Rejected Eggs* 2003 (Fig 1); *Private View* 2002-2021(Fig 2); *Photos that my parents, boyfriend and friends would choose to give to the police / press if I were to go missing, have an accident or die* 2004 and *NepArtism* 2009-2011. The title as a contextual description can attract attention, create a connection between the artwork and viewer as well as help an audience better interpret the artists intention.

The reach of artist Sophie Calle (b. 1953 France) a conceptual artist, whose work is distinguished by her use of conceptual constraints that often makes her emotional life public, can be seen in my favoured use of the survey method to create artwork. Calle adheres to rules as starting points to explore the human condition, though the rules often give space for chance results. Her work combines text, photography and installation. Her projects range from asking strangers to take her to a place special to them (*The Bronx* 1990), to asking 107 women chosen for their profession or skills, to interpret a break up letter that she had received (*Take Care of Yourself*, 2007).

I have conducted surveys in various mediums such as face-to face, by phone, email and through online forms. Depending on the question that I had asked, replies to my survey questions took a variety of forms, responses have included chicken eggs (Fig 1, page 34), used pregnancy tests (Fig.2, page 35), photographs (Fig. 5, page 38) and digital image files (Fig 6, page 38). The artworks present the collected data in an organised manner, allowing people to view and compare the images from different contributors on a single page or single wall. The artworks generally take the form of groupings of photographs, or composited images that I refer to as comparison sites and invite viewers to make side-by-side comparisons. Examples of the method can be seen in a range of my work, such as; *A Dozen Rejected Eggs*, 2003 (Fig 1, page 34), where I asked a number of farmers to save eggs that could not be sold, because their appearance made them unfit to be consumed by the eyes, though the eggs could still be safely eaten. I used a large

format camera to photograph chicken eggs in a studio setting in a portrait style more commonly associated with human head shots.



*Fig. 1 A Dozen Rejected Eggs, 2003 (twelve 16 x 20in hand-printed c-types photographs) ©Liv Pennington*

*Private View* 2006 (Fig. 2, page 35) is made from data collected from a single 'live' performance. The photographs were taken with a medium format film camera, I then handmade colour photographs which I then scanned to make digital files. It is the first example of my use of digital software to create a composite print, this was driven by the need to include text. The opening night of an art exhibition is known to those in the art world as a "Private View", and on the night of exhibition opening I asked women who used the toilets if they would mind taking a home pregnancy test, and letting the results develop anonymously on a projector screen or screen at the bar (Fig 3, page 35). I used a grid format to organise forty-five images of used pregnancy tests. The numbered images run in rows left to right, their position following the order in which that woman took a pregnancy test on the night. The women whilst they were inevitably queuing for a toilet were invited to write a personal response to the idea of taking an anonymised test in public, to think about what being pregnant would mean to them. This text was subsequently transcribed verbatim digitally sits just under to the right-hand side of their test (Fig 4, page 36).

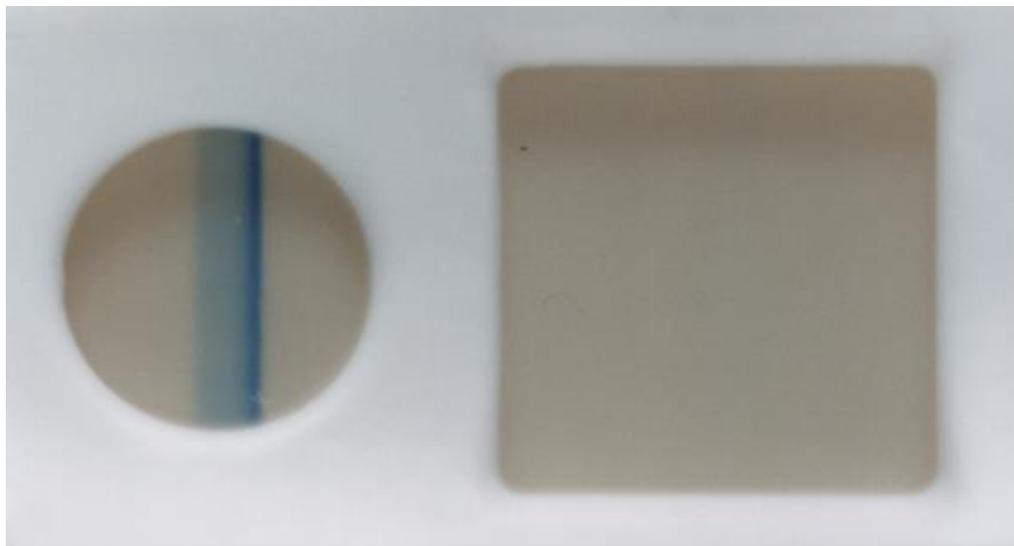


*Fig. 2 Private View, 2006 (Digital C-type Composite of 45 images with text) ©Liv Pennington*

A pregnancy test is meant to be a standardised diagnostic tool used to determine whether a person is pregnant or not. It detects the presence of a hormone (hCG) in the urine, which is produced by the placenta shortly after a fertilised egg attaches to the uterus lining. Placing the images of the tests side by side offers a forensic approach to looking for unique patterns and characteristics, and aids classification. The simplest classification here is that two lines means pregnant or one line means not pregnant.



*Fig. 3 Private View performance installation documentation, The Royal College of Art 2002 ©Liv Pennington*



(no 39)

I'm hoping for a girl

*Fig. 4 Detail from Private View 2006 ©Liv Pennington*

*Private View* is a performance, where I am off screen taking a role perhaps more recognisable as that of an administrator and project manager – I am the data controller, similar to the approach of Sophie Calle. However, I wanted to

acknowledge the influence of feminist performance artists ORLAN (b. 1947 France) and VALIE EXPORT (b.1940 Austria), and their commitment to 'live' work. Though it may not be so obvious a characteristic of my work, they remind me to try make braver material choices. They both create work 'live' with their body, and their work often involves direct bodily interventions such as ORLAN's *Baiser de l'Artiste (Kiss of the artist)*. A performance at the International Fair of Contemporary Art in 1977, where ORLAN donned a life-sized photographic image of her own nude torso. This image bore an instruction/advert reading "insert 5F" positioned above the breasts. Walking around the art fair, she offered kisses to attendees in exchange for a payment of 5 francs. In order to receive a kiss, participants would insert a 5F coin into a slot located on the chest, which would then fall into a collection box over the artist's groin. The act of the kiss was accompanied by a 2-3 second burst of baroque music, concluding with the sound of a siren. This provocative piece garnered substantial attention and controversy, ultimately leading to the loss of ORLAN's teaching position due to the scandal it generated.

VALIE EXPORT's 1968 performance titled *Tapp und Tastinko (Touch Cinema)* involved a striking act where she welcomed direct touch from strangers to her body in a public setting. During the performance, EXPORT walked in public while wearing a box positioned across her chest. This box was equipped with a curtain, reminiscent of the cinema curtain that unveils the film screen and action. However, in this performance, the box featured two holes through which people could insert their hands to touch her breasts. This performance piece challenged boundaries and conventions while exploring the dynamics of personal space and interaction in a public context. In this work, and *Aktionhose: Genitalpanik (Action Pants: Genital Panic)* 1969. EXPORT dared the public to engage with a living woman instead of screen images, illustrating her concept of "expanded cinema." This concept involves creating a film experience without traditional celluloid, the artist's body is the catalyst for the live context of viewing. I describe my practice as "expanded photography," I use photography as a foundation but then integrate it with other mediums, techniques or technologies to create new forms of expression. I discuss this method in further depth, and how I see its relation to material feminism in Chapter 4.

In the course of this research inquiry, there are three occasions where I unsuccessfully attempted performances to a 'live' audience. Firstly, I performed the position of a host in e-a-c#1 live to gallery visitors, but this wasn't received as a performance more that I was just being me (discussed page 123-124). Secondly, the 'live' hot branding of an image that failed a risk assessment requirement (discussed page 138) and finally, the imagined but unperformed performance lecture discussed in Chapter 5. More frequently, I create artworks through other people's labour and prompt the viewers of my artworks in a gallery setting to perform. I do not invite direct touch to my actual physical body, but point people to the artworks as my proxy. I see ORLAN's work *MesuRAGEs* (1968–2012) and VALIE EXPORT's series *Encirclement* (1976) projects in which they use their bodies as alternative measuring devices as supporting the development of *Like Me and Like Me More* 2019 and the *A-Frames* 2019.



*Fig. 5 Detail of Photos that my parents, boyfriend and friends would choose to give to the police / press if I were to go missing, have an accident or die 2004 ©Liv Pennington*

In 2007, I started to explore how the evolving accessibility to digital retouching was influencing the types of images made of girls and women. To create *The Standard Package Trilogy* 2008 – 2011<sup>2</sup>, I initially searched the web, making lists of retouchers who were associated with online beauty pageants for children and offered low-cost services. At that time, professional photographers and skilled enthusiasts

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<sup>2</sup> To see the full series, please see [www.livpennington.com](http://www.livpennington.com)

often performed image retouching as part of their post-processing workflow. They would adjust elements such as brightness, contrast, colour balance, and remove blemishes or unwanted objects to achieve a more polished and visually appealing final image.



*Fig. 6 The Standard Package, Part II Partial Recall 2008 ©Liv Pennington*

To create *The Standard Package Part II: Partial Recall 2008* (fig 6), I first rephotographed the first professional picture my parents had taken of me when I was around two to three years old. I then sent the identical image file to seven re-touchers, asking for a beauty makeover. I kept communication to a minimum, stating that “I trusted their judgement on the level of retouching needed.” I always accepted the image that they first sent back. One re-toucher said “no”, that they couldn’t make the image beautiful. The re-touchers knew that that I was the photographer because I had to declare that I was the photographer to grant them permission to work on the image, but it was not necessarily evident that I was the model or an artist.

One of my aims was to create a work that challenged the pursuit of an ideal by exploring whether a universal standard of beauty existed. I speculated whether it might be possible for all the re-touchers to identify the same aspects as needing modification and whether they would make identical decisions in the process. The images in *The Standard Package: Partial Recall* 2008 are individual framed digital canvas prints, and then when exhibited, they are grouped together, either in one row of six or two rows of three. This grouping approach allows the digital manipulation, which ideally should be imperceptible, to become noticeable and apparent. Consequently, viewers gain insight into the re-touchers' personal preferences and their subjective notions of what constitutes a better photograph or better-looking girls and women. The juxtaposition of these images encourages critical reflection on beauty standards and the influence of digital retouching on our perception of femininity.

An instance where I have previously employed words within an image can be observed in the series *Action Photos* 2014 (Fig. 7, page 41). This series serves as a precursor that holds both conceptual and aesthetic ties to the subsequent research artwork *The Enchanted Self*, 2016- ongoing (Fig. 27, page 99). The series consists of images crafted from digital files, designed to emulate the appearance of traditional studio photographs. I bought them because they were cheap and poorly put together, and spoke to me of a desire of wanting to appear attractive and of having access to glamorous locations at an affordable level. These virtual images offer opulent interiors, often featuring an unoccupied chair, sofa, or chaise longue.



Fig. 7 Action Photos - Light Skin 2014 (Digital c-type print 10 x 8in) ©Liv Pennington

Within the digital image file, I created a new layer and constructed a body from text. This textual content is extracted from a Photoshop Action, a potent tool in Adobe Photoshop enabling users to automate repetitive image editing tasks by recording and implementing a sequence of commands through a single click. They come in various styles and functionalities. Some actions are designed for specific purposes, such as creating a vintage effect, and there are actions aimed at ‘enhancing’ the overall appearance of the subject such as skin retouching, teeth whitening, eye and lip enhancing, and contouring and highlighting. On a separate layer I modified the image of the chair or seat, to give it the impression that it was being sat on, that the text had weight.

The title *Action Photos* refers both to the technological process that has inspired it, but also to action painting. Action painting is generally associated with masculinity, being active, the gestural body, an event, a dialogue between the artist

and canvas. I found pleasure in this contrasting concept, recognising that my images were devoid of 'action.' It occurred to me that for women to sit in the chair, they would need to contort their bodies and envision a virtual chair, placing themselves in an imaginative, futuristic realm that could only be accessed by remaining still, by being cut and pasted. This image presents the starting point of my research inquiry, of wanting to be present, but seen on my own terms. However, these terms are not my own, and identity is not rigid. If the action code is transcribed from the image of the person and ran in Photoshop it will instruct the image to change.

My preoccupation with how the organisation of information effects its reading, is evident in the now archived web project *NepArtism.com* 2009 – 2011, as is the nascent interest in exploring the power of exploiting social networks. I had started to use blogging websites to create online projects in 2008 after the birth of my first child, and as a response to an extended period of living abroad. It was a means of remotely maintaining intimate professional connections and an opportunity to establish new ones. *Nepartism* borrowed its form from the collaborative drawing or writing game Exquisite Corpse, invented by Surrealist artists in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The game involves multiple participants who work together to create a collective piece of art or writing, my adapted version presented new chains of artworks. Each month I selected the first image in the chain, it was chosen because I thought it was a great piece of work and thought more people should see it. Parallel to this is that I knew the artist well enough to have their email address and/or phone number. The selected artist was then invited to follow the same procedure, to select a piece of work from someone they knew and wanted to promote, that artist is then invited to follow the same procedure and so on until 10 pieces of work have been selected, someone doesn't want to play, or the deadline has been met.

The project text on the website says:

The show grows because of who we know; it is nepotism with a bit of altruism. I am interested in where this chain goes, does one

artist get selected more than once. How small or large are the artist pools?

How do our selections reflect on our own artist practice, are we interested in similarities or differences, do opposites attract? or is it safety in familiarity?

Are our relationships formed with others because of admiration and interest in the artwork or in spite of? (Pennington, 2009)

*Nepartism* is the first project of mine that I identify as responding to the pressure to visibly signal our online **LIKES** and the endorsements of social and professional networks. Whilst the digital reveal was exhilarating, and alluded to making our onlife relationships visible and our networks traceable I missed the face-to-face element of working with other artists. The *Withdrawing Room* ([withdrawingroom.co.uk](http://withdrawingroom.co.uk)) was created in 2014 as an intentionally hybrid space. It is a way of addressing my desire to be in a room with people and artworks, rather than always through a screen. It is both an online and physical space conceptualised so that I can host exhibitions, talks and events. The physical offline project space is the two front reception rooms within my family home, known as Harbourside.

The inaugural project, *Collecting 2014*, remains open ended. I took the longstanding practice of artist personal swaps and made them public as a way of looking at value, relationships and reciprocation. The physical versions of the nine swapped artworks are installed in my living room. Visitors to the physical space get to view the works, to see their scale and texture which is difficult to comprehend via a screen. The artworks contain their own narrative and the story of the swapping. In introducing the artworks to visitors, myself or my family members describe the process of how they arrived in the house, the artist who made the work, our relation to one another and also describe the item that they were swapped for. This opens up a space for both the anecdotal and more formal conversations regarding trust, return value, relationships and fairness that can accompany reciprocation.

The nine artists have a dedicated web page on *Withdrawingroom.com* under the *Collecting* project, that presents digital images of both the swapped items, a short bio and social media links and/or website address. Conventionally items that have been swapped, are housed at different locations and would not be seen together in the same space. Pairing the artworks has several effects and can serve different purposes, I placed them next to each other to allow the viewer to compare and contrast, highlighting differences and similarities in style, theme or concept, it opens a space for the viewer to consider the relationship between the two paired artists.

The key characteristics of my artistic practice are evident in their extension and influence on this research inquiry: play-on-words and word-image relations, employing survey method to capture data and to establish connections to people, an interest with how information is organised and presented as an aesthetic, and an acknowledgment of its potential as both a political tool and an avenue for artistic exploration. A significant development in my use of the survey method in this research inquiry is that, through developing sites of comparison in different mediums, I started to explore how I could create an artwork where the material process of capturing, storing, and managing the data became both the artwork and critique. This will be discussed further in chapters 3, 4 and 5 and how this development served as a means to physicalise the concept of *likability* and its relation to **LIKES**, demonstrating how they shape influences on the body and society.

## 2 Condition-ing Report for 'likable female image in onlife'

This chapter takes its inspiration from the condition report, a detailed and systematic documentation of the state or condition of an object, property or asset. I have used the typical structure of a condition report that includes the following items: Identification, Location and Date, Description of condition, Photographic Documentation, Measurement and Specification as a method to guide and organise the interpretation of research material in this chapter.

The purpose of a condition report is to provide an accurate and objective record of the item's condition at a specific point in time, serving as reference for comparison in the future. The assessment primarily focused on works written or performed in English or translated into English I am using the term conditioning report purposefully. Conventionally, conditioning refers to the process of learning and modifying behaviour through repeated experiences and associations with stimuli in the environment. I propose that the conceptual purpose of a condition-ing report is to expand the view of the item under scrutiny to include histories and note interactions with significant others, as well as to note changes to the object of study through its transit in time. I employ the format of the condition-ing report to demonstrate that capitalism's relations with new technologies are the major surrounding circumstances, influences, and factors that shape and impact the *likable* female image in onlife.

### 2.a Identification:

The item being described is the '**likable female image in onlife**' and the definition that I put forward is: *a portrayal or representation of a woman that is seen positively and is attractive or appealing to others. It is typically a self-generated image connected to social media through a self-awareness that the image will circulate online and whilst open to receiving **LIKES** could also be a target of abuse.* While this project doesn't specifically explore sexting or image-based sexual abuse, it acknowledges the impact of such circulation on women's lives, potentially influencing the types of images they create or do not create due to fears of future exposure.

A *likable* female body in the spaces of social media and social networks is a body that conventionally does not want to cause friction by upsetting their group, so tightly manages their image. According to feminist scholar and activist Mona Eltahawy, "the most subversive thing a woman can do is to talk about her life as if it really matters, because it does" (2019: 47). She contends that declaring "I count" in a patriarchy that demands modesty and humility is revolutionary (Eltahawy 2019: 37). Patriarchal control surpasses mere sexual access to women's bodies; it encompasses limiting their entry and participation in economic, political, cultural, civic, and social spheres. A *likable* female relying on self-generated images as their business cannot afford to lose their audience or the access to the platform they work on. As feminist scholar Sarah Banet-Weiser says 'in a media context in which if you are visible you *matter*, visibility matters indeed' (2018:10 emphasis in original). A likable female subject producing likable female images for social media is forming an identity, through a combination of onlife experiences; personal experiences, cultural background, social interactions, and self-perception and creates a digital representation that engages with others in the online social space.

The presence of women online, and the hypervisibility of some women does not mean that sexism and misogyny is being challenged or interrogated. The demands for visibility, originating from a political standpoint rather than an economic one, are quite distinct. This perspective is concerned with how visibility is managed and controlled, rather than simply seeking visibility for its own sake. Jodi Dean (2005) argues that people through contribution to the circulation of content, social networks maintain the fantasy of being an active, engaged subject, forfeiting the space for antagonistic dialogue. She terms this communicative capitalism, and says:

Communicative capitalism' designates the way values heralded as central to democracy take material form in networked technologies (Dean, 2002; 2004; 2005). Ideals of access, inclusion, discussion, and participation come to be realized in and through intensification of global telecommunications. (Dean 2007: 226)

In later work *Comrade* (2019) Dean argues that:

**When identity is all that is left, hanging on to it can be a sensible response.** At the very least – and against all odds – one survives. (2019:16 my emphasis)

A likable female can be seen trying to survive onlife, through regular practices of individualised competition. She becomes strategic in the process of creating, scheduling, analysing and engaging with content. Life becomes approached as a process of data management, of collecting, storing, organising, and maintaining data in a structured and secure manner.

A theme of *likable* female content is empowerment, of security and self-care. In the context of the likable female image and popular feminism, empowerment becomes the central focus, but it often lacks specificity regarding the objectives of empowering women (Banet-Weiser 2019). In this popular form of feminism, the emphasis tends to shift towards the individual empowered woman, leading to a restructuring of feminist politics that centres on personal empowerment, to being personally responsible rather than addressing systemic issue. In the context of fraternal capitalism, to be an empowered woman in the arts and cultural industries is not to be a better feminist subject or artist, it is to be a better economic subject.

### **Exemplars of the likable female image in onlife at work**

Visual artist Amalia Ulman (b.1989, Argentina), and comedienne Celeste Barber (b.1982, Australia), have both embarked on serial self-representation projects portraying a competitive and popular form of femininity associated with social media. The two women share methods in that they each use their body to perform in front of a camera to question what is deemed popular and how the status of women in society is affected by social media and social networking platforms. Their projects have gained spectacular attention in their respective fields of art and entertainment and are exemplars of the likable female image at work. Through their performances, they make clear references to the importance of having both **LIKES** and *likability* in the digital landscape. To fully experience their work as close

as possible to its original context, I encourage the reader to visit: Amalia Ulman's performance *Excellences & Perfections* 2014 now archived by Conifer and Celeste Barber's *#Celestechallengeaccepted* 2015 in situ, links to websites and Instagram accounts can be found in the references.

Both women are central characters in their self-generated content, referencing social photography, 'everyday images taken to shared' (Jurgenson 2019: 8). Their content-as-work serves multiple purposes - exposing the expectations imposed on girls and women to govern and manage their bodies and appearance (McRobbie 2015) critiquing the influence of social media and to gain economic and critical success in their respective fields. Both projects explore a dissatisfaction with the **LIKE** economy and question the belief that "status is synonymous with contentment" (Prinstein 201:65). Indeed, both women skilfully use the concept of the influencer as both a theme and as an approach to engage their audiences, generate interest, and ultimately translate their increased influence from the realm of social media to their respective individual fields. Questioning the creation of likable content doesn't inherently criticise the women involved. I am aware if the attention fixates solely on the women, it veers away from the conditions established by capitalism. The projects offer a deeper understanding of how the present-day female body is both perceived and lived as prospective content for various social media platforms. In this context, the female body becomes a subject of consideration for its potential to capture attention, generate engagement and grow the number of **LIKES**, views, reposts, comments, and followers.

Amalia Ulman, an arts graduate of Central Saint Martins, London, and based in Los Angeles since 2014, is credited with creating the first "Instagram masterpiece" (Sooke 2016), and being the "first great Instagram artist" (Langmuir 2016) for *Excellences & Perfections* 2014. Ulman's five-month durational performance realised through Instagram comprised of 182 posts, including selfies, food photos, product shots, inspirational quotes, and ten videos, presenting an awry look at an awareness of cultural inscription. The content itself so closely mirrored social photography (Jurgenson 2019) and generic online behaviour associated with

young women that the performance only became recognised as an artwork when a clearing was made in everyday noise (Bolt 2004). This happened at the point when Ulman announced that it had been a performance. Her following is niche, primarily within the art and fashion world, with approximately 138,000 followers as of September 2022.

In her project Ulman cycles through three separate characters—the small-town good girl, the urban sugar babe and the therapied yogini, all of whom embodied various aspects of influencer culture. Through these characters, she explored themes of identity, gender, and aspirational online behaviours while engaging with her audience and gaining a dedicated following. Although there is satire in the overall performance, each image in Ulman's work caters to what is conventionally desirable. She maintains a *likable* and attractive image, occasionally shifting briefly from being perceived as a "good girl." Ulman utilised the language of the Web to experiment with fictional narratives that explore body politics and online behaviours, clear that,

The idea was to experiment with fiction online using the language of the Internet,... rather than trying to adapt old media to the Internet, as has been done with mini-series on YouTube. The cadence and rhythm were totally different. (Sooke 2016)

In contrast, Barber's *#Celestechallengeaccepted* uses parody and humour to recreate and mock influencer imagery and content from female celebrities. By juxtaposing herself with these celebrities and humorously imitating their glamorous posts, she highlights the absurdity and unrealistic beauty standards often promoted on social media. Her approach relies on irony and wit, allowing her to resonate with her audience and amass a substantial number of followers (over 9 million on Instagram).

On her Instagram profile, Barber describes herself as a "Actor. Comedian. Writer. Lady." She defines the origin of the project as "as a fun experiment to see what it would look like for an average person to photograph herself doing rich people things" (McKay 2019). Barber's approach is knowingly kitsch, her accompanying

commentary acts as both the punch line and a reminder that the posts are meant in jest. Barber's project *#Celestechallengeaccepted* 2015 started as a light hearted joke with her sister but quickly went viral when she posted the images online. Women making jokes about not living up to glamorous images and presenting their ordinariness as relatable failures are traits that make them *likable* and align with the ideals of popular feminism (Banet-Weiser 2018).

Celeste Barber deliberately contrasts her body with that of younger, more famous actresses, pop stars, and models, creating an intentional juxtaposition that highlights her body as larger, less elastic, and older. She is fully aware that her body will be perceived as such and likely considered less deserving of visibility in social spaces. However, she cleverly employs excess and exaggeration in her imitation of poses and mannerisms, using humour to draw attention to the issue. Rather than framing her content as a body failing to meet certain standards, she shifts the focus to critique the images and the system that perpetuates such ideals and expectations. In doing so, Barber challenges the norms of the media and popular culture, bringing attention to the problematic nature of these imposed standards.

Celeste Barber purposely employs a snapshot style to distance herself from the celebrity shoot, highlighting the contrast between amateur and professional, while Amalia Ulman adapts a variety of styles that suit the context. Ulman's character is adept at producing smartphone social photographs, including competent food photography, mirror-selfies, and product shots. In contrast, Barber deliberately creates lower quality, poorly lit, and rushed-looking images to convey authenticity and avoid a highly produced appearance. Her analysis of the celebrity image she parodies is thoughtful, and she embraces the haphazard as a means to imply truth and reality in her videos. Barber avoids what could be considered competitive camera work (Tifentale and Manovich, 2016) as it suits her humour to have awkward angles, unflattering lighting and inappropriate props. While her images might appear unrefined, they are actually meticulously crafted, much like Ulman's, to intensify the contrast between the paired images. Both women use the technique of the reveal as a plot device, but in vastly different durations. Ulman's twist unfolds

after five months, impressing the seriousness of her commitment. Her extended engagement blurs believability and social media acceptance. In contrast, Barber's rapid change happens within minutes, allowing for immediate impact and humour. They skilfully use timing to create distinct audience experiences. While Barber focuses on quick execution to cater to the fast-paced nature of social media consumption, Ulman takes a long-term approach possibly to impress that it is art.

Celeste Barber and Amalia Ulman have both adhered to the code of being *likable* in their respective fields. However, there was a brief moment when Ulman was believed to have deviated from the expected behaviour of an artist, leading to admonishment for breaching her art world's social norm. In an interview with art critic Alastair Sooke, Ulman revealed that a gallery representing her had advised her to "behave" after closely following her social networking accounts and being unaware that she was performing:

People started hating me, [...] Some gallery I was showing with freaked out and was like, "You have to stop doing this, because people don't take you seriously anymore." Suddenly I was this dumb b---- because I was showing my ass in pictures. (Sooke 2016)

The gallery's perspective reflected a concern that displaying her artist's body in the manner she did, might lead to her not being taken seriously and could potentially negatively impact her artistic career. A similar sentiment has been directed towards artist Leah Schrager, and in particular her ongoing online Instagram performance titled *Ona Artist*, which she initiated in 2015. Schrager states that "she began @OnaArtist with the question of how to make a celebrity as part of an art practice and the desire to self-appropriate my own celebrity image." (Schrager 2022). In comparison to Amalia Ulman's work, Schrager's project stands out due to the continuous sexual imagery posted to Instagram for over five years. With a substantial following of over 5 million on Instagram, Schrager says she holds the distinction of having the largest female artist following on the platform. However, she acknowledges that this level of attention doesn't necessarily translate into achieving blue-chip gallery representation or mainstream recognition. It's worth noting that the prolonged duration of Schrager's performance has introduced

complexities that may blur the line between authenticity and artifice. While Ulman's five-month performance was celebrated, the extended five-year timeframe of Schragger's project has led to a perception shift, to it not be recognised as live durational art. It might be argued that it has transitioned from a committed character portrayal, as Ulman executed, to being perceived as a monetisation of the body.

The underlying implications here are that society often views youthful female bodies outside of an art context solely for entertainment and pleasure, rather than recognising their ability to critically explore self-identity through self-image making and self-publishing. The portrayal of the female body is often seen as being out of control, but not beyond control. In the context of professionalism, the default standard for *likability* is still rooted in masculine norms. Women may face repercussions for not conforming to these expectations and for being perceived as inauthentic (Menendez 2019) or as attention seeking (Eltahawy 2019).

Throughout history, feminisms have aimed for "liberation" from sexist and unequal social, political, and economic structures. Popular feminism, on the other hand, emphasises empowerment as its central logic without clearly defining what exactly women should be empowered to do (Banet-Weiser 2018: 17). This approach tends to shift the focus of feminism towards the individual empowered woman, potentially neglecting the broader structural changes needed for true liberation. That some people are successful, spectacularly successful mobilises a general ethos where everyone can be creative and succeed (McRobbie 2016). Amalia Ulman's last character transforms and gains empowerment through fruit teas and yoga. Celeste Barber includes comments from followers praising her as "brave" and "empowering" (Keen 2019), emphasising how some women feel constantly terrified about their appearance and feel subject to constant surveillance.

According to scholar Sarah Banet-Weiser it is common that:

Women and girls are told to be more confident and empowered –  
this confidence will help them become better economic subjects –

without scrutinising the broad economic context that encourages women and girls to be not confident in the first place. (Banet-Weiser 2018:30)

Both Amalia Ulman and Celeste Barber direct their critique towards the platform of social media without expressing direct opposition to it or to capitalism. They do not overtly criticise social media as a form of labour or a place of work, but rather view it as a necessary task to build an audience and gain opportunities for their preferred work. Ulman acknowledged the **LIKE** economy's power she said she knew “that photos of half-naked girls get a lot of likes” (Sooke 2014) and used it strategically to attract an audience that would support her future artistic endeavours, because:

*Excellences & Perfections* was easy to understand on the surface, since the easiest thing to get people to look at is a hot girl. Only by doing that first piece could I gather the audience to show something weirder later. It couldn't have happened the other way around. (2018: Bradley)

Similarly, Barber leveraged her online success to secure more opportunities in film and television, explaining that “she simply wanted to leverage a bit of potential online success into more jobs in film and television” (Rutherford 2021) and that it is a business decision to keep posting content frequently, as a way of staying in people's minds and to sell tickets to shows (Audible 2019). Both women recognise that maintaining a *likable* and visible online presence as crucial for their careers. Thus, they adapt to the self-surveillance pressures of social media as a means to achieve their professional goals.

Using Dean's definition of political efficacy, Ulman's artwork and Barber's comedy do comment successfully on the fantasy attaching us to communicative capitalism, but they do not work to change current conditions, they focus on individualised success and survival, rendering their work politically ineffective. There have always been artists that have refused the market, but if artists are unable to function as artists (economically, critically, socially, educationally) outside the corporate Internet, social media and social networking platforms, then this affirms that these technologies should be viewed as critical infrastructure and utilities. This then

directs attention to the problems associated with forms of privatising public utilities, infrastructure, and of the monetising of personal data.

### **Identification as a survivor of systems**

It was in the later stages of this research project after reading Jodi Dean's text *Comrade* 2019, that the research artworks created through exploring **female likable image in onlife** were recognised as manifesting **survivor and system** tendencies. Dean considers that the focus and emphasis on survivors, that appears in academic environments, social media platforms, and certain activist networks can be traced through intense expressions of allyship and as the 'struggle to persist in conditions of unlivability rather than to seize and transform these conditions.' (Dean 2019: 12) The attempt to work through the stalemate of survivor and system is seen in the artworks of Chapter 4 but discussed in Chapter 5 through the development of work of *IDWYTOLM* 2020 and *CONTEST* 2021.

### **2.b Location and Dates:**

Onlife (Floridi 2012) is the primary location of the likable female image, and the setting for the research inquiry. The term "onlife" emphasises the idea that our lives are now lived in a continuous and seamless interaction between the physical and the digital realm, regardless of how we perceive our deliberate web and social media usage. There have been rigorous attempts to find a better term to describe how we live an enmeshed online/offline life. Scholars Sadie Plant, Tiziana Terranova, Nathan Jurgenson and Luciano Floridi have made separate arguments at different times, that conceptually separating online from offline or referring to offline as "in real life" (IRL) is not sensible. Sadie Plant (1997), was disdainful of a calling a life where people communicated without media 'real life', and disputed that we are never disembodied and considered that 'immersive digital realities continuous with reality itself' (1997: 13). Information technology scholar Tiziana Terranova referred to this enmeshment as:

The "outernet"—the network of social, cultural and economic relationships which criss-crosses and exceeds the Internet—

surrounds and connects the latter to larger flows of labour, culture and power. (2004: 75)

Terranova warned that “it is dangerous to think of the Internet, of informational space as distant from the world of flesh and physical spaces” (2004: 42). Social media theorist Nathan Jurgenson coined the term “digital dualism” (Jurgenson 2011) in response to people’s frequent use of “online” and “offline” to describe experiences that implied online and offline are separate realms. He considered this to be a fallacy and proposed:

An alternative view that states that our reality is both technological and organic, both digital and physical, all at once. We are not crossing in and out of separate digital and physical realities, ala *The Matrix*, but instead live in one reality, one that is augmented by atoms and bits. (Jurgenson 2011)

Floridi proposes that the power of the digital realm is cleaving: meaning it can either separate or unite, so things can easily be cut and pasted. This means that experiences which were once considered singular, such as physical presence and location, can now be digitally divided. For example, tasks like transferring money or experiencing an art exhibition no longer require physical visits. Instead, you can perform these actions digitally, using a website to transfer money or taking a virtual walkthrough of a 3D virtual exhibition on a smartphone. Human bodies enable social media to have a material presence in the world. This occurs through the modification of skin and flesh, where aesthetic languages such as the “Instagram face” can be observed (Tolentino 2019). This also manifests through social media challenges, for example the blackout challenge that had been circulating on TikTok has reportedly led to the deaths of several children, resulting in two families planning to sue TikTok (Paul.K 2022).

The initial excitement of the Web as an imaginative location, a space where anybody could be any body, with freedom and endless possibilities for individual play and global collaboration, has long dissipated. The Internet and the Web have undergone a restructuring driven by capitalism. The original research network

configuration has been supplanted by a profit-capturing system designed to monitor people's actions and accumulate extensive information about them. The structure of social media sharing platforms, like liberal feminism, advocates freedom of choice, and a belief that meritocracy has empowering potential while also encouraging individual responsibility for one's success. It has been argued that the web as it essentially exists today, is not a communication medium but an advertising portal, and futures market for behaviour modification (Zuboff 2019). This process aims to gather valuable insights into their preferences and potential buying habits (Miller 2020) and limit the possibilities for political engagement (Dean 2005, 2016a). As a result, people can be nudged into making decisions that economically benefit the billionaire class of surveillance capitalist platform owners and predictability can be calculated and people's future behaviour modified. There have been advances in virtual reality and brain-computer interfaces that create immersive experiences and interactions, blurring the lines between physical and digital realities. However, these technologies do not lead to true disembodiment; rather, they enhance or alter our perceptions of reality.

## **Dates**

The research inquiry took place 2015 – 2022, though the dates covered by the condition-ing report are wider. Under the heading **Photographic Documentation**, there is a general account of the history of photography, and its relation to the female body. I then locate my research work in a lineage of feminist art practice, where the artist uses her body as the primary material, as a means to question the representation of femininity, and attempt to hold discriminatory institutional systems to account. There is special recognition of feminist artists of the 1970's who pioneered the use of the artist's body as the material and site of artwork through different methods. In the subsequent chapters, the exploration of several artists working in similar territory is woven in.

## **2.c Description of condition:**

The **likable female image** finds herself contracting in a sexist workspace, shaped by fraternal capitalism. "Contracting" here refers to: entering formal agreements

between parties, performing tasks, providing services, or exchanging goods under specific terms and conditions); the impact of new communication technologies and advanced travel options, making the world more accessible but narrowing the content and people we encounter online (Pariser 2011), and ways in which women are often encouraged to shrink themselves to fit into narrow and limiting ideals of femininity (Wolf 1990, Plant 1997, Aruruzza et al 2019) particularly in the age of social media and digital communication (Elias, Gill, Scharff 2017, Banet-Weiser 2018).

Carole Pateman in her feminist political theory text "The Sexual Contract" (1988), suggests that it is not women's poor negotiating ability to create "good" contracts for themselves, rather that the problem is the contract itself, and that "contract is the means through which modern patriarchy is constituted" (1988: 1) A key point in Pateman's argument is that the transition from "classical patriarchalism" (1988: 24) to modern patriarchy altered who held power over women, but it did not change the fact that women were still dominated by men, and women did not have the same power over men's bodies as men had over women's bodies. The foundation of patriarchy remained intact, but it transformed into "fraternal patriarchy," where men as a collective group, the "brotherhood," ruled over women. Instead of power being concentrated in one man (the father), male power was distributed among more men.

This "brotherhood" is evident in the executive boards of dominant technology monopolies, with a hierarchical yet nearly horizontal structure composed of a class of transnational billionaire men. It is also seen in their predominantly male venture capitalist funders and their employment practices (Chang 2018). The influence of the brotherhood is not always visible but no less impactful, as it is manifested in the digital code that organises, ranks, and releases new content (Dair 2022, Aji 2022). In professional contexts, the female body is understood as a sign-emitting text to be managed by professional women, ensuring that appropriate messages are produced for the audience. However, social media and social networks

decouple content from its original context, resulting in a complex interplay of meanings and interpretations that mean:

The task of controlling and disciplining the female body is made even more difficult and complicated for women because the female body has a tendency to overflow. Women never know when their bodies display messages and meanings that were not intended. (Tretheway 1999: 437)

In the late 1990s, the professional woman's body was not supposed to be excessive, overweight, emotional, or overtly sexual in the masculine public sphere of work (Trethewey 1999). However, in the current neoliberal world of social media, where corporations prioritise behavioural data for growth, the excessive female body may be tolerated as long as it doesn't disrupt circulation of content. Popular feminism may celebrate the empowering aspects of the excessive female body, but it also becomes a target for bullying and shaming by misogynists (Banet-Weiser 2018).

It has been shown that public spaces and workplaces in the UK tend to favour the masculine. *Invisible Women*, by Caroline Criado Perez (2019) exposes how gender data gaps and biases sustain inequality. The book reveals systemic workplace disparities and underscores the need to rectify biases for an equitable future. I consider that social media platforms should be seen as hybrid public workplaces, comprising organisations within organisations, akin to Russian dolls, each layer presenting different challenges. For instance, an artist's primary place of work may be an artist-led studio, or offline cooperative gallery and these may be active in rejecting the marginalising of female identities. These primary local spaces, through their relation with the organisational life of social media and social networking platforms become complicit in the ongoing art-washing and legitimising of those organisations and sustain a global fraternal capitalist monopoly. In the digital realm, networked images are detached from the characteristics of the person or event they represent, and the data they hold is valued more than the image itself and the person (Dean 2005, Zuboff 2019, Tarnoff 2022).

For artworks (and all digital content) to be able to circulate on the internet they need to be reformatted to become information. For information to reliably get from one place to another uncorrupted, it needs to be reproducible and the properties to not change (Terranova 2004). Information becomes understood as a 'probability function' and when information is stripped of context it becomes a mathematical quantity, Vincent Miller (2020) calls this process 'informatization'. Miller proposes that it is difficult to apply human ethics in an informational landscape that is not interested in acknowledging the character of what is being communicated. Under capitalism, the pursuit of profit is not a choice but a necessity of the system as the imperative is to accumulate. If accumulation stops, there are bankruptcies. The economic system prioritises maximising profit, and wealth accumulation in the hands of a privileged few.

A person has to accept a series of regularly updating contracts (terms and services) to obtain access to the Internet, browse websites, scroll social media and make financial transactions. Although the range and number of contracts will vary according to the individual, at the very least there will be a contract with an Internet service provider (ISPs) to gain admission to the Internet. In his book *Internet for the People 2022*, technology writer Ben Tarnoff describes ISPs as "the Internet's slumlords" and describes their principal function as:

To fleece their customers and funnel money upward. They charge exorbitant prices for the privilege of using their deteriorating infrastructure because people have no alternative. (2022: 31)

Moreover, a fast Internet connection is still considered a luxury and something that a premium rate can be charged for. Tarnoff reminds us that:

If profit is the principle that determines how connectivity is distributed, millions will be forced to go without it – those who can't afford to pay, or those who live in places that aren't profitable enough to invest in. (2022: 35)

Scholars Jodi Dean and Shoshana Zuboff's work is concerned with the social and political consequences of capitalism, particular in the digital age. They highlight the

ways in which capitalism can lead to the concentration of power in the hands of a few dominant actors, be it through communicative capitalism (Dean 2005, 2016a, 2016b, 2020) or surveillance capitalism (Zuboff 2019). While both Dean and Zuboff are critical of capitalism, they approach their analysis from different angles. Dean emphasises the role of communication technologies and the impact on democracy, while Zuboff focuses on data surveillance and its implications for individual autonomy. Dean's work often centres on issues of political agency and collective action, whereas Zuboff's research delves deeply into the power dynamics and corporate practices of surveillance capitalism. They both advocate for increased awareness and critical engagement with these issues to foster a more just and democratic society.

Shoshana Zuboff coined the term surveillance capitalism in 2014, after which it featured in the title of her book, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (2019). Surveillance capitalism exploits the idea that conformity is unnecessary by offering personalised content and monetising people's predictable behaviours by extractive data practices. Where behavioural data is scraped, organised, analysed to calculate predictability and sold on that basis. An emphasis on data collection and database management has infiltrated every sector, including the arts. Under communicative and surveillance capitalism, people, their relationships, and creative practices like art are considered irrelevant, taking a backseat to the pursuit of communication flow, as charted by Dean (2005, 2016a), and the extractive operations, as outlined by Shoshana Zuboff (2019).

Jonathan Crary, in his text *Scorched Earth* (2022), takes a much more bombastic approach and tone concerning the future of the internet compared to Jodi Dean and Shoshana Zuboff. However, the three scholars agree that there are no revolutionary subjects on social media. Both Crary and Zuboff identify similar sensation, the feeling that the Internet is unstoppable and that change is impossible. Crary calls this 'unalterability' (2022: 03), an insistence that we cannot change the Internet, while Zuboff refers to it as 'inevitability,' the idea that something is certain to happen. Crary and Dean's position on regulation differs to

Zuboff they do not think that regulation will work. Shoshana Zuboff is more optimistic and calls for a reset: “We need to have laws that make this kind of secret extraction illegal. Simply criminalize it.” (Natarajan and Zuboff 2021) She considers that the systems can be regulated and that we have yet to try legislative solutions (2019). According to Dean (2019), communism represents the sole solution to address these problems because Capitalism's incapacity to tackle climate change, migrations, and resource conflicts will result in borders, military action and genocide. She proposes that the tech ‘Barons’ (2022) have enough power to evade the law, or to influence and change legislation in their favour to protect their capital, they are treated by governments as sovereign states.

Crary asserts that a radical refusal of the Internet is needed rather than adaption or resignation, as there is no time left to address climate change. He is resolute in his argument that the Internet cannot be a successful organising tool and that:

The reality is the Internet has proven to be a set of arrangements that prevent or close off even the tentative emergence of sustained anti-systemic organizing and action. (Crary 2022: 11)

He considers that is an act of failure of imagination to think of the Internet as permanent, because we need to change everything. His thinking demonstrates a preoccupation with planetary exhaustion, and extinction that Dean associates with as fixation on systems. Dean offers the concept of the Comrade (2019) as a counter to capitalism, and its tendencies of survivor and systems to capture the imagination of ‘the programmes of aesthetic and conceptual venues’ (Dean 2019: 11) and is positive that there is still an opening for politics, and for change.

## **2.d Photographic Documentation:**

From its invention, photography has been used for various purposes, including scholarly examination, personal enjoyment, categorisation of people, and breaking down bodies into discrete elements (Warner Marien 2003). The early use of photographic archives in criminal surveillance and eugenics played a pivotal role in shaping the foundation of our present-day surveillance society. Extending

through photography's history, professionals and amateurs have catalogued, shared, and swapped images that treat women's bodies as content for men's sexual enjoyment and amusement. Artists have long been involved in the production and circulation of images of women, initially as postcards for their convenience in studying and reproducing as paintings. Over time, these images shifted from a focus on form to a more explicit titillation. By the early 20th century, there were hundreds of thousands of images of women in different stages of undress in circulation as postcard-backed prints (Sadler 2015).

The advent of digital technology and the internet facilitated the broader circulation of intimate and self-generated imagery, sometimes leading to privacy breaches and exploitation. It is of note to digital photographic history and to the history of the Internet, that it was the top third of a 1972 Playboy centrefold that was scanned and used to test a compression algorithm to make image files manageable. The image, known as *Lena* and sometimes referred to as 'the first lady of the Internet' (Chang 2018: 1) was used to engineer the digital image format that would become the JPEG. *Lena* has served as a test subject for a range of editing techniques, colour correction and auto-focus. *Lena's* virtual presence permeates through the technological composition of digital images. Emily Chang, author of *Brotopia: Breaking Up The Boys Club of Silicon Valley* describes the use of *Lena's* image as "the industry's original sin" (2018: 1) and considers that;

the prolific use of *Lena's* photo can be seen as a harbinger of behavior within the tech industry (Chang 2018: 6)

There have been calls to "retire the image of *Lena* from computer science" (Culnane and Leins 2019) as a way of making women feel more welcome in tech. The story of *Lena* contributes to pointing out the difficulties of identifying the embedded politics in non-physical systems and the challenges to rectify them once the technology has been built and released. Scholar Sadie Plant (1997) presses that women's relationship to computers, and the emergence of digital machines is not minor, and women's roles in their creation is not a secondary one;

when computers were virtually real machines, women wrote the software on which they ran. And when computer was a term applied to flesh and blood workers, the bodies which composed them were female. Hardware, software, wetware – before their beginnings and beyond their ends, women have been the simulators, assemblers, and the programmers of the digital machines. (1997: 37)

Technologies, if anything, are designed with the primary goal of preserving or enhancing the existing status quo, rather than aiming to revolutionise the cultures into which they are introduced. In the past decade, a discernible transformation has occurred in the creation, sharing, and consumption of photographs within contemporary computerised society. The traditional role of photography as a means of representation has gradually transformed into algorithmic and generative processes due to the influence of computer connectivity and control. The expanded field of the social networked image holds personal information which:

gets transformed into valuable ‘data,’ which opens it up to all forms of economic, instrumental, and exploitative use, discouraging ethical links to real persons and their rights to privacy and autonomy.’ (Miller 2020: 24)

The suggestions we receive for future purchases and content to view, maybe composed after our data body is configured with data from others who **LIKE**, like us, and have similar browsing and purchasing histories. This means which ever corporate or government body has access to our data, can easily divide, subdivide and reconfigure our data body to suit their interests and aims, to maintain the status quo of their power.

In the course of this research journey, I have explored expanded photography as a method to emphasise the physicality of digital data, draw attention to a second shadow text, and materialise the impact of actions of a **LIKE** on human bodies in the digital world. Through this approach, I aim to pay greater attention to upholding traditional ethical principles of informed consent while exposing the vulnerabilities of individuals and their data in ways they may not have anticipated or consented

to when originally shared in the public domain. The human body is treated as decomposable, and when personal data is considered detached from the person, it becomes freed from moral and ethical responsibilities (Miller, 2020).

George Baker in *Photograph's Expanded Field*, 2005, observes that

even the most traditional of a younger generation of contemporary photographers cannot now resist the impulse to deal the concerns of other mediums into their practice, less utilizing photography to recode other practices than allowing the photograph to be recoded in turn (2005: 123)

Expanded photography is not exclusively attached to a camera-based activity, understood at its simplest it is 'new combinations of photography with other forms and activities' (Soutter 2016: 36) and can be hybridised by networked devices. Digital technologies provide possibilities for presentations that can push the image into three dimensions, through projection mapping technologies or printing techniques onto fabric, metal, wood and acrylic, it:

Pushes beyond photography's traditional domains of the wall, page and screen, yet retains a deep connection to photographic ideas or impulses. (Soutter 2016: 45)

Alfredo Cramerotti puts forward a definition of expanded photography as:

An attempt (one among many) to make sense of photography 'in excess', that is, how it transcends its established definition. It takes on board the fact that photography may no longer be subdivided and talked about according to genres but, rather, is a sort of visual alphabet and a visual database. (2011)

Baker considers the "rhetoric of oppositional thinking" (2005: 124) that he sees critics using, as necessary to map the expanded field of practice and that the "tearing of photography between oppositional extremes" (2005: 125) is productive:

whether we look to the photograph as torn between ontology and social usage, or between art and technology, or between what

Barthes called denotation and connotation, or what he also later called punctum and studium, between “discourse and document” (to use an invention of Benjamin Buchloh’s), between “Labor and Capital” (to use one of Allan Sekula’s), between index and icon, sequence and series, archive and art photograph. One could go on. (Baker 2005: 125)

To Baker's collection of oppositions, I will add the tearing of social photography between Shoshana Zuboff's two oppositional texts: the first text representing the visible content and the invisible second text encompassing the behavioural data. In the context of social networked photographs, these images undergo expansion, but simultaneously, they are persistently stripped down to "bytes, the most basic unit of information in computer storage" (byte | Definition & Facts, 2022), eventually being stored in numerous databases. This process of expansion and dissection illustrates the complex and multifaceted nature of social photography where the visible content becomes just one facet of a larger network of data that underlies the creation, sharing, and storage of these images.

## **2.e Measurement and Specification: LIKES and Likability**

The **LIKE** button was added to Facebook in 2009, allowing users to express approval or enjoyment of various content with a simple click and each click added to a visible counter next to the content, and later on webpages. Initially, Facebook's founder, Mark Zuckerberg, had concerns that the **LIKE** button might discourage meaningful contributions such as comments and sharing, but data showed the opposite effect, increasing post popularity and encouraging more comments (Bosworth 2010). To **LIKE** exists as an option across a range of web platforms, from social networks and forums to e-commerce sites, news pages and audio streaming and media services. **LIKES** have contributed to the **LIKE** economy, and artists, being self-employed, are expected to use social media to establish visibility (Gerlitz and Helmond 2013; Giupponi and Xu 2020).

Common goals across social media platforms are to go viral, equated to becoming highly popular. Connectivity and popularity on social media are measured by the number of contacts and **LIKES**, termed the "popularity principle" by Jose van Dijck (2013). She considers this particular type of *likability*:

Not a virtue attributed consciously by a person to a thing or idea, but the result of an algorithmic computation derived from instant clicks on the Like button. (van Dijck 2013: 13)

**LIKES** are used as a quantifiable social endorsement, and people and organisations actively seek them, with competitions and giveaways based on receiving **LIKES** (Sherman L. E. et al. 2016; Herman 2021). If **LIKES** are considered a commodity, then its value comes from scarcity, which means that for there to be a leader, with the most **LIKES**, that the majority of users should always (feel like they) have noticeably less than those in their peer or professional groups. Manipulation of **LIKES** using bots and click farms has raised concerns about the authenticity of perceived popularity on digital platforms (Lynch 2021). However, there is limited evidence of individual visual artists using click farms to boost their profiles, although there are a number of artists such as Amalia Ulman, Hito Steyerl and Adam Harvey who use internet popularity as a theme within their works. To be able to **LIKE** or receive **LIKES** on social media and social networking platforms is to accept the regularly updating terms and conditions of the relevant company, tethered to that particular geographical location and point in time.

**LIKES** play a crucial role in shaping our digital world, but their consequences are complex and often unknown. They can trigger sequences of events with different rhythms, impacts, and purposes, making it difficult to track how data from **LIKES** is used and stored by various companies (Smolaks 2019). This creates a technological loopback that sustains individualisation and enforces *likability*. Dean, in her 2005 essay, *Communicative Capitalism*, makes the argument that a fundamental feature enabled by networked technologies is that the unit of communication has shifted from a message to the contribution:

So, a message is no longer primarily a message from a sender to a receiver. Uncoupled from contexts of action and application – as

on the web or in print and broadcast media – the message is simply part of a circulating stream. (2005: 58)

It is not the content that is communicating, it is the action of contributing, posting a comment or using a social plugin (share, retweet, **LIKE**) that makes a person feel that they have engaged and have been active. While we are all busy participating and contributing, there is no space for response, and that:

The proliferation, distribution, acceleration and intensification of communicative access and opportunity, far from enhancing democratic governance or resistance results in precisely the opposite. (Dean 2005: 53)

In summary, **LIKES** wield substantial influence within the digital landscape, yet the extent of their consequences remains extensive and frequently beyond our comprehension. These consequences shape the data that moulds our experiences on the internet and our interactions across onlife

**LIKES** contribute to status and *likability*, both of which are types of popularity; they are interrelated but not equivalent. Mitch Prinstein defines *likability*:

It captures those we feel close to and trust, and the people who makes us happy when we spend time with them. (Prinstein 2017: 8)

My use and public use of the term *likability* has been formed from the 1987 seminal review of long-term effects of *likability* by developmental psychologists Jeff Parker and Steve Asher. They state that:

Likable people are generally well adjusted, they are smart (but not too smart!) They are often in a good mood. They can hold up their end of a conversation. But they make sure to give others a turn to speak, too. They are creative, especially at solving awkward social dilemmas. And perhaps most important: *they don't disrupt the group*. (As quoted in Prinstein 2017: 121, my emphasis)

The most likable people are those who cooperate with others, are helpful, share and follow the rules of their social cultural groups—and perhaps most importantly, do not disrupt the group.

**LIKES** are associated with being given social status by other people, equating to “where someone is well known, widely emulated, and able to bend others to his or her will” (Prinstein 2017: 07). While having a popular status does not mean that a person is well liked or happy, it has been noted that “we may even begin to believe that status is synonymous with contentment” (Prinstein 2017: 65). The promise of *likability* when tied to **LIKES** is that you will be safe at this moment, and rewarded in the future for the work you do now, and for your convivial behaviour. I view *likability* as an element of 'aspirational labor' within the context of content creation, a concept defined by scholar Brooke Erin Duffy in an interview as a,

belief that their (mostly) unpaid work, motivated by passion and the infectious rhetoric of entrepreneurialism, will eventually provide respectable income and rewarding careers (Bulet 2018: 305)

Duffy goes on to describe it as “a particular, gendered version of what Kuehn and Corrigan call “hope labor,” (Bulet 2018: 305) the gendered aspect, comes from qualities associated with femininity, though it's important to note that aspirational labour for creating *likable* content isn't exclusive to women.

That women are at risk of and carry the *likability* burden is well known, but in the main ignored or rationalised. There are peak times when it is in the public imaginary, one example is American presidential election times when discussion of women's *likability* becomes a hyper visible event. The topic of gendered *likability* of characters in literature is visited often. It is noted to be a:

Critical double standard—that tormented, foul-mouthed, or perverse male characters are celebrated, while their female counterparts are primly dismissed as unlikeable. (The New Yorker 2013)

An interview with the author Claire Messud gained significant media attention when she responded in horror to an interviewer who stated that she "wouldn't want to be friends" with one of her characters. Some responses defended likable characters (Weiner 2013) and others extolled the unlikable. Writer Roxane Gay addresses the unlikable character in an article titled *Not Here to Make Friends* (2014), in which she notes that the *likability* question did not begin with the Internet. Gay considers the unlikable female protagonist important:

In many ways, likability is a very elaborate lie, a performance, a code of conduct dictating the proper way to be. Characters who don't follow this code become unlikable. Critics who fault a character's unlikability cannot necessarily be faulted. They are merely expressing a wider cultural malaise with all things unpleasant, all things that dare to breach the norm of social acceptability. (Gay 2014)

There are numerous instances of individuals judged to breaching social norms online, of violating the terms and conditions of a particular platform. For women artists who incorporate the female body in their artwork, there are cases of having their work removed, accounts suspended, or accounts closed.

The censorship of images by Instagram, an online photo-sharing application and social network platform, has given rise to the creation of an artist book titled *Pics Or It Didn't Happen: Images Banned from Instagram*, Edited by Arvida Byström and Milly Soda in 2017, the book showcases 270 images that Instagram removed. The editors emphasise that the censored content primarily revolves around female bodies, encompassing aspects such as nipples, vaginal secretions, and body hair (Banks 2017). The distinct difference in the treatment of male and female nipples on social media platforms has drawn considerable attention, giving rise to the viral slogan and rallying banner #FreeTheNipple. This movement has brought together artists and activists from across the globe, materializing through both online and offline initiatives (Shapiro 2021).

According to reports, Instagram convened a closed-door meeting in 2019, inviting twenty artists and museum leaders to discuss the platform's stance on nudity and

ensorship (Holmes 2019). Since participants were required to sign non-disclosure agreements, direct quotes from the meeting are unavailable. Nonetheless, insights can be gleaned from those invited or in attendance. Among them was artist Joanne Leah, an advocate for the Artists Against Social Media Censorship coalition. She champions artists whose content has been removed and orchestrated a petition aimed at major social media sites and platforms. The petition urges these entities to reevaluate their community guidelines to put an end to the unjust censorship of artists (Petition — Artists Against Social Media Censorship, n.d.).

Eminent U.S. artist Betty Tompkins, although unable to attend the meeting, was among the invitees. Her artistic practice involves crafting explicit photorealist paintings on a grand scale, which Instagram has removed multiple times. In an Instagram post on October 25, 2019, Tompkins underscored,

Instagram does NOT follow its own guidelines which are very clear: **Nudity In photos of paintings and sculptures is OK, too.** There are no qualifiers here. They are “OK” Period. (Tompkins, 2019).

In an interview, Tompkins emphasised the pivotal role of social media accounts in artists' careers, stating,

It's so scary because we all use social media, and Instagram in particular, to advance our careers. The first thing that really struck me when the account was down was, 'Oh, my God, how am I going to advertise this show?' They are censoring me personally, as an artist (Betty Tompkins quoted in Shaw, 2019).

In this post, Tompkins openly recognises the significance of social media and social networking platforms as vital channels for promoting and propelling artists' careers. She also highlights the delicate balance between being considered *likable* within corporate terms and conditions when creating artwork that expressly challenges social norms.

### 3a: Exhibition-as-Chapter #1 CONTENT



Fig. 8 Digital asset for Content exhibition ©Liv Pennington, 2018

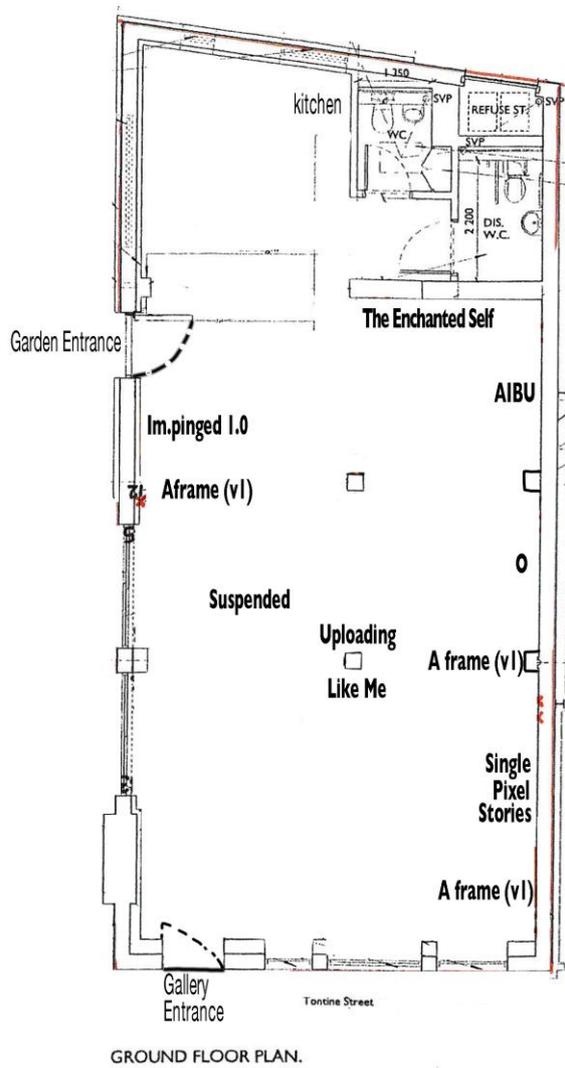
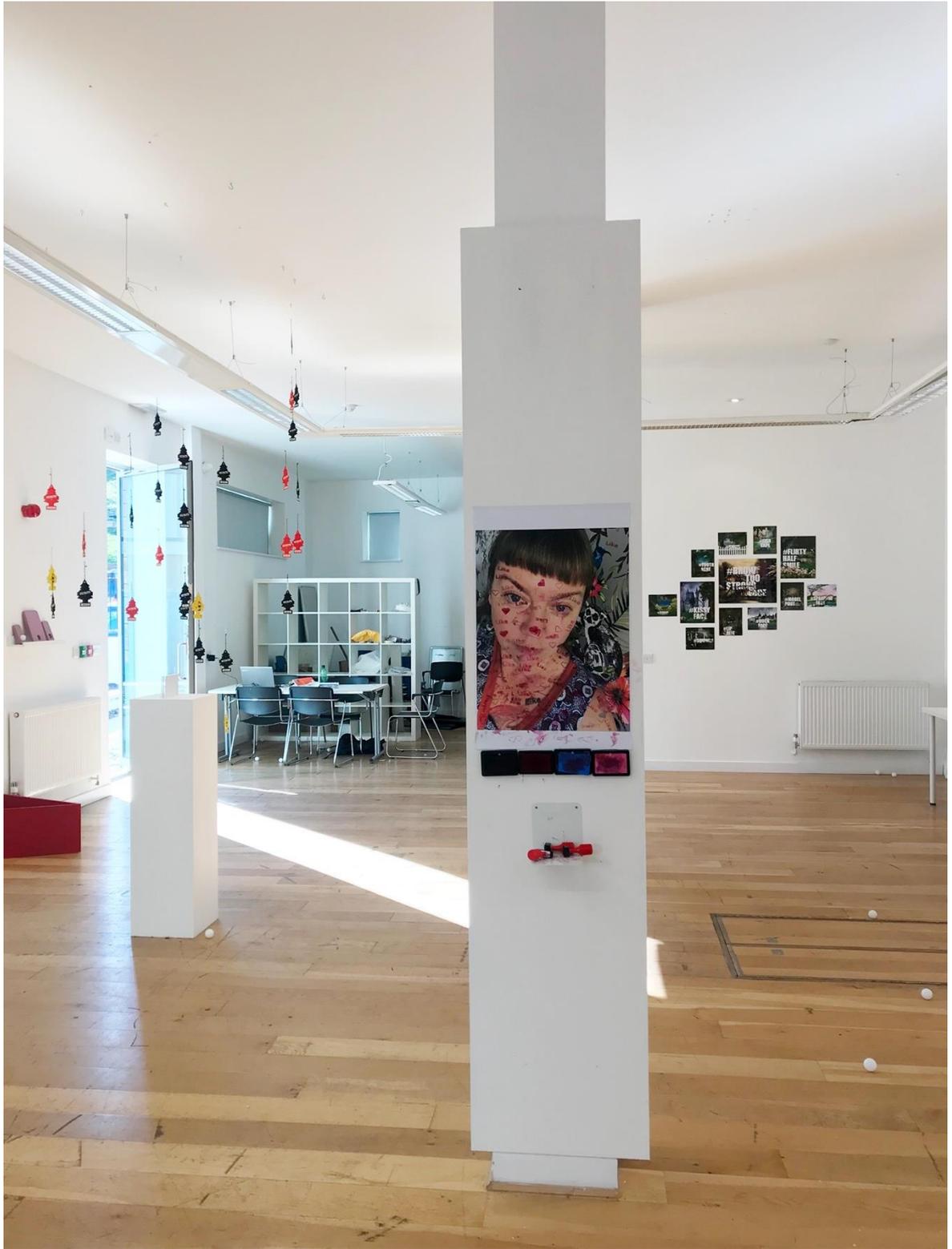


Fig. 9 Exhibition installation plan for CONTENT 2018 Floor plan, Brewery Tap, University for the Creative Arts Project Space, Folkestone with ©University for the Creative Arts



*Fig. 10 Like Me 2018 Installation view day two of the exhibition ©Liv Pennington*



*Fig. 11 Installation view L-R: Suspended 2018, A Frame 2018, Im.Pinged 2018 ©Liv Pennington*



*Fig. 12 Installation view from back of gallery 2018 ©Liv Pennington*



*Fig. 13 Installation view 2018 ©Liv Pennington*



*Fig. 14 Installation view L-R: Like Me 2018, A-Frame – vulva (2018), Single Pixel Stories 2018, A-Frame - eye 2018 ©Liv Pennington*

### 3b: 'CONTENT'

This chapter discusses the set of nine research works that were presented in CONTENT, an offline public exhibition held from 1 to 3 November 2018 at the Brewery Tap, The University for the Creative Arts Project Space, Folkestone. The artworks were made between 2016 and 2018 and began in the studio as experimental material responses to Jodi Dean's 2005 essay *Communicative Capitalism: Circulation and the foreclosure of politics*. Dean's proposition is that communicative exchanges:

Our specific contributions (our messages, posting, books, articles, films, letter to the editor) simply circulate in a rapidly moving changing flow of content, in contributing, in participating, we act as if we do not know this. (Dean 2005: 59)

Under communicative capitalism, everything is “**content.**” To think of the economic function of messages and their role as a commodity in capitalist exchange means that it is possible to consider that they have no “use” value, that the message does not matter as they are like any other commodity, and “are the basic elements of capitalist production” (Dean 2005: 56). Dean statement that the meaning of content does not matter, is a point of view shared by communication engineers, where the relevant engineering problem for networks is how to deliver a message successfully (Terranova 2004).

Dean's idea that content seems meaningless is heart-breaking, as well as antagonistic. If the social network platform is one where:

The message is simply part of a circulating data stream. Its particular content is irrelevant. Who sent it is irrelevant. Who receives it is irrelevant. That it need be responded to is irrelevant. The only thing that is relevant is circulation, the addition to the pool. Any particular contribution remains secondary to the fact of circulation. (Dean 2005: 58)

Following Dean's line of thought, one could consider that artworks, when placed in the intense spaces of circulation on social media platforms and “uncoupled from contexts of action and application” (Dean 2005: 58), are most likely treated as

messages. As such, their meaning is not important; their primary function in this context is to add value for the companies that accrue data. Thus, Jodi Dean considers that:

Politics in the sense of working to change current conditions may well require breaking with and through the fantasies attaching us to communicative capitalism. (2005: 71)

To be clear, Jodi Dean does not claim that political resistance is never facilitated through networked communications, but that it is context-dependent. The fantasies that Dean refers to have their roots in psychoanalysis and Marxism. As such, they have particular specificities; fantasy offers the illusion that we will be comforted by the object that we pursue, it offers a source of relief from the conditions of desire. She uses the psychoanalytic notion of the drive to read networks and to offer an explanation of how people become entrapped in circuits of domination, arguing that these effects also undermine capacities for democracy. That,

Drive is a keeping on beyond pleasure, beyond use, beyond desire. In the reflexive turn of the drive, drive's loop back round upon itself, activity becomes passivity, stuckness in a circuit: *I know that you know that I know that you know that I know*. (Dean 2016: 2 original emphasis)

This statement suggests that when we view human drives, instincts, impulses, and actions as functions of the mind, they are fundamentally connected to the body and have tangible associations with the physical world. In other words, our psychological processes and behaviours are deeply rooted in our physical existence and interact with the material aspects of reality.

Exhibition-as-chapter #1 **CONTENT** used a hybrid of methods, including but not limited to expanded photography, attendee labour, surveys, and through performing as a gallery host, I observed the behaviour of attendees and of myself. This was done as the initial attempt to break away from the fantasies attached to being an engaged and active online citizen. I engaged "onlife" paradigms through humour to approach serious subjects in a non-threatening way, as to cause

physical interruptions in the circuit of the gallery. The collection of artworks aimed to convey both a sense of unease and disbelief to the public audience that women often feel compelled to alter their bodies and images in order to achieve a 'look' that aligns better with prevailing social and cultural standards, so that they can be looked at and **LIKED** as content.

Exhibition-as-chapter (e-a-c) is a term that I have coined in the process of this research inquiry. The exhibition-as-chapter delivers a commitment to Practice -as- Research, and to Robin Nelson's description of "praxis as being theory imbricated within practice" (2013: 05), whilst also developing my research practice, centring how the organisation of information influences how it is read and understood. The e-a-c is not an illustration of theory or to be seen as a summary of the research. It is a system, and a method, where I have approached the operative nature of the database and used this to create a set of rules, by which I produce the e-a-c. As a method it is rich and multi-purpose; it operates to (i) test materials, (ii) play with scale and distance, (iii) reveal associative links between artworks, (iv) provide space for critical reflection, (v) offer opportunity for feedback from critical friends, (vi) observe visitors to the exhibition and (vi) to respond live to visitors' questions.

It is a lively space that resonates with academics Craig Batty and Marsha Berry's ideas of

A research space filled with constellations of connections, which serves as a vital incubator for risk taking, reflexivity and fearless critical thinking. (Batty and Berry 2015)

As well as supporting the UKs Research Excellence Framework (REF) guidance of:

A process of investigation leading to new insights effectively shared (UK Ref, 2019: 48)

I work with databases but my work is not experienced as a database, as

A database, in itself, does not *present* data: it contains data. The data must always be in an arrangement in order to be read. And it must be the arrangement that gives the data meaning, (Weinbren 2007: 68 emphasis in original)

The e-a-c functions to structure and arrange a collection of artworks. This is commonly known in an art context as 'curate, where art curation is the process of selecting, organising, and presenting artworks in a thoughtful and meaningful manner to create a coherent and engaging experience for viewers. While it is indeed organised thoughtfully, its purpose is not solely on creating an exhibition experience. Instead, it aims to facilitate the identification of connections between individual artworks and to support data filtering.

The primary conceptual intent behind creating multiple e-a-cs was to facilitate data filtering. Through this approach, the exhibition is reviewed, and relevant artworks are extracted for potential future development, while unnecessary or irrelevant pieces are removed or excluded. Data filtering is a pivotal aspect of data preprocessing and analysis. It allows researchers to work with manageable subsets of data that directly pertain to their research questions or objectives. By eliminating irrelevant data, noise, or outliers, filtering enhances the accuracy and efficiency of subsequent analyses and helps in deriving meaningful insights from the data.

Three exhibition-as-chapters were initially planned, the concept being that each successive exhibition would include research artworks at different stages of development and refinement. This facilitated the opportunity for an artwork to be included in more than one exhibition, in different states of fine-tuning and to be observed from a multiplicity of angles. The gradual accumulation of artworks over time facilitates the exploration of associations and the establishment of connections between thinkers and makers as the research journey unfolds. My exposure to new texts meant that as certain artworks are shown for a second time in conversation with new works that it is possible to build a fuller picture of the research inquiry to that point. This cycle of testing in public and returning to the privacy of the studio for reflection provided an opportunity to analyse the work over

a period of time and to identify how the research artworks stand up to the development of ideas. The exhibition-as-chapter occurred twice in the form of a public exhibition, the third e-a-c was amended to observe covid 19 regulations.

The artworks produced and exhibited within the exhibition-as-chapter sections are not:

Where one finds *answers to questions*, but rather where one *contemplates* and *experiences* situations, themes or feeling complexes (or ways of being). (Boutet 2013: 30)

The selection of materials in the creation, installation, circulation and display of artworks was carefully considered. By curating works to guide the flow of visitors through the gallery space, I created physical loops that encouraged circular movements, utilising the entire gallery. I purposely composed squeeze points so that people would have to negotiate with one another, either verbally or by responding to bodily gestures. This response directly addressed the concept of the "filter bubble," an unperceived shift in information flow as discussed by Internet activist Eli Pariser (2011). Filter bubbles result from algorithms presenting content based on a person's past searches and interactions, as well as those of their network. This can lead to individuals existing in an information bubble, exposed only to agreeable perspectives, sheltered from opposing viewpoints. I felt it crucial to incorporate constrictions within the exhibition to stimulate conversations or, at minimum, prompt recognition of each other's presence.

My use of expanded photography as a method sought to encourage visitors to this first e-a-c to perform a series of physical bodily movements and to handle tools to be able to access and read certain art works. I wanted to test if interactions between human bodies and artworks embodying **LIKES** and circulation concepts could reveal how the Internet, ICTs, social media, and networking platforms control access and profit from content movement. The e-a-c method creates a virtuous loop, where positive effects compound over time and become visible in the development of artworks, and provides a way of scheduling a space for reflection

on outcomes at regular stages of the research. It was a tactic to bring the material practice to the fore of the research and to enable conversations with others, inside and outside of academia.

I introduce the artworks in the following text in the order in which I would want a visitor to the exhibition project space to meet them.

### 3.b1 LIKE ME



*Fig. 15 Like Me, 2018, shot on iPhone, printed on billboard paper, print size 40cm x 53cm ©Liv Pennington*

*Like Me, 2018* (Fig. 15) is a wall-based photographic installation, comprising a selfie-type image shot on an iPhone and printed on billboard paper. It features a conventional selfie pose, with the image not utilising post-production filters. This is evident from the visibility of pores, stray hair, facial hair, wrinkles, and skin

blemishes. I opted to imprint the word "Like" directly onto the skin using black ink, embedding the instruction to **LIKE** as a command within the image. The ink has seeped into the skin, with the first letter being nearly illegible.



*Fig. 16 Like Me 2018 Documentation Image, day two of CONTENT exhibition ©Liv Pennington*

The paper surface of the installed image begins the exhibition in pristine condition, and over the duration of the exhibition the image is rubber stamped with ink stamps by visitors (Fig. 16). There is a small shelf underneath the image that holds three rubber stamps, one spells the word like and the other two are heart-shaped. Four different-coloured ink pads were attached to the wall under the image.

*Like Me 2018*, was designed to elicit a physical response from visitors,<sup>3</sup> aiming to symbolise the online action of "liking as a mechanism that both conceals and reveals information. In one of my sketches (Fig 17) I clearly identify that I think that signalling a **LIKE** has a physical element, involving different types of touch. First the hand of the person on the smart device, the **LIKE** counter changes, the viewer reads the **LIKE** and then a complex interplay of sensory, neurological, emotional and physiological responses occur. The **LIKE** can be said to have touched the body, or at least made the body touch itself, by allowing the person to perceive and react to their situation.

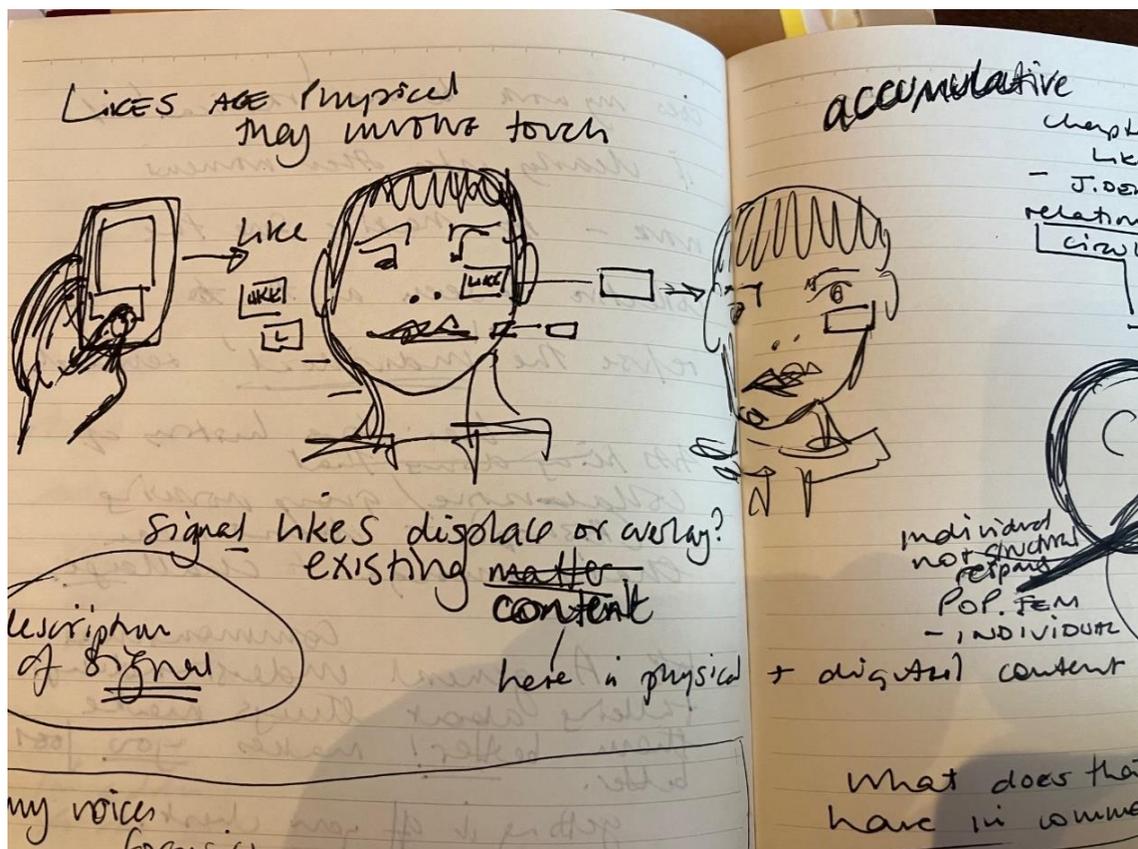


Fig. 17 Development sketch for *Like me* ©Liv Pennington

When a visitor stamps a "like" on the image (Fig. 18 page 85), they initiate a communicative action that parallels signalling a **LIKE** online. The genuine meaning remains ambiguous to others, who can only observe that a **LIKE** has been clicked/stamped. At a platform level, this action generally implies that the content might be well-received among users who share similar interests and have shown

<sup>3</sup> To view a timelapse video recorded at the private view on 1 November 2018, please follow the link <http://livpennington.com/phd-supporting-videos> and enter the password: Phdvideos

appreciation for comparable content before. The contextual data linked to that online **LIKE** remains hidden, potentially stored across multiple databases contributing to a user profile. This data could be utilised in real-time bidding, a process where companies purchase and place advertisements online through automated auctions (Adjust, n.d.).



*Fig. 18 Detail Like Me 2018 ©Liv Pennington*

For this first iteration, I did not want heavily textured or heavyweight matt paper as it would perhaps appear too valuable to destroy (Fig. 18, above). The suggestion by the print technician to use billboard paper was aesthetically and materially congruent to the project because of the association with advertising spaces. In asking people to “Like Me”, I was instructing the audience to act, to signal that they had understood the request emitting from the art work. It is pleasurable to use an advertising technique to:

Bypass the noise of crowded informational milieu by establishing a connection with potential customers... The purpose of communication (the exclusion of noise and the establishment of contact) is simultaneously presupposed, technically produced, and actively reinforced. (Terranova 2004: 17)

I further distorted the signal by promoting the use of ink stamps as a graffiti-like action. This was an effort to disrupt the streamlined and efficient communication machinery (Fig. 19, below).



*Fig. 19 Detail Like Me 2018 detail ©Liv Pennington*

During the course of three days, attendees left their mark on the image through stamping. As a general observation, children tended to create multiple marks from a single stamp, while adults were less exuberant and stamped just once. The act of physically stamping a printed image with a rubber stamp submerges the image under ink in a literal and tangible way. Through these visitor interactions, the ink-stamped image evolves into a record of their physical presence at the site, alluding to the labour of online audiences without subjecting the individual who **"LIKES"** to consequences.

The act of rubber stamping can be interpreted as a form of bureaucracy, often signifying approval without in-depth consideration. Its connection to information circulation is seen through its association with librarians who stamp books in and out of circulation, contributing to the flow of public information. Originally, the rubber stamp had a masculine origin, playing a role in sealing official documents for a kingdom's functioning. This evolved into a signet ring symbolising a male

bearer's wealth and significance (Austin, nd), eventually replaced by the signature. The decline of the physical wax seal parallels the current state of digital literacy. In today's era, digital literacy is crucial for a public capable of deciphering "fake news" and detecting disinformation presented by deepfakes. Regrettably, this hasn't fully materialised yet.

*Like Me 2018*, employs audience interaction strategically to infuse motion into the image and audience labour to sustain the artwork's vitality. There's an inherent openness to the future of *Like Me*, suggesting that the impact of events expands beyond my personal control. This approach draws inspiration from the internet, where:

Users keep a site alive through their labour, the cumulative hours of accessing the site (thus generating advertising), writing messages, participating in conversations and sometimes making the jump to collaborators. (Terranova 2004: 91)

In *Updating to Remain the Same: Habitual New Media* (2016), Wendy Hui Kyong Chun argues that media becomes most influential when its usage becomes habitual. She suggests moving away from the assumption that everyone is inevitably exposed online, emphasising instead the right to be forgotten and the avoidance of storage. The dual significance of updates as both destructive and preservative forces are recognised through the process of continuous updating and overwriting, created by *Like Me 2018*. This artwork demands substantial input, which might be perceived as inefficient labour. However, this can also be viewed in contrast as an efficient way to garner attention from viewers, which is a trait of being optimised for circulating online. There is an awareness of the potentiality of virality in this artwork, and of making the labour involved visible.

In the discussion of CON\$ENT in Chapter 5, I introduce a trial involving smaller prints to encourage complete immersion of the image through layers of stamped ink. I juxtaposed these prints to imply that the vulnerability of the female body is exposed through the labour required for its circulation as likable content.

### 3b.2 Suspended



*Fig. 20 Suspended, 2018 (6in x 4in B&W photograph in plexiglass box, twenty-four air fresheners, plinth) installation view ©Liv Pennington*

*Suspended* 2018, is an expanded photography work that seeks to raise questions about circulation, ageing and images of femininity (Fig. 20, above). The installation is comprised of twenty-four car air fresheners suspended by fishing wire at various heights. They loosely circle a small, clear acrylic photo block that sits on top of plinth that measures 120cm in height.

The 6 x 4 inch black and white chemically printed photograph portrays a clichéd glamour shoot with a teenage girl (see Fig. 21, page 89). According to the online Oxford Dictionary of English, glamour photography is defined as,

the practice of taking photographs of a sexually suggestive or mildly pornographic nature, typically featuring nude or topless young women" (Stevenson, 2010).

The photograph exudes a sense of hastiness, and the girl avoids direct eye contact with the camera. Positioned in the lower third of the image, the girl's body is depicted lying on her stomach in a matching bra and knicker set on a fur rug, in front of an unlit large fireplace. The technical quality is lacking, giving it an amateurish feel; the body appears over-exposed due to the on-camera flash. The composition cuts off one leg at mid-calf and trims the toes of the other foot, while also distorting both horizontal and vertical lines.



*Fig. 21 Detail: Suspended, 2018 ©Liv Pennington*

The girl in the black and white photograph is me, aged fourteen or fifteen. In 1991, I had plans to create and sell posters of this photograph. Back then, capturing this image felt like an act of asserting my independence, an attempt to discover avenues towards financial autonomy. While I might have associated it with feminism, I lacked the awareness to pinpoint a specific form of feminism at the time. By presenting myself confidently as a commodified image, I aimed to carve out a pathway to financial self-reliance, separate from my family. This mindset mirrors aspects of contemporary social media influencer marketing. It serves as an instance of a young woman embracing her object status, seeking to remain on a pedestal, evaluated by conventional social standards, and reaping the benefits linked to being attractive, popular, youthful, and compliant.

The clear acrylic container alludes to narratives found in fairy tales like Snow White, while the title evokes associations with science fiction films that depict suspended animation and cryogenics—a process where deceased individuals are cryogenically frozen in the anticipation of revival through future advancements in science. The act of enclosing this photograph in acrylic can be seen as a symbol of the aspiration to preserve and bring back analogue photography and youthful vitality.

I sought to disrupt the flow of people through a space by overwhelming their olfactory senses, rendering access to the image uncomfortable. To approach and engage with the image closely, visitors must first endure the overpowering fragrance emitted by the air fresheners. I intentionally inundated the area with chemical fragrance to highlight a scenario where equal access was not universal. The artwork troubles the visitors' bodies, as it acknowledges that representation is painful, imposed, laden with power relations. Smell plays a significant role in our experiences, memories, and emotions, and contributes to our overall perception of the world around us. I used smell as a way of drawing attention to how other types of information enter the body – the source of the smell was visible, but the odorant molecules of the fragrance move through the air invisibly, unseen by the human eye but making contact with our skin.

The layers of chemical scents were overwhelming, with reports of visitors experiencing headaches due to the intensity. The headaches varied based on visitors' existing sensitivities and their time spent in the exhibition space. The work prompted a spectrum of bodily responses, aiming to draw attention to the intricate and multifaceted nature of social exclusion. One visitor, who had a fragrance allergy, maintained a distance from the artwork to minimise exposure. This sparked conversations among other attendees present in the gallery. Attendees shared personal stories of instances when they couldn't access or engage with objects or events due to physical barriers like allergies and medical conditions. Although it's not clear whether attendees directly linked personalised access to the internet with a single artwork, the collective impact of all the artworks in the exhibition likely contributed to this realisation.

*Suspended* plays with the concept of circulation in a number of ways, firstly through the title. "Suspended" alludes to both sporting penalties and school disciplinary actions where individuals are removed from general circulation due to rule violations. This form of punishment involves being barred from routine activities. In literature or film, we often accept implausible scenarios by suspending disbelief, enabling us to enjoy even the most improbable plots. Conversely, there are instances where we are invited to engage with overtly fictional worlds as a means of political escapism, enabling us to envision an alternate, improved reality. In the realm of "Suspended," I envision a world dominated by popular feminism. This aligns with the perspective of feminist scholar Sarah Banet-Weiser, who contends:

Popular feminism tinkers on the surface, embracing a palatable feminism, encouraging individual girls and women to just *be* empowered. (2018: 21)

that feminist action has become increasingly commodified, prompting a shift towards market-driven feminism. My work delves into these notions, aiming to provoke contemplation on the convergence of fiction, politics, and imagined realities. Popular feminism, as defined by Banet-Weiser (2018), doesn't challenge capitalism or mainstream politics. Instead, it centres on the individual, embraces entrepreneurship, and welcomes expanding markets. Popular feminism often gains visibility by avoiding direct confrontations with inequitable structures, which is why it may not challenge prevailing inequalities head-on. In this realm, it might feel easier to temporarily set aside critical analysis by suspending disbelief.

The film "Se7en" (1995), a fictional crime thriller, influenced my choice of tree-shaped car air fresheners. The film revolves around the pursuit of a serial killer who employs the seven deadly sins as his modus operandi. In a particularly memorable scene depicting the sin of sloth, numerous air fresheners are used to mask the stench of a decomposing body. Sloth is a sin characterized by omission, a lack, defined by the Oxford Dictionary as "reluctance to work or to make an effort; laziness" (2010). It signifies a yearning for an effortless existence. The remarkable technique of olfactory masking in the film resonated with me, prompting thoughts about the cultural imperative for women to "stay young" in order to secure their

livelihoods. The extensive anti-aging market aimed at women, is projected to reach \$45.6 billion by 2026 (Research and Markets, 2022). While it might appear contradictory to associate aesthetic labour with avoiding work, I draw this connection to highlight the distinction between endeavours to change and revolutionise a system versus the labour required to maintain the status quo.

The twenty-four car air fresheners used in *Suspended* aim to make looking at youth uncomfortable as a way of pointing to the fact that older female bodies are only deemed interesting if they act as proof of defying aging. This is evident in the regular headlines attached to English television star Carol Vorderman, describing how she “defies age in daring selfie as fans left impressed” (Rodger 2022) and “shows off age-defying figure in tight gym gear” (Gallagher 2022). Post-feminist and popular feminist portrayals of women attempting to not age, associate this with an apparent empowerment that women “choose” their appearance. This is at odds with feminist texts, such as Naomi Wolf’s *The Beauty Myth* (1991), where creating anxiety about female aging is considered a patriarchal strategy for diverting older women’s power:

Ageing in women is “unbeautiful” since women grow more powerful with time, and since the links between generations of women must always be newly broken. Older women fear young ones, young women fear old, and the beauty myth truncates for all the female life span. (1991: 14)

The pressure to stay youthful is more pronounced in careers that centre physical appearance. Moreover, the increase in the use and acceptance of video-calls for work and socialising linked to remote working due to the Covid-19 pandemic has led to a demonstrable increase in make-up sales and plastic surgery, dubbed the “Zoom Boom” (Livingstone 2020).

### 3.3b A-frames



*Fig. 22 A-Frame- Vulva 2018 MDF, 6in x 4in print, mirror cut to dimensions of iPad ©Liv Pennington*

The three *A-Frames* 2018 are sculptural sketches, resembling advertising street signs (Fig. 22, above). Each is painted in a single, solid colour derived from a pixel within a personal image. The selected pixels were printed and taken to a local DIY shop for paint colour matching. One pixel is from the centre of my lips, another is a grey-blue pixel from the edge of my pupil, and the third is from an image of my labia. These A-Frames are constructed from two MDF pieces connected by a hinge along one of the shorter edges, with a total length of 30 inches, mirroring my inner leg measurement. The physical form, coupled with the title "A-Frame," draws attention to the notion of being a walking advertisement or a mobile target for advertising. However, this advertising connection went unnoticed by most attendees I spoke to. I used this feedback to rework the piece, as discussed in exhibition-as-chapter #2.

Each A-Frame is paired with a mirror cut to match the dimensions of popular smart devices like iPhones, iPads, or Android smartphones. These mirrors are positioned to reflect the convergence of the legs and lower limbs, the crotch area on a person (Fig. 23, page 95). The *A-Frames* artworks grew out of a desire for increased physicality. I sought to make people aware of their body as they access content, emphasising that content consumption is not a passive activity. The *A-Frames* can allude to both up-skirting and self-inspection (Fig. 24, page 96) meaning the desire to look closer—one consensual and one unauthorised, yet both driven by curiosity.

A smartphone eliminates the need to transfer photos off the device or involve external parties, effectively transforming them into personal editing and private storage tools. This accessibility to intimate images and online pornography has given rise to new expectations, as well as the rise of cosmetic treatments and procedures related to the appearance of intimate body parts such as the vulva, labia, perineum, and anus (Braun 2017). A case of online image culture extending beyond the digital realm to tangible bodily practices is exemplified by the suggestion that medical cosmetic procedures can enhance online profiles. This was vividly illustrated by an advertisement board outside a GP surgery in Edinburgh in 2016, adorned with the Facebook logo and the phrase, "Medical cosmetic treatments available here. Come on in. Side effects may include more likes" (Baker, K. 2016).

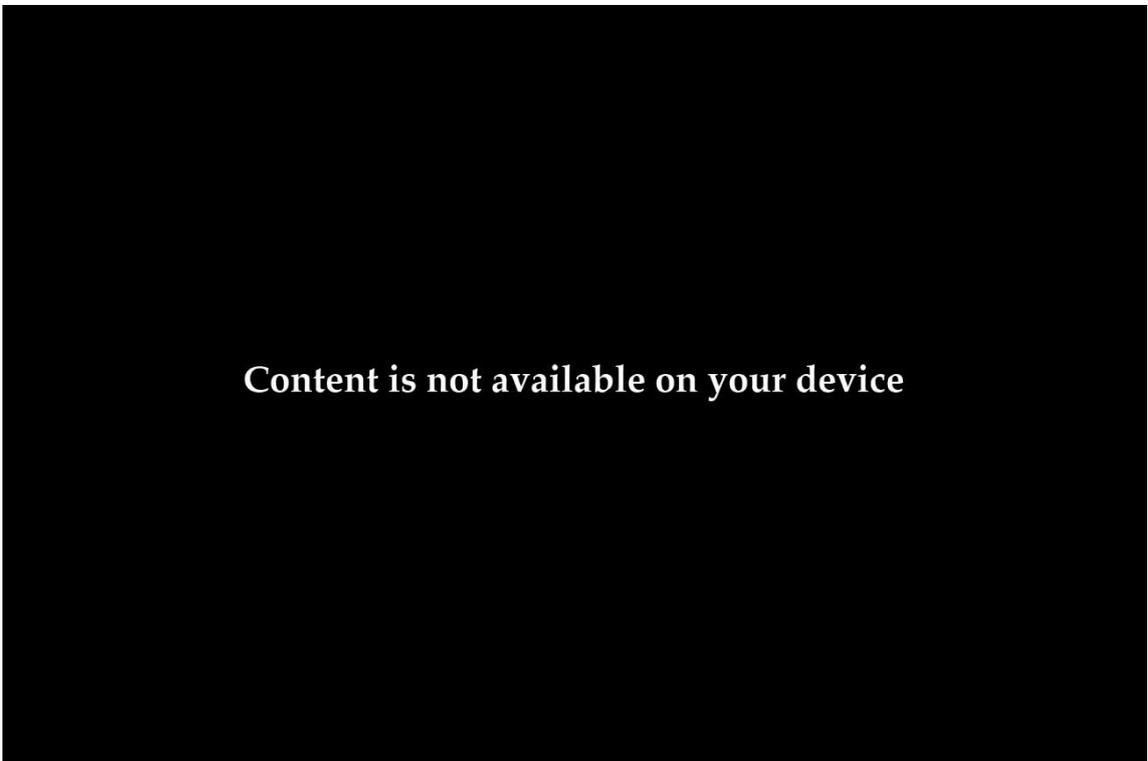


*Fig. 23 A-Frame- eye 2018 (MDF, 6in x 4in print, mirror cut to dimensions of Samsung Galaxy 10) ©Liv Pennington*

When the *A-Frames* were installed, I watched with delight as people squatted down and caught sight of themselves in the mirrors while trying to read the text. It became evident that I was successful in restricting access to content for some visitors, as not all individuals could position themselves optimally for unobstructed access. I observed various approaches, with some attempting contortions to get closer to the artwork. Some reached for a handhold on a wall or someone else's hand to steady themselves while kneeling down. Certain individuals leaned from the hip in their efforts to bring their faces closer for reading the small text (Fig. 23, above) while others refrained from trying altogether



*Fig. 24 A-Frame- Lips 2018 (MDF, 6in x 4in print, mirror cut to dimensions of iPhone 6)  
©Liv Pennington*



*Fig. 25 Detail from A Frame, text on card 2018 ©Liv Pennington*

Exclusion, bias and discrimination in digital platforms is a common issue, but often people aren't consciously aware of it. Examples that have become public are reports of Facebook's targeted advertising tools allowed employers to exclude certain demographics, including women from seeing their job advertisements (Hao 2021). In this artwork, the textual content reiterates that that the material is not accessible to the viewer, implying that the challenge resides in the individual rather than the technology itself.

### 3.4b Im.Pinged v1



*Fig. 26 Im.Pinged v1 2018 (Shaped MDF dimensions of iPhone 6, iPad, Samsung galaxy 10, emulsion paint colour picked from the artist-researcher's personal photograph collection) ©Liv Pennington*

*Im.Pinged v1 2018* (Fig. 26) takes the form of three MDF sketches hand cut in the shape and scale of an iPhone 6, an iPad and a Samsung galaxy 10. Where the home button would be on the iPhone is a hole the size of a ping pong ball. All three are painted in a soft matt pink (reused from one of the *A-Frames artworks*). They sit on a small shelf attached to the wall.

During the three-day exhibition, I noticed individuals inserting or taking out ping pong balls from the holes in the sculptures. On the opening day I had emptied out a bag of fifty ping pong balls on to the gallery floor, aiming to infuse an element of spontaneity into the design. These ping pong balls can symbolise the interplay between status and *likability*, a central theme of this investigation. The ping pong balls provide visitors with a chance to engage in a playful manner, whether by kicking or throwing the ball, to observe the resulting outcomes. Each kick or throw of the ball holds the potential to forge novel connections between objects and individuals, fostering unique relationships between the two.

Collectively, the fifty small white plastic balls possessed the potential to incite chaos if individuals embraced the invitation to throw them or inadvertently interacted with them. Generally, adults opted to gently nudge the balls aside with their toes or employ the side of their foot to kick them, without directly handling them. However, during the private view event, I observed a few children promptly picking up and tossing the balls as they came across them. This swiftly evolved into a strategic approach of gathering and scooping up as many balls as possible, to ensure a sustained engagement in a playful "battle. While the balls had the capacity to spark playfulness among children, the adults sought a sense of validation for their actions within this context. Notably, some adults seemed uncomfortable, likely because they perceived the gallery space as a professional space for someone's artistic creation.

The sketches confirmed that the shape and scale of the MDF had promise but the thickness of the fibreboard was wrong, it made the objects feel too heavy, and similar to children's wooden toy. I felt that the inaccuracies of the curved corners created by being hand sawn and the roughness of the hand sanding needed to be either exaggerated to emphasis the human hand or resolved by closer more exacting machine work, offered by laser cutting technology. I discuss the further development of *Im.Pinged* in chapter 3, page 152.

### 3.5b The Enchanted Self



Fig. 27 Installation view, *The Enchanted Self* 2016 – ongoing (Digital c-type gloss prints, size various: 5in x 4in to 20in x 16in) ©Liv Pennington

*The Enchanted Self* 2016-ongoing is an ongoing series of digital images that were outputted as digital c-type gloss prints and installed on the wall in a salon-style picture hang (Fig.27). The text in the image draws inspiration from an online article in Seventeen Magazine (8 December 2015) titled "*There are 8 Kinds of Selfie Faces Every Girl Makes On Instagram.*" Conducting an internet search using the term "selfie faces that girls need to know" on Google.com on 6 December 2021 now yields thirteen named poses. It occurred to me that if women and girls were adopting these named poses, they were probably incorporating the corresponding hashtag, such as #duckface, with their images. This text serves as a surrogate representation for a body, it is text as image. I opted to use Impact typeface because of its association with memes, which are known for rapid dissemination across social media platforms. Print sizes vary from 5 inches x 4 inches to 20 inches x 16 inches.

The works were created using Photoshop, where I composited text onto digital backdrops acquired from eBay. These digital backdrops were delivered as files stored on a CD and sent via post—an illustration of digital content taking on a tangible form and establishing physical presence. I had been searching for a use for these digital files for a number of years, after completing *Action Photos 2014* discussed in the introduction chapter. Originally intended for use in green screen photography, the backdrops are adaptable for both amateur and professional applications. In green screen photography, a person is positioned against a green background, allowing easy isolation in photo-editing software. They typically don suitable attire and are directed to assume and hold poses, simulating presence within the digital composite landscape. In this instance, the backdrops were priced quite affordably, suggesting a probable audience of amateur users.

The original designer of the digital backdrops opted for a 5-inch by 4-inch ratio, a conventional analogue dimension that deviates from the standard digital paper size ratio. This quirk holds a certain charm, a connection to the analogue realm within a digitally native file. It's a subtle detail, perhaps only noticeable to those who entered the realm of photography through analogue film. Large-format cameras are typically regarded as specialised tools within photographic communities, and their use involves considerable financial investment. These cameras are usually stationary and primarily employed for capturing still subjects such as architecture and landscapes. The most prominent distinction between large-format cameras and other types (excluding polaroid or pinhole cameras) as well as digital devices is the number of exposures possible. A large-format camera permits just one exposure before the film holder must be removed and rotated. The choice of the digital backdrop's dimensions as 5 inches by 4 inches might suggest an intention by the creator to infuse the digital file with a sense of propriety and historical legacy. This choice stands in contrast to the eventual use as JPEGs intended to accommodate an endless array of cut-and-paste, anonymous bodies.

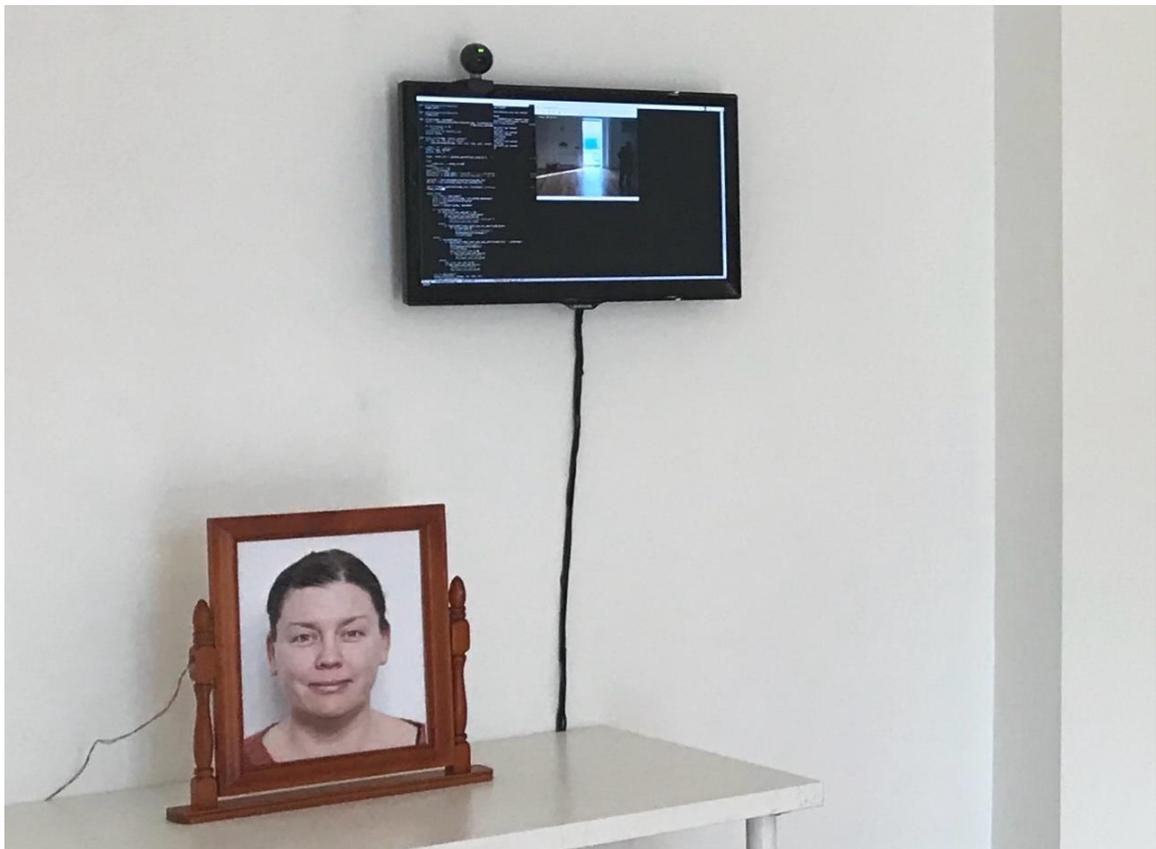
The significance of deciphering technical or even outdated language as a way to access further information becomes evident in what might be termed a quirk or a subtly disregarded aspect of this digitally native file. The influence of comprehending technical terminology and its importance to this inquiry can be seen in this chapter in the development of artworks AIBU and *Single Pixel Stories*.

Unlike the other pieces in this e-a-c, this artwork doesn't aim to disrupt the flow of visitors within the space. Instead, it highlights the potency of the hashtag (#) in information dissemination. The initial implementation of hashtags by digital platforms occurred on Twitter in 2007, with the purpose of grouping related tweets (Cooper 2013). The hashtag renders content discoverable amidst the constant flow of information through on-platform searches, facilitating its transmission across networks. This results in simultaneous or asynchronous appearance on multiple devices. Serving as a metatag, the hashtag facilitates the categorisation of digital data (both images and text), albeit without ensuring that a specific piece of content will gain visibility.

The hashtag serves as a tool for building communities, which can span commercial, political, or social domains. At times, a hashtag can spark significant surges in circulation, exemplified by the **LIKES** of #MeToo. This tag gained widespread use in 2017, linking together a substantial number of women who coalesced through the hashtag, thereby igniting a social movement against sexual abuse and harassment (Khomami 2017). Though its roots lie in Hollywood, its impact extended beyond the digital realm, reaching print and broadcast media and evolving into face-to-face conversations. However, a critique of this viral movement emerged, focusing on the immense media coverage that overshadowed the efforts of Tarana Burke, an activist and black woman who had been using the phrase "MeToo" since 2006. Her work became obscured by the limelight on young, mostly white celebrities. This spotlight on celebrities had the unintended effect of portraying the issues as isolated incidents, thereby veiling the systemic nature of sexual violence.

The potential of a hashtag to render a subject visible or popular has given rise to the term "hashtag activist," often abbreviated as "hashtagavist." This concept aligns with the idea of clicktivism (Frost 2020), wherein individuals express support for a cause through online activism, such as signing digital petitions. This form of online activism aligns with Jodi Dean's concept of a communicative capitalist fantasy, where engagement in digital interactions is perceived as meaningful action (2005).

### 3.6b AIBU

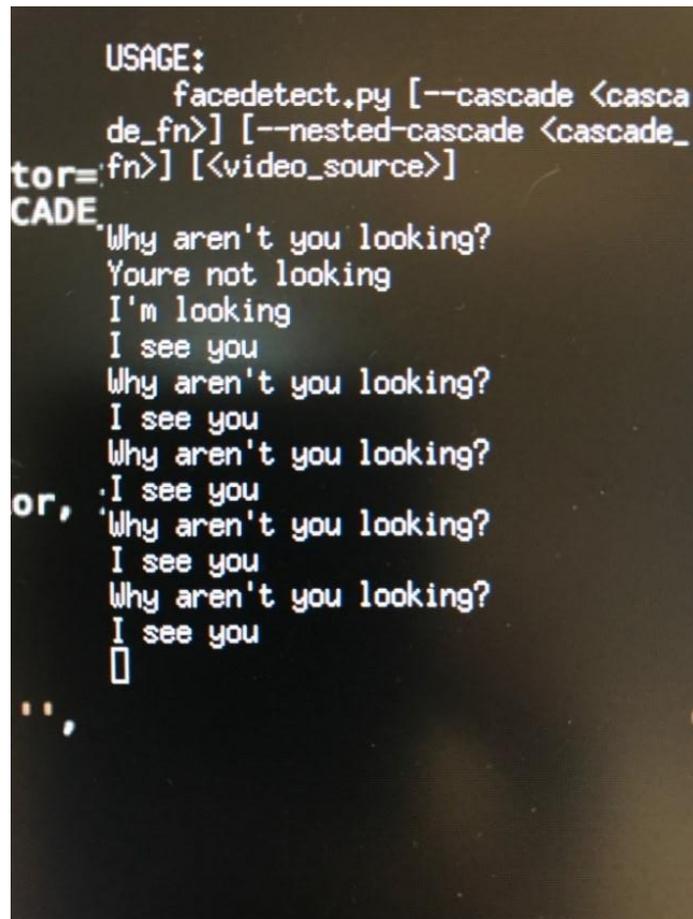


*Fig. 28 Installation view AIBU 2018 ©Liv Pennington*

*AIBU 2018*, is an expanded photographic practice-as-research work that consists of a modified pine dressing table mirror where the mirror has been replaced with a digital c-type print, a desk, web cam, eye-tracking software, computer and monitor (Fig. 28 above). As a new media object, the portrait is the interface, providing access to the underlying database.

*AIBU* is an acronym for “Am I being unreasonable?” This is closely associated with Mumsnet, an Internet forum for parents, which features a dedicated AIBU message board. The acronym is often used as a way to preface a question or statement, prompting others to respond and offer their perspectives on whether the person's actions or thoughts are reasonable or not. It is frequently used in discussions about everyday scenarios, parenting dilemmas, relationships and more. I chose the title because I wanted to be found unreasonable.

This was my first entry into using eye-tracking software and having to commission bespoke programming. As this artwork sat uncomfortably outside of my technical abilities, I found an excellent computer engineer who was able to translate my concept and sketches into a working maquette. The basic premise is that when a person is recognised by the technology to be looking at my image, the picture will face forward. If the technology reads that there is no one in front of it, my picture will sulk and rotate to face the wall. The analogue image, configured with digital technology, wants to interact with a person in an attempt to stay relevant and not become redundant but also wants to punish a distracted viewer. While working together with the engineer, I was surprised to find that when I was shown his first iteration of code that it was possible to write the code as emotional instructions. I was horrified to find that the code he had written told me that I was lonely. The work that I wanted to make was petulant and questioning, not pleading. We then worked together to write the code and I made the decision to make the programming language an integral visible part of the installation, (Fig. 29, page 104). I wanted to share my realisation that the hidden language, the backend code of any interactive system, could be telling an alternative story that contested the story being represented on screen, in the future I would associate this with Zuboff's second shadow text.



*Fig. 29 Image detail from monitor AIBU 2018 ©Liv Pennington*

Specialists would already have this knowledge, but for others, including myself, it was new. In discussions with critical friends, gallery attendees and fellow research students, it became clear that people were aware that they might be being nudged by technology via personalised adverts. In making visible the programming code that described people's actions as they were executing them visible, it was possible to strengthen the connection between people's action as data points.

The experience of looking at a digital networked social photograph is expanded. It is temporally and spatially split, firstly between what is felt and secondly understood by a person as she looks at the content (first text). The second shadow text behavioural data created by that interaction remains associated with the person, capable of infinite activation to be used on that body. In addition to illustrating the relationship between the visual front end, and the back end of data, AIBU also turns the human – smart object (networked device) relationship into a

metaphor for artistic creation, and subversive possibilities. I agree with curator Christiane Paul's observation that:

The hidden or protected back end of any project – be it a database or code – always makes an inherently political statement about access and its control (Paul 2007: 97)

The human-smart object relation is conventionally marketed as offering a wide range of benefits across various domains, such as improved health, energy efficiency, home security. They enable automation of various tasks that can increase productivity, save time, reduce resource wastage and anticipate people's needs and preferences. AIBU does not offer the promise of liberation rather it is an attempt to expose how the human may not recognise what they are doing as working for the machine.

Feminist Andrea Dworkin begins her text "Life and Death" (1997) with a revelation. She admits that she had previously dismissed literature written by women that used the pronoun 'I' as trivial. However, she was jolted by the realisation that she herself had employed 'I' extensively throughout her own writing. Dworkin had previously regarded the use of 'I' as lacking significance, that 'Women's writing – like women-are judged by the pretty surface.' (1997: xiv). She viewed it as being seen as personal, and saw parallels between this perception and the way women's writing and women themselves were often evaluated based on surface appearances. Dworkin's perspective shifted when she recognized that her 'I' was not restrained by politeness; the experiences she chose to convey were not confined to the realm of courtesy. She astutely observed that 'I' possesses depth and power, particularly when addressing the suppressed 'I' that men tend to disdain.

The 'I' in this artwork, is one that emphasises individualised competitiveness, of turning away when not looked at correctly and disengaging if the viewer does not pay proper attention. In her text Dworkin says 'And I am asking women to break the mirror.' (1997: xviii), this might refer to the act of dispelling illusions, facing

reality, or challenging false perceptions. It could signify a willingness to confront difficult truths or let go of self-deception. In *AIBU* – I attempt to break the connection to the mirror so in part I am asking viewers to confront difficult truths, to see the hidden effects and imagine the reach of the shadow text.

In the weeks following the conclusion of the exhibition, while refining the research focus, I chose to put *AIBU* on hold until after completing my PhD. This decision was driven by the realisation that its further development would necessitate a personal commitment to learning computer coding, as well as a financial investment beyond my current means. Given the uncertainty of securing sufficient funds within the necessary timeframe, I resolved to convey the potential and actual impact of coding through a visual, tangible medium that I could more effectively produce and control. The influences of *AIBU* can be seen in *Single Pixel Stories*, and the performance lecture *I Don't Want You [To Have To] Like Me (IDWYHTLM)* 2020. There are also distinct resonances with the artworks created for *CONTEST* 2021. They are both thoughtful material explorations of how data collection, organisation, search and retrieval, manifest as a physical presence capable of telling alternative stories to what is on the first screen.

### 3.7b O, 2018



*Fig. 30 O, 2018 (Twelve laser etched ply squares) ©Liv Pennington*

O, 2018 is wall-based and constructed from oversized Scrabble letters made from laser-cut ply (Fig. 30, above). O is a short piece of text. It is two words that become four words because of the way that the letters have been installed on the wall, and floor. Social media platforms like Pinterest and Instagram have popularised the use of Scrabble letters for home décor items, often featured as backdrops in their content.

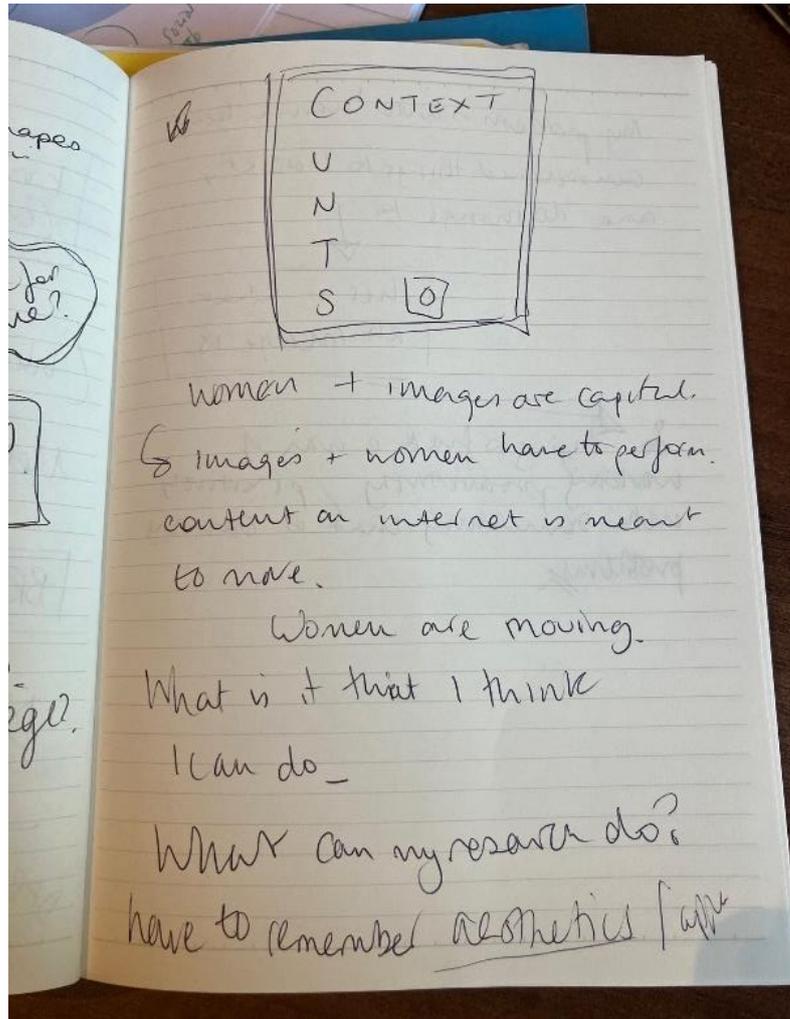


Fig. 31 Detail from sketchbook 2018 ©Liv Pennington

Through O I aimed to disrupt the circulation of people in the exhibition space, by forcing them to stop and read a text at least twice. The letters used for this work appear to spell two words, but the visual joke comes from there being a third word. The first word is installed horizontally on the wall and spells CONTEXT. The second word interlinked by the letter C runs vertically down the wall and the second letter appears to have become unstuck and fallen to the floor. This is the letter O. It sits at a jaunty angle on the floor, leaving C UNTS on the wall. The first reading typically reveals the words on the wall CONTEXT C UNTS and then once the letter O is located, the actual statement 'CONTEXT COUNTS' is formed.

A number of female artists have employed the word "Cunt" as text, and as image in their artworks, as a way to challenge social norms and to provoke discussion around power, gender and sexuality. Some well-known examples are VALIE

EXPORT'S performance artwork *Genital Panic* (1968), Judy Chicago's *Cunt Cheerleaders* 1970 and *Cock and Cunt Play* (1972), Tee Corin's *Cunt Coloring Book* 1975, a collection of her drawings of women's genitals for use in sex education classes. Cunt as a motif appears in the 1991 work of VNS Matrix, an Australian cyberfeminist collective of four women released *A Cyberfeminist Manifesto for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century in 1991*, on to the Internet, they declared 'We are the future cunt'. The manifesto aimed to disrupt conventional thinking about gender, technology, and power dynamics while calling for a radical reimagining of the future of women's roles in the digital age, it became a significant influence cyberfeminism as a movement. The following lines:

'we see art with our cunt we make art with cunt  
we believe in jouissance madness holiness and poetry  
we are the virus of the new world disorder  
rupturing the symbolic from within  
the saboteurs of big daddy mainframe' (VNS\_Matrix: 1992)

offers the reading that because we see and make art with the entirety of our sexed being, and our bodies are open systems that mingle with other systems, that involves rejecting traditional gender roles.

This artwork uses word play, as a simple way of organising material as an attempt to shock people into recalling that context profoundly influences the meaning, interpretation, and understanding of information, statement, or situation. In the hands of patriarchy, language is an oppressive tool (Spender 1980,1985), and I consider that losing context, of not having a context a form is a form of losing control. Context is essential for giving meaning to information and communication, it shapes the way we perceive and understand the world around us. Here the inclusion of CUNT means that CONTEXT COUNTS is said in a much stronger manner, than if it had just been the original two words. Cunt refers to the entire female genitalia, the clitoris, labia, vulva and vagina, it is the word that best

describes the female sex organ. More frequently it registers as abuse, appearing in 1785 dictionary of coarse language as “a nasty word for a nasty thing.”

The letter O when spoken and depending on the tone of delivery can mean a variety of things. It can imply a question, suggest disappointment, signal understanding or represent an orgasmic climax. O as a symbol can mean zero, it can be used as nought or can equate to a hug in a text message. The O here needs context to count. If the context for art after the Internet, is, as artist Brad Troemel says, no longer defined by the artist or institution, but by the people using social media as:

Content always flows away, but if the source of that content is unique, people will continue to come back. (2014: 41)

then as an artist it makes practical sense build a social media audience if that is what now offers the chance to define the context. For information engineers and computer programming, the loss or misplacement of a single letter can be enough to corrupt a message, or stall a programme:

If the information is distorted or does not reach its destination, then the communication act has been unsuccessful. (Terranova 2004: 10)

because the context here is an art project space, distortion can be successfully and joyfully employed to draw attention to the importance of context in providing meaning and clarity to an intended message.

I had intuitively toyed with the letter O, employing it as a tool for evoking laughter and conveying exasperation. However, during the exhibition, I hadn't fully grasped the profound symbolic and metaphorical significance it held, and connection to women, "CUNT" and the "Other". Sadie Plants text Zeros and Ones (1997), an exploration of the history and significance of digital technology in shaping modern society supported an expansion of my thinking. Plant uses mathematician Ada Lovelace's (1815-1852) working relationship with Charles Babbage (1791-1971)

as a framework, and the technological developments of weaving to present a compelling narrative that reflects on the power dynamics between men and women, humans and machines, challenging conventional notions of control and autonomy. Plant's theory of feminisation presents an intimate affinity between women and technology, as both have been tools and instruments for a male-dominated culture and society. She considers that the collapse of the patriarchal economy is possible because systems (women) that begin to talk to each other and self-guide were not in the original plan.

Plant's text introduced me to Lacan's designation of women with a capital 'O', and to Monica Wittig *Les Guérillères* 1969 which created a rereading of the work. My artwork was created to look incomplete, and faulty; and whilst it may offer a connection to Lacan's designation of women with a capital 'O', of the Other, where:

Woman "functions as a *hole*," a gap, a space, "a *nothing* – that is a nothing the same, identical, identifiable... a fault, a flaw, a lack, an absence, outside the systems of representations and auto-representations.' (Lacan quoted in Plant 1997: 35)

The fault I have introduced is intentional, meant to bring forth laughter. It points to the subversive and transformative power of humour and laughter, which play a crucial role in challenging established norms and hierarchies. In the context of Monique Wittig's radical feminist novel "Les Guérillères" (1969), laughter serves as a tool for women to dismantle the oppressive structures that have confined them. This form of laughter evolves into a weapon of resistance, effectively deconstructing established power dynamics and traditional gender roles.

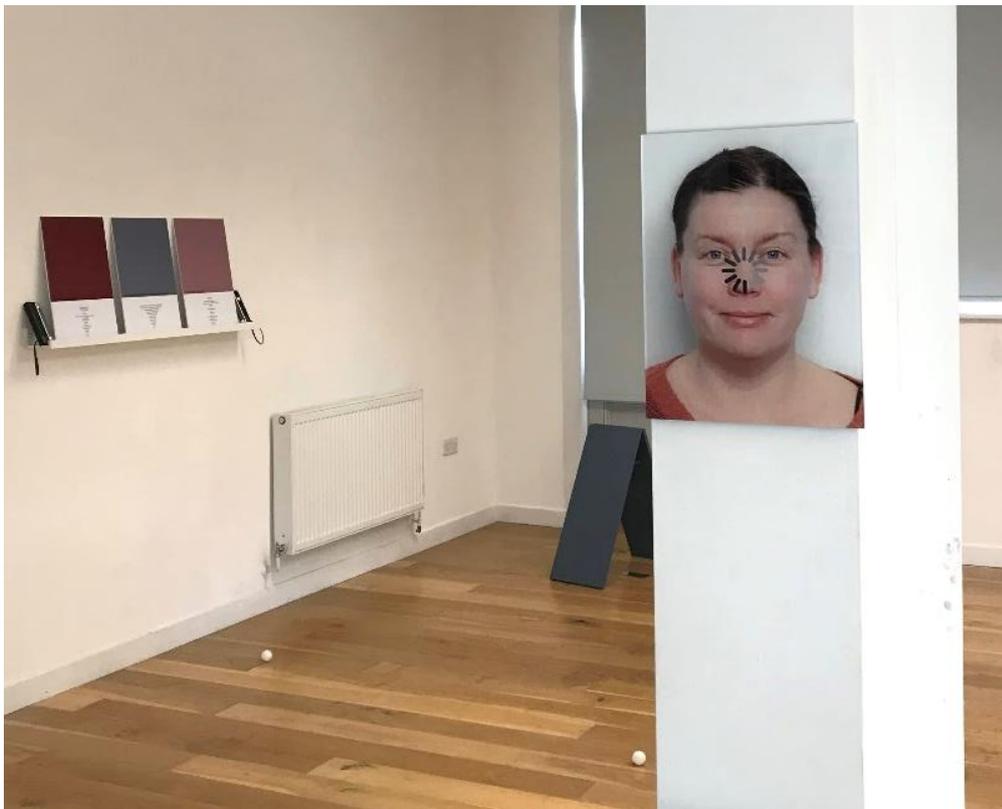
Wittig deploys the letter 'O' as a central feature in her novel, in which she envisions a female centred society, engaged in a revolutionary struggle. It is a mesmerising depiction of a lesbian society that extends an invitation to all women, urging them to unite in the fight, to join their circle, and become part of their empowering community. The letter 'O' in her work may represent the circular nature of women's struggles throughout history and the continuous cycle of resistance against patriarchal oppression. Additionally, the letter "O" could signify unity and solidarity

among women, forming a collective force in their fight for freedom. O is the sign of the goddess;

The women say that of her song nothing is to be heard but a continuous O. That is why this song evokes for them, like everything that recalls the O, the zero or the circle, the vulval ring.  
(Wittig 1969: 7)

Wittig attempts to create a new signifying system structured around the O, as an attempt to destroy the masculine. I make no attempt to destroy the masculine, perhaps potentially displace it through employing written, visual, and verbal language to place women at the centre of the action. O is a resolved artwork, and features in e-a-c#2, its influence can be seen in the plans for performance lecture *IDYTOLM 2020*.

### 3.8b Uploading 2018



*Fig. 32 Uploading 2018 (12 x 16in digital c-type print face mounted on acrylic) ©Liv Pennington*

*Uploading* is a digital C-type print that has been face-mounted onto acrylic (Fig. 32 page 112), giving its surface a similar appearance to that of a tablet or computer monitor screen. In Photoshop, I edited the image and incorporated a loading icon, also known as a spinning wheel error or pinwheel, positioned across my nose in the centre of my face. This artwork serves as a formal self-portrait that I employ for ID cards and my passport. Its primary purpose is to facilitate entry into other countries and to open doors for professional and educational opportunities, enabling me to circulate, to acquire new knowledge and experiences. Choosing this image for integration with the loading sign was deliberate, as it effectively conveys the frustration stemming from my diminishing ability to tolerate waiting for an image to load. Additionally, it resonates with the broader context of Brexit and the consequent loss of freedom of movement.

Previously, with chemical photography, the processes of taking a photograph, developing the film, making a contact sheet, and then making a final print, could take anywhere between a day and a fortnight. This work attempted to be disruptive by using the loading sign on a still image. The intention was to visually prompt people to wait, stand still and perhaps look for longer. While it added a distinct element to the exhibition's rhythm, functioning as an unconventional punctuation mark that encouraged fleeting glances, I found myself dissatisfied with the outcome. Consequently, *Uploading* 2018 remains in its initial sketch form and hasn't undergone further development. Instead, it was integrated into video content created for *A-Frames* 2019 in e-a-c#2.

### 3.9b Single Pixel Stories

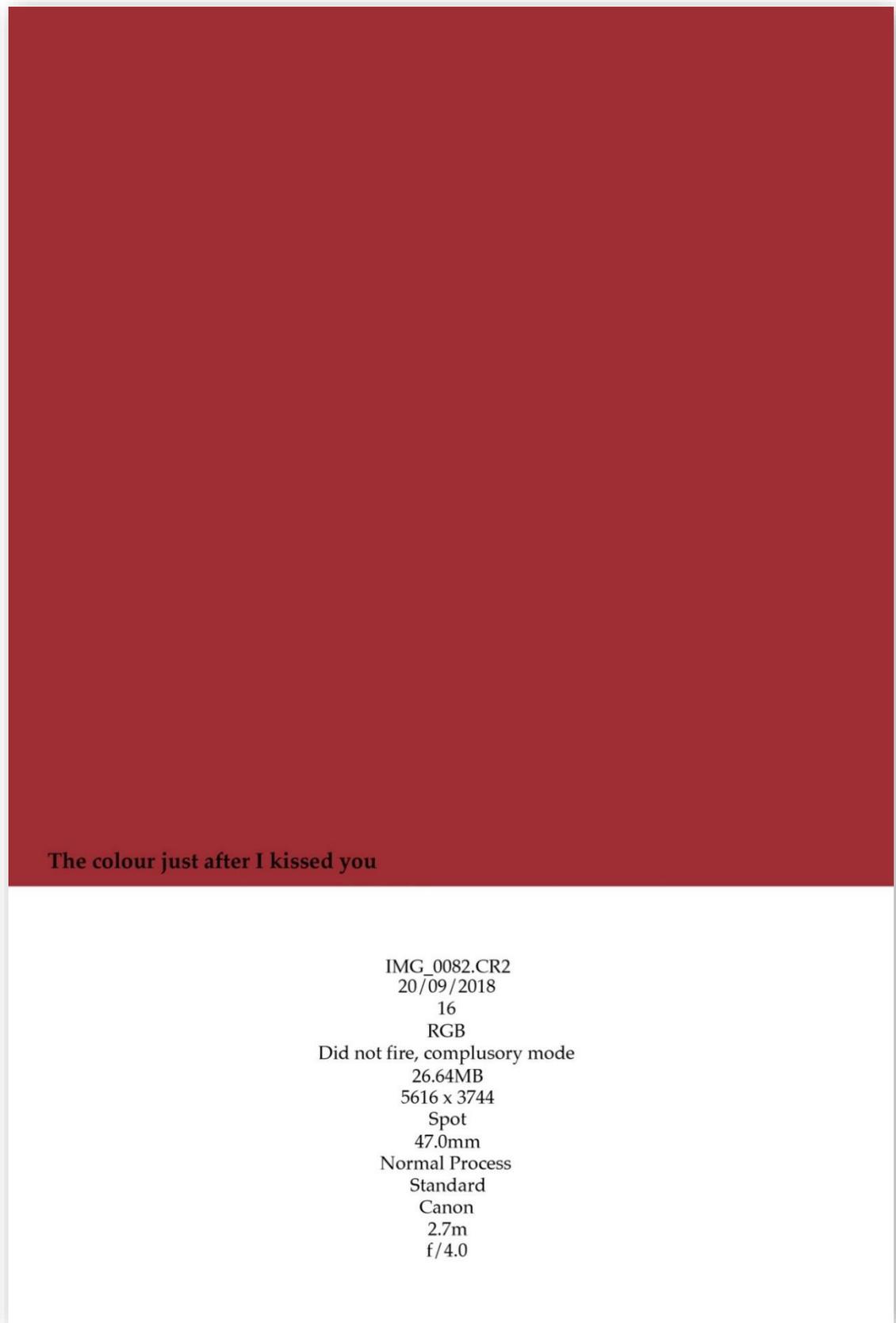


*Fig. 33 Installation view, Single Pixel Stories 2018 ©Liv Pennington*

*The Single Pixel Stories*, 2018 (Fig. 33), is a sketch, comprised four digital prints on paper. The artwork includes five distinct components: firstly, a solitary square colour block; secondly, a title text printed on the corner of the colour block; thirdly, a list of technical data printed centrally on the bottom third of the image; fourthly, text handwritten in UV ink; and fifthly, a blacklight torch so that viewers can use it to read the invisible text. The composition of the piece draws inspiration from a paint colour swatch card, recognised for its colour sample and paint name. This reference to domestic residential house painting alludes to how smart technologies are focused on linking homes, personal spaces, and privacy to the network.

Around mid-2018, following the Facebook and Cambridge Analytica scandal, and with the implementation of the EU General Data Protection Regulation, it's reasonable to assume that a majority of Web and social media users comprehend

that their actions yield data. However, it's less evident that individuals fully grasp the processes of collecting, analysing, and attributing economic, cultural, and political value this information has. After my experience of imbuing computer code with emotional undertones in *AIBU*, I embarked on the journey of extracting and compiling technical details from the metadata of JPEGs captured by a digital SLR and an iPhone. I aimed to present technical language as a narrative that could tell a story to those acquainted with the terminology. My goal is for individuals to perceive and experience the hidden structures that enable the visibility and accessibility of image information. This holds true regardless of whether they can decipher the information or grasp its implications. This shift arises partly from my transition away from analogue photography, where crafting an image entail comprehending camera mechanics and its components. With digital photography, especially smartphone photography, technical expertise is less crucial, as networked software assumes decisions about the image's appearance.



The colour just after I kissed you

IMG\_0082.CR2  
20/09/2018  
16  
RGB  
Did not fire, compulsory mode  
26.64MB  
5616 x 3744  
Spot  
47.0mm  
Normal Process  
Standard  
Canon  
2.7m  
f/4.0

*Fig. 34 Single Pixel Stories - lips 2018 (Digital C-type mounted on foam board, 45cm x 30cm, UV Ink) ©Liv Pennington*

Rapidly deleted & never posted

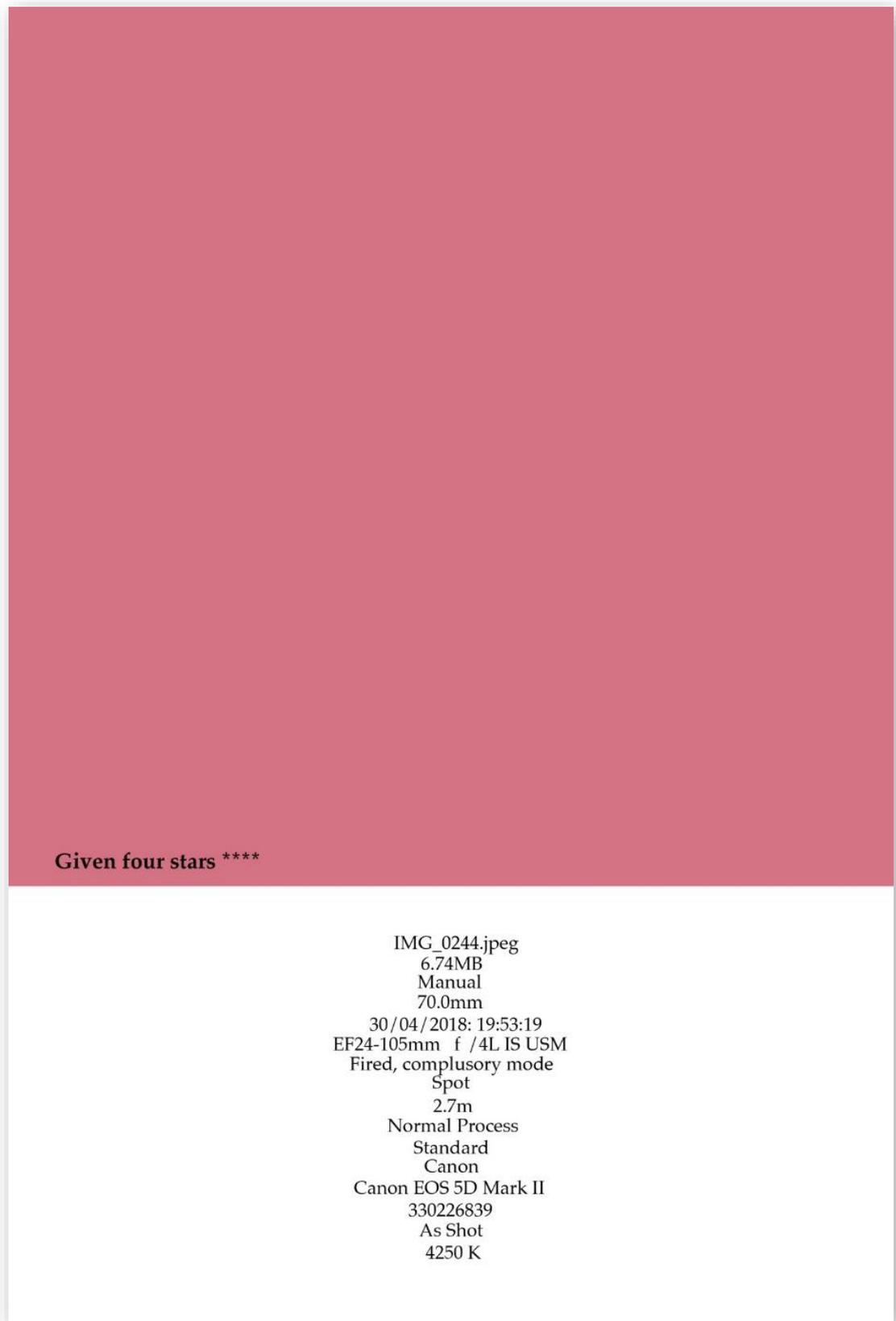
Manual  
100.0mm  
EF100mm f2.8 Macro USM  
Did not fire, compulsory mode  
Partial  
0.4m  
Normal Process  
Auto  
Standard  
Canon  
Canon EOS 5D Mark II  
330226839  
181808\_0023CR2  
As Shot  
4250 K  
-2

*Fig. 35 Single Pixel Stories – vulva 2018 (Digital C-type mounted on foam board, 45cm x30cm, UV Ink) ©Liv Pennington*

I looked again, and wondered if smaller would make me more content

Date Modified 9 Aug 2018 at 20:58:07 BST  
Date Saved 9 Aug 2018 at 12.25:03 BST  
Filename IMG\_2083.JPEG  
Image Size 4032 x 3024  
File Size 2.518 MB  
Orientation 6  
Format JPEG  
Maker Apple  
Display P3  
Depth 8  
TIFF  
GPS

*Fig. 36 Single Pixel Stories – eye 2018 (Digital C-type mounted on foam board, 45cm x30cm, UV Ink) ©Liv Pennington*



*Fig. 37 Single Pixel Stories – lips 2018 (Digital C-type mounted on foam board, 45cm x30cm, UV Ink) ©Liv Pennington*

A pixel is a building block, that when grouped shape visibility on digital screens. Even when isolated from its collective, the single pixel retains the potential to convey a wealth of information, albeit challenging for the human eye to interpret. The inclusion of text, statistics, and technical data within and on the surface of the single pixel serves to stimulate a diversity of interpretations. This method aims to provoke inquiries into the concept of singular truths, a notion historically linked with empirical methodologies and masculine paradigms, commonly associated with feminist research.

Viewers of *Single Pixel Stories* who possess technical photographic knowledge might tentatively start constructing a narrative regarding the type of image the pixel originated from. For instance, in *Single Pixel Stories – lips2* (Fig. 37, page 119), the technical data accompanying the artwork subtitled "**Given four stars \*\*\*\***" spans sixteen lines beneath the colour block. The file name, IMG\_0244.jpg, follows the camera's automated naming convention and contains no personal information. One might speculate that the file remains unprocessed and neglected on the computer or that its creator lacks diligence in digital housekeeping. It is not a raw file, so it is unlikely to be a professional image, although the camera's make and model are suitable for professional use. The lens was set at 70mm, commonly chosen for portraits. The manual focus setting implies a stationary subject. The date is 30 April 2018, at 19:53:19, a time of potential evening light in April. The f4 aperture suggests a shallow depth of field, pointing again to a photo of an individual. By comprehending the environmental factors that influence lens length, shutter speed, aperture, and ISO settings, we can speculate and make informed assumptions about the image's content

Subsequently, I've introduced an additional layer of information written on by hand, spanning the colour block's surface and accessible only under black light (see Fig. 38, page 121).

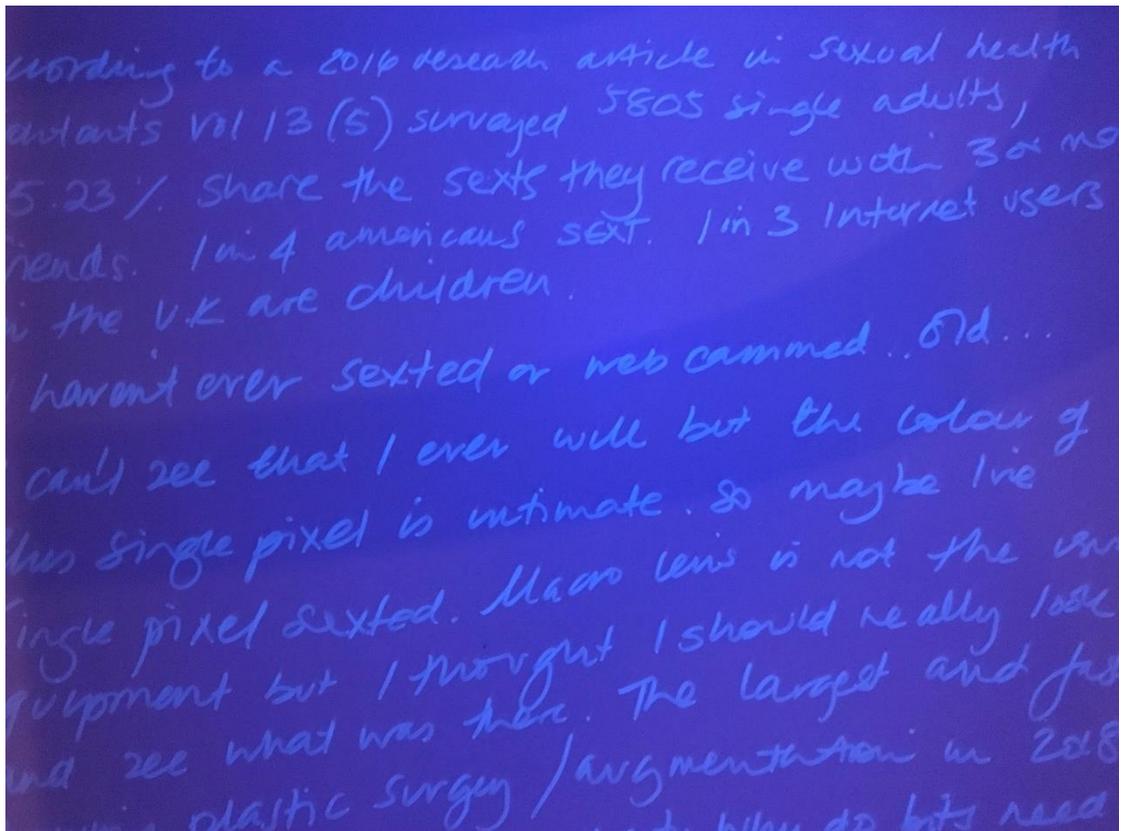


Fig. 38 Detail under blacklight of Single Pixel Stories - vulva 2018 ©Liv Pennington

This text is autobiographical and auto-ethnographical in nature. It merges my recollections of the digital photograph's creation, contemplations regarding the image's content, musings on prevailing national and international events, along with quotations or statistics extracted from literature and media relevant to this research inquiry. The use of black light draws associations with crime scene investigations and the detection of UV ink with materials like blood and semen. By inviting visitors to hold the black light torch and explore, they assume the role of an authority figure, they are responsible for data collection. However, this knowledge is incomplete until all data is gathered and processed. Thus, information transforms into knowledge, allowing visitors to engage in the process of gathering insights.

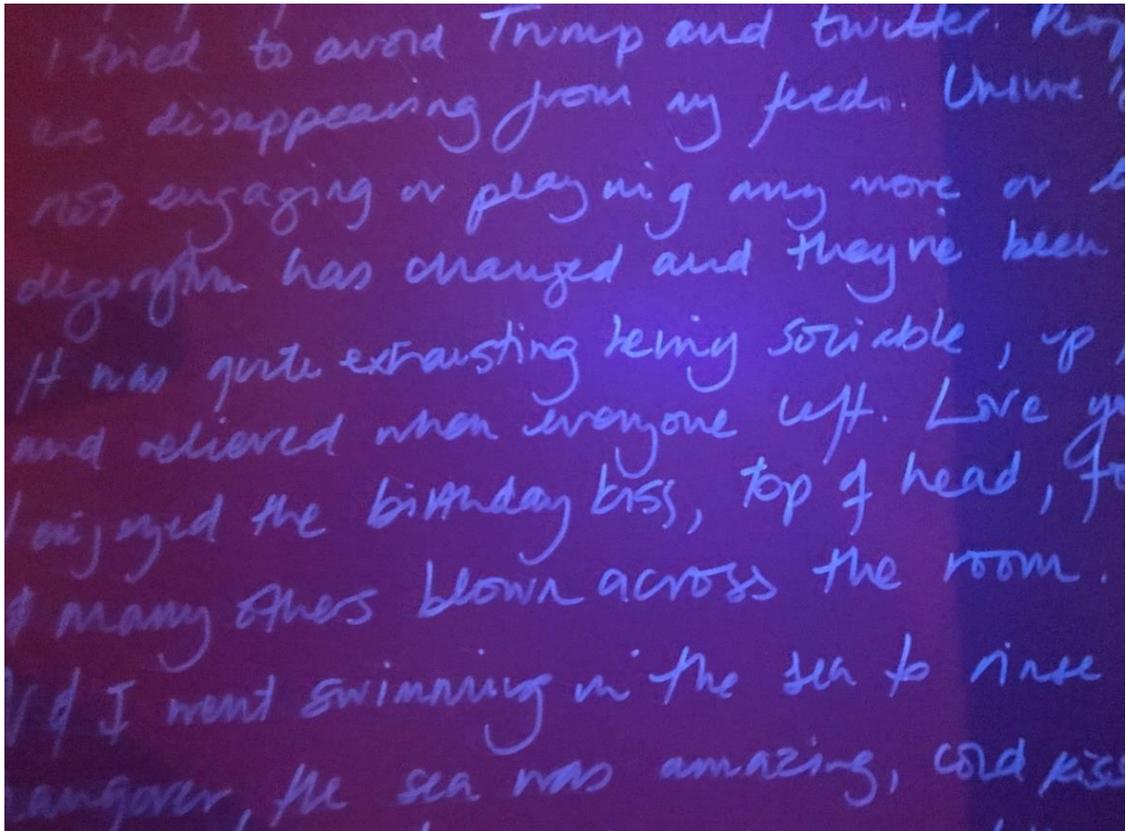


Fig. 39 Detail under blacklight of *Single Pixel Stories – eye 2018* (Digital C-type mounted on foam board, 45cm x 30cm, UV Ink) ©Liv Pennington

I watched as visitors held a blacklight torch to the image. The strength of the torch light meant that only partial fragments were visible (fig. 39 above). This restricted visitors' speed as they had to move slowly along lines of text and then return back to the left-hand side to find the next line and continue reading. I was reminded of bandwidth, the maximum rate of data across a given path, and how different speeds of data can have a dramatic effect on access.

The intentional slowing down of bandwidth by governments, known as 'Internet throttling' is a hard-to-prove way of restricting the circulation of content (Woodhams 2020). It is seen as a form of stifling dissent because the access to and distribution of information becomes painfully difficult. If we are to be able to challenge ICT situations presented as inevitable, it is imperative that the public gain a level of data literacy. One way to do this is through education and another through lobbying government for better data regulations. I acknowledge that it is not very Avant Garde for art to be calling for further regulation rather than acts of transgressions, but this is to think of regulation in this context as either/or rather than both/and.

### 3.10b Filtering - chapter summary

This phase of the research inquiry aimed to evaluate the prototype of the exhibition-as-chapter and attempt to render the relationship between female *likability* and circulation palpable, refining the research inquiry's focus in the process. I was not looking to inform or persuade the visitors of my thinking, but to share my research encounters to date as a means of opening up conversations and to start weaving a story for the subsequent exhibition-as-chapters. The audience was approached as potential critical friends (Marshall 2016: 43) and as a data source, from which useful information could be extracted through conversations and observations. An exhibition-as-chapter is an act of filtration, a sifting through of artworks to remove unnecessary elements, to get a sense of key points and in the next chapter present a more refined and organised version.

The number of works included in the first e-a-c is perhaps overly ambitious; nine separate works, even considered as nine conversation openers, still need talking about, and as such generate a lot of data to be managed. They were fruitful and provided a point from which to filter and refine the research inquiry, but they were labour and time intensive. The research has so far demonstrated that it is possible to think of the circulation of content as multi-directional, multi-layered and operating asynchronously. The studio practice revealed that my physicality had asserted a presence into the works, at a time when I was withdrawing from having an online presence. I was surprised by how much I wanted to be seen, to be represented and influenced to find alternate ways of being included that avoided the use of a figurative self-portrait.

For the full duration that the exhibition was open to the public, I explored the concept of the filter bubble further by taking on the position of the exhibition host and performing as a search engine. I had purposely avoided producing any accompanying written material, so that visitors to the space would be forced to go through me for supplementary information. And I would be required to respond. I performed the role of a helpful guide, that responded and assisted people explore and discover things in the exhibition. I considered my responses as potentially

having the power to expose links as comparable to how Internet networks modulate access to content.

Using the method of performing a gallery host, I warmly received people into the space. Living life as inquiry researcher Judi Marshall considers that “speaking inquiry is potentially [a] vital process” (2016: 56) and as a method it is helpful to “speak what I am feeling and thinking to others as a form of inquiring” (2016: 56). When I returned answers, I listened carefully to my voice to hear where I became excited and what fell flat. This way, I could learn and hold on to what resonated for me, so that:

I can experience and hear in my voice what holds energy and what may not. And the listener(s) can feed back their impressions...As I speak I am paying gentle attentions to what the boundaries are here, to containment. How deep I want to go, what is legitimate in this space, what is taking some sort of risk, and why would I do that? This is inquiring. Sometimes I tell some form of truth that seems to be pushing the boundaries, in that place and time. I can monitor this fit as I speak, adjusting as I go, perhaps meta-commentating explicitly to others. (Marshall 2016: 560)

I was conscious of how I filtered my communication when addressing different individuals, often leading with lines that I believed would captivate their personal interest. As I engaged in person-profiling, I fine-tuned and adjusted my wording while keenly observing facial cues. Through questions, I aimed to uncover the underlying intent behind each visitor's search inquiry. Scrutinising people's body language and expressions, I gauged their interest. I filtered my verbal content, excluding details that I didn't consider aligned with the person's profile and redirected conversations. I made recommendations, through providing links to other artworks, artists, or mainstream media, sometimes blending anecdotes with quantitative statistics. I made a point to note down which artworks consistently captured my attention, the recurring phrases and words, and those works I deliberately avoided.

An outcome of this exhibition-as-chapter and, in particular, through the artwork *Like Me*, is that I began to think of **LIKES** as agentic matter. This created an uneasy connection with the concept of 'going viral', when something goes viral online, it means that it becomes extremely popular and gets shared, liked, reposted, or viewed by a vast number of people in a relatively short timeframe. The following question was generated how do **LIKES** and *likability* affect everyday life, and female bodies in particular, and how does this affect women's content(ment). This is discussed in chapter 2, and chapter 4.

In e-a-c#1, the artworks *AIBU* and *LIKE ME* mark the initial steps toward devising an artwork in which the tangible process of capturing, storing, and managing data serves as both the artistic expression and a form of critique. In *AIBU*, the act of capturing viewers' attention is presented on the screen through images and code. This is further reflected in the orientation of the framed smart photographic print and whether it is facing forward or not. The critical aspect of this process is embedded within the emotional narrative found in the code. For both *AIBU* and *Like Me* the viewer's body becomes integral to the artwork's execution. Conformity with the code is essential for both artworks to become visible, underscoring the notion that the body can be directed to embody a form of temporary *likability*.

To summarise of the nine research artworks in progress included in e-a-c#1, there are two works that have been eliminated from this research inquiry: *AIBU* and *Uploading*, however their influences can be seen in future works, and this will be highlighted appropriately. Three works *The Enchanted Self*, *O* and *Suspended* are considered resolved as artworks, and the contributions to the study have been duly noted. There are four works that are conceptually and materially developed further, there is a new iteration of **A-Frames**, *Like Me* becomes **Like Me and Like Me More**, *Im.Pinged* spawns a second iteration, plus **Glory Hole** and *Single Pixel Stories* feeds into **Full Framed & Full Bodied** The development of these artworks, a method of expanded photography and the influence of selected feminist artists is charted in Chapter 4.

#### 4a. CON\$ENT

In the initial section of this chapter, labelled as part a, I delve into my approach to expanded photography as an embodied material practice. I also trace the evolution of five pivotal research artworks that were shaped by the following questions: How do **LIKES** and *likability* impact everyday life, particularly concerning female bodies, and what implications does this hold for women's contentment? Additionally, how can a contemporary artistic practice demonstrate the influence of **LIKES** and *likability*? These questions were employed as invitations to explore the creation of material responses that translated online behaviours into physical forms.

The key works discussed this e-a-c#2 are *A-Frames*, *Branded Content*, *Like Me and Like Me More*, *Glory Hole* and *Full Framed & Full Bodied*. The five works were exhibited in **CON\$ENT** (2019) with six other works in the second exhibition-as-chapter held from 22 November to 6 December 2019 at The University of Creative Arts, Herbert Read Gallery in Canterbury. These specific works hold significant importance in tracing the development of the research practice (PaR), and as sources of inspiration for the subsequent unperformed performance *IDWYTLM* and for **CONTEST**, the final artwork discussed in chapter 5.

The second section, part b presents documentation images of the **CON\$ENT** exhibition. The title acts as the conceptual organising thread, holding the artworks (practice and theory) in relation to each other. I replaced the letter "S" with a dollar sign, "\$" (figure 61 and 62, page 169). This symbol is expansive, it surpasses its literal meaning, to symbolise money, wealth and greed. It's inclusion in the title serves to emphasise an embedded financial and commercial connection between **content** and **consent**. This is discussed further through the artwork *Branded Content*.

The impact of conceptual feminist artists from the 1970s strongly reverberates within my research practice. They demonstrated that it is possible to approach art differently, using their bodies as both material and a site for challenging societal norms. By exploring the female body as a platform for political and personal

expression, they were able to provoke change within the systems they inhabited. I continue to use those strategies, to address how our onlife is approached as an engineering problem, primarily focused on how to capture *all* data, with little ethical consideration given by corporations to how data is managed (processed, analysed, shared, used, secured, archived, deleted).

Kathy Battista notes in reference to the 1970's that when groups of artists moved away from galleries to alternative spaces, they faced problems with “visibility, remuneration, documentation and acclaim” (Battista 2013:18). These are the exact same problems that artists are faced with fifty years later when placing work online, into the spaces of social media and social networks. As social media and social networking platforms are now mainstream and no longer alternative spaces, they have become more clearly associated with extractive practices and patriarchal institutions.

Everything we do as bodies online is recorded and there are two main forms of recording. The first and most familiar is the public visible layer of the web, the content of websites, platforms and applications comprising image, video, text, **LIKES**, comments and reposts. The second form of recording is invisible to users. It has been termed a “black box” by law professor Frank Pasquale, which he considers:

A useful metaphor, given its own dual meaning. It can refer to a recording device, like the data- monitoring systems in planes, trains, and cars. Or it can mean a system whose workings are mysterious; we can observe its inputs and outputs, but we cannot tell how one becomes the other. We face these two meanings daily: tracked ever more closely by firms and government, we have no clear idea of just how far much of this information can travel, how it is used, or its consequences. (2015: 03)

The black box records user-generated behavioural data; it is the information derived through digital interactions that is corporately captured and kept invisible to users of the Internet. I prefer social psychologist Shoshana Zuboff's term the

second shadow text (2019) to describe the capture and use of behavioural data, as a black box infers something locked away, rather than happenings in the world.

Zuboff offers that surveillance capitalism is compelled to create two “electronic texts” not one. According to Zuboff the first text ‘functions as the supply operation for the second text: the *shadow text*.’ (2019: 186) The first text, is the public facing visible layer of content of which we are the authors and readers, the second text is made invisible to us,

Everything that we contribute to the first text, no matter how trivial or fleeting, becomes a target for surplus extraction. That surplus fills the pages of the second text. This one is hidden from our view: “read only” for surveillance capitalists. [...] the shadow text is a burgeoning accumulation of behavioural surplus and its analyses, and says more about us than we can know about ourselves. (Zuboff 2019: 186)

The surplus is every post we like, every link we linger on or click, how our finger moves across the screen, where we walk, what food and medicine we buy, when we menstruate. If we consider that biological (genetics, menstrual patterns, fertility, health, age, weight, height, size) and environmental (economic, social, cultural, educational, geographical) histories are entwined with the digital environment to produce personalised content that acts as an environmental force leaving impressions on that particular body, then the shadow term is useful because to make a shadow, there has to be a body (human or non-human) present that is cutting off light, it is an extension of oneself, it is like.

Technological developments mean all surfaces are approached as readable by machines. Artists can play a crucial role in challenging and exposing the intricate relationship between the visible, often termed the “front end,” or “first text,” or “content,” and the concealed, referred to as the “back end,” or “shadow text,” or “black box.” The alignment of technology with progress has been so persistent, that it appears that technology equals progress, so then the presence of more technology is misread as greater progress. To question the use of technology can

be met with accusations of being fearful, old-fashioned, nostalgic, of being regressive. I am fearful, not of technologies but of its misuse. In my use of expanded photography as a method to create analogue works, I am not old-fashioned as Lev Manovich observes:

New media does not radically break with the past; it distributes weight differently between the categories that hold cultures together. Foregrounding what was in the background, and vice versa. (Manovich 2007: 48)

or nostalgic, because the world was not better before. I operate as a new feminist media, trying to progress and foreground the invisible instructions of the digital, because:

The digital medium is not by nature visual but always consists of a “back end” of algorithms and data sets that remain hidden and a visible “front end” that is experienced by the viewer/user, the latter being produced by the former. (Paul 2007: 97)

I do use digital technologies and digital tools to create analogue works, the Internet, social media and informational culture inform my work. Expanded photography and expanded Internet artworks share common traits in their hybrid, interactive, and conceptual nature. They both go beyond the screen, towards sculpture and installation, they are not determined solely by their existence as an image or being found online. The term “expanded” has been added to both as a way to try a find a description of what certain artworks do. Expanded internet artworks according to curator Cecilia Moss use the Internet as a,

nexus around which to research, assemble, transmit, and present data, both online and offline. (Moss 2015: 09)

Artists creating expanded Internet art, make work that can exist in both online and offline realms, of creating work that grabs the attention of viewers on emotional, intuitive level, with an awareness of the potential for virality. They want their work to circulate and expand across online and offline network. Writer Brian Droitcour considers that he can tell what is Post-Internet because its,

art made for its own installation shots, or installation shots presented as art. Post-internet art is about creating objects that look good online [and] preserves the white cube to leach off its prestige. (Droitcour 2014)

The artworks produced during this stage of research purposefully circumvent a circular progression in which a digital file transforms into a physical object and subsequently reverts to a digital file, a small act of non-digital participation and refusal of the potential of virality. This approach differentiates my work from Internet art and aligns it more closely with expanded photography. Expanded photography, in my view has a tangible physical component, references photographic histories and processes whilst acting to provoke future events.

The term 'expanded' is defined as the action of spreading out or unfolding, expanded photography is interested in process, of being approached as active. In relation to thinking with material feminism, expanded photography can be viewed as active process of continual becoming. It highlights the dynamic nature of interactions, focusing on how entities, objects, and phenomena evolve over time through complex relationships. In asking the viewers to body move differently to access an artwork, or to get bodies to work together with other bodies to 'see' a view I am attempting to physicalise echoes of online, to show exploitation rather than simply tell that it is happening.

#### 4.a1 Branded Content

*Branded Content* 2019 evolves from *Like Me* 2018, their shared commonalities are text applied directly to the skin, the use of my body as the initial canvas and being self-generated smartphone selfies. Both artworks are then completed in the offline realm, there is post-post-production, where additional letters, text or symbols are printed on to, or, burnt through the paper's surface. *Branded Content* diverges from *Like Me*, because I, not viewers modified my body's image. The word **CONTENT** has been stencilled onto my chest in uppercase formal lettering using black paint, resembling a temporary tattoo of sorts. A single letter alteration, achieved through the act of being burnt into **CONTENT**, gives rise to a new word: **CON\$ENT**. We are invited to consider what this transformation could mean. Moreover, by making my body the site of an artwork I anticipate sharing my body-image as art with others, thus inviting the possibility of further meanings. The body here is understood as expansive; it is not confined to physical boundaries but extends into social, cultural, political and psychological dimensions. I am considering how the body is influenced by and influences its environment, experiences, relationships and societal norms. **CON\$ENT** is also the title for and conceptual thread of the second exhibition-as-chapter.

I was aware of the proximity to creating a meme, of attempting to make a visual pun, through combining image and text, that acted as an insider joke. My work falls short of being a meme, because a really good meme is instantly recognisable, and repetition and replication are crucial. Our contemporary social norms expect that we present our bodies and experiences online as **CONTENT**, with success tied to how fast, and by how many times the content is shared, viewed and **LIKED**. This artwork does not explicitly refuse the potential for virality, but rather is an attempt to understand how the construction of image with text can have the potential to spread fast. By first labelling my body **CONTENT** I'm intentionally creating a space for ambiguity between potential meanings. During this initial attempt, my focus wasn't on achieving convincingly permanent lettering, it served as a test to check the scale and positioning of the lettering. I was aware that I could address any paint smudges or runs using Photoshop before creating printed material.



*Fig. 40 Selfie Test shots. ©Liv Pennington 2019*

I experimented taking selfies against different backgrounds, attempted various standing and lying down poses (Fig. 40). I promptly disregarded the images in which I was lying down and looking up into the camera, they conveyed an intimate sexuality, which felt out of place.



*Fig. 41 Image selected to become Branded Content ©Liv Pennington 2019*

In this work I was trying to convey contentment, defined by the Oxford Dictionary as “a state of happiness and satisfaction” (2022), so looked for poses where I looked relaxed (Fig. 41). I settled on an image that whilst it showed skin, didn’t show a cleavage, by the shoulders being straighter, the text was easier to read. The angle

of the camera means the eyes have to look up slightly, there are small bright reflections in the centre of the pupils, which adds a dynamic quality, perhaps mischief. There is the tiniest of smiles present and the close cropping means that there is no real hint to the location. In photoshop I tidied up the paint smears, but left the text looking poorly painted to emphasise the role of physical touch, and a lack of mastery, I wasn't looking to be read as flawless. Practice-as-Research scholar Barbara Bolt suggests that art enjoys a thing not working (2004: 67), that for artists this is not a problem; it is a possibility. I could have digitally added text to the skin in an attempt to make it convincingly real, or committed to being tattooed. However, at this stage in the development of the research I chose not to do either.

I position myself within a lineage of feminist artists who have employed drawing and painting as means to make both temporary and permanent statements on their own bodies, or directly onto their image. They use these visual expressions as strategies to contest constrictive notions of women's roles and expectations, as well as to challenge the prevailing norms of behaviour linked to the female body. Of significance to the development of this artwork, and the e-a-c#2, are Austrian artists VALIE EXPORT (b.1940) and Birgit Jürgenssen (1949 – 2003).

EXPORT and Jürgenssen have different approaches to developing an understanding of the body as expansive. Jürgenssen's approach maybe immediately less explicit, but I see it through her visual critique of artificial restraints. Her drawings and photos visualise the social invisible, women as busy housewives, held back and weighed down by domesticity and social norms. The use of straps, ribbons, bandages, masks and cages, in her work serves a visual language to express a dissatisfaction with being limited. These can be interpreted as a metaphor for the restrictions placed on women within traditional roles and domestic settings. This can be observed more directly in her work *Hausfrauen-Küchenschürze (Housewives- Kitchen Apron)* 1975 where Jürgenssen is photographed wearing an apron that takes the sculptural form of a cooker, in the oven element is a loaf, a visual colloquialism for being pregnant.

The implication here that domesticity is something artificial and if taken off, can be rejected and as such other worlds would be available to women.

In contrast to Jürgenssen's, EXPORT's work is more explicitly confrontational, it is a hybrid practice often performed live to an audience, putting her body in risky situations. EXPORT's connection to the expansive body is well recognised through her concept of the 'Expanded Cinema' where a film can be produced without celluloid, the artists body the screen for the live context of watching. VALIE EXPORT born Waltaud Lehner, changed her name in 1967, as a form of self-determination. This renaming, a rebranding is EXPORT's rejection of patriarchal structures, and a way of creating something entirely new. The term 'Export' held significance because of its connection to exporting ideas, and to going outside (Pollock 2023). Her use of an ink stamp, that stamped her brand name came a little later. My rebranding of CONTENT to CON\$ENT is also about movement, of how data connected to content is generated, collected, managed and organised, and how this effects women's bodies, behaviours and experience. It calls for a closer reading to see how sexist norms are embedded in new technologies; in the content of code, and in the contracts that we consent to. In a sense this work is closer to Jürgenssen's approach of visualising the social invisible, rather than EXPORTS challenge to patriarchal structures of viewing.

After the digital post-production; I needed the paper prints to hand so that I could measure the letter T and fashion a letter 'S' out of iron to the correct dimensions. I then heated the iron letter S on a coal fire to create a branding iron, I experimented with different durations to see what type of burn marks were made. The successful combination was a lustre surface on 5mm foam board, and by burning a letter S over the painted letter T, I created a hybrid onlife "\$" symbol (Fig. 42 page 135). The plastic coating of the lustre photographic paper burnt through, resulting in ruffled edges and a blackened impression with flashes of red on the foam board. The flashes of red were exciting because they were both fleshy and reminiscent of light leaks in analogue colour photography. Those instances when unwanted light seeps into an analogue film camera, affecting the film. The transformation of the word via direct intervention at the level of the paper image is symbolic, of wanting

to assert her identity and control over how she's perceived and treated, moving from being a passive object of contentment to an active participant with agency. That it is system of images that needs to change, not the woman.



Fig. 42 Documentation images. Left: iron s in coal fire. Right: Branded content burn mark ©Liv Pennington 2019

Jürgenssen is well recognised for using text in her work (*Naturgeschichte* 1979), on her body (*Jeder hat seine eigene Ansicht* 1975), and making text with her body (*Frau* 1972). She created a prolific and diverse body that subverted sexist stereotypes in the 1970's. They were a playful, humorous expression of the limitations that she saw women were subject to at the time. Her work functions as ethnographic references to the subjection of women. Her 1975 work '*Jeder hat seine eigene Ansicht*' (*Everyone Has His Own Point of View*) is a black and white photograph that depicts the artist's naked back on which the German sentence '*Jeder hat seine eigene Ansicht*' is written in capital letters in lipstick. The photo contrasts word and image, playfully showing the artist's back while using the term 'An-sicht', typically linked to 'front-view.' By using lipstick to inscribe the words she signifies a feminine mode of communication and brings into focus the notion that women gain visibility in the societal realm primarily through their bodies. I find the use of lipstick in this image to emphasise an approach that allows individuals to make with whatever they have to hand, using the resources that are

available. The use of lipstick in this image has also been interpreted as Jürgenssen pushing back against feminists of her time, who considered that she dressed too fashionably and criticised her use of make-up.

The intensity in *Branded Content* is purposely added in the post-post production stage. The violent shift from **CONTENT** to **CON\$ENT** is both a provocation and a declaration, a statement of belief that attempts to challenge the prevailing expectation that we should be happily producing and sharing content for the benefit of the few, that we should desire 'virality'. It attempts to highlight the blurred lines between what is willingly shared online but then is shared unknowingly without proper consent. It underscores the importance of being able to giving meaningful and informed consent. The rapid pace of technological advancements often outpaces the formulation of concrete regulations and guidelines, resulting in situations where new data collection methods emerge before appropriate rules are in place. Data collected by one organisation might be shared with third parties, leading to uncertainty about who has access to personal information and how it's being used. Additionally, data collection frequently occurs across international borders, introducing complexities tied to differing data protection laws and regulations across various jurisdictions.

Originally, I had intended to emulate EXPORT's *Body Sign Action* performance from 1970, where she was publicly tattooed, by conducting a live hot branding of *Branded Content*, during the e-a-c#2 private view. EXPORT's performance was a part of her broader body of work aimed at dismantling traditional gender roles, questioning societal norms, and confronting the male-dominated art world. Her tattoo placement created the illusion of a real garter belt when she wore a short skirt. This action underscored women's objectification and projection surface for male fantasies. It can be interpreted as a reclamation of agency over the symbolic representations imposed on women's bodies by society. This plan would have allowed the audience to directly witness the metamorphosis of the word and image, serving as a symbolic act of branding. The presence of witnesses would have added credibility and accountability to the ceremony, aiming to foster a collective

sense awareness and responsibility for exploitative image practices and their impact on individuals.

I have been reluctant to engage in 'live art' when I naively interpreted it as spectacle creation. However, this particular practice-as-research work seemed to demand a 'live' presentation. Barbara Bolt aptly notes that 'in the making of a work, there is a point at which the work takes over and the artist is no longer in control.' (2004: 82). I realised that could respond to the works need for a live witnessing and craft a space for people while excluding their smart devices. The act of branding, carried out in front of an audience, would become a deliberate act of damage, understood as transformation, resulting in a new artwork. Those people present would be explicitly requested to abstain from filming or photographing the event. My refusal to allow a conventional friends and peers marketing opportunity, understood through a creative lens, held the potential to generate novel meanings and possibilities.

I am encouraged by Bolts conception of an artist not being in control, and that materials make meanings, this supports a material feminist way of thinking of materials as active and having agency. I am also aware that this should be expanded to acknowledge the effects of both the supporting and non-supporting systems that press upon an artwork and an artist, that whilst:

In this designation, it is possible to conceive of artistic practice as a productive flow of different forces, different speeds and intensities operating to create a machinic assemblage. (Bolt 2004: 83)

It is important to consider that this flow isn't one directional, that we are part of the productive flow and therefore effected by the different forces, different speeds and intensities of our practices. Because we live an onlife, this includes: the sexist patriarchal capitalist flows of the Internet, the gendered circulation of content, the male dominated hidden data organising and managing systems. It was the

materiality of bodies, images and **LIKES** that *Branded Content* and their responsibility to one another that the work was trying to signpost.

Due to the institution's risk assessment, I couldn't perform the branding at the Herbert Read Gallery in a manner where I was allowed to be in the same space and in proximity to a live audience. This is an example of how an artistic practice can be shaped externally, and where the artist is no longer in control of the work. I opted to perform the branding at home, so that the image could be included in e-a-c#2. This institutional refusal of liveness and proximity to others due to risk, fed into my desire to want to create *I Don't Want You to Like Me* and to perform it within an academic space. This is discussed in chapter 5.



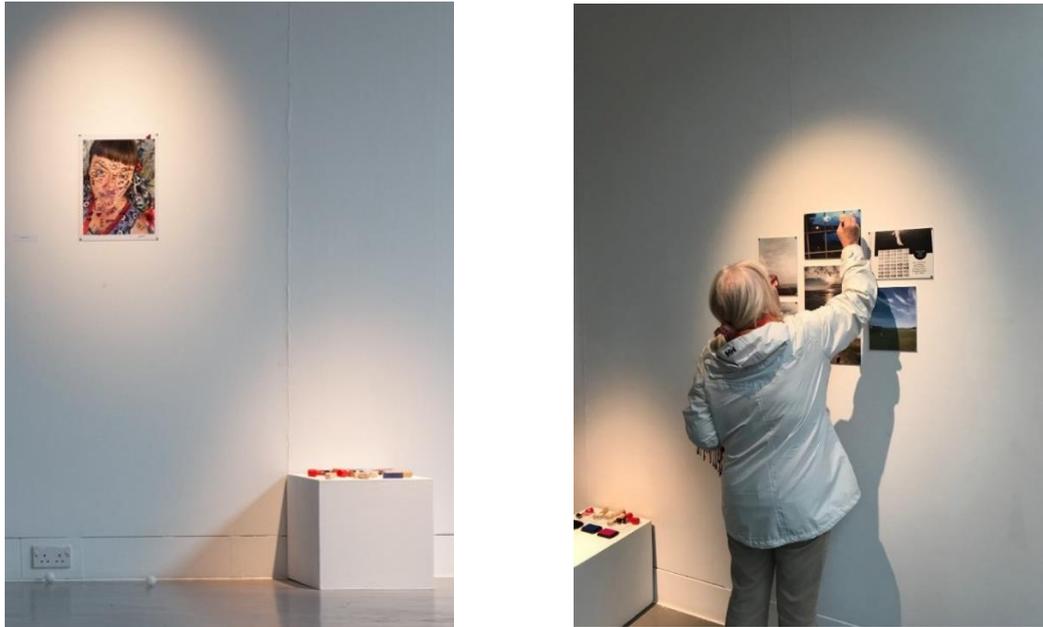
Fig. 43 Installation image of *Branded Content* 2019 ©Liv Pennington

The installed artwork (Fig. 43, page 138), the portrait is nearly life-sized, offering a face-to-face encounter with the viewer. The image doesn't seem to be filtered; it displays stray eyebrow hairs, visible pores, and occasional top lip hair. The painted text has been cleaned up, smears removed, and the word fits seamlessly between the two thin straps of the top.

When considering *Branded Content* as a response to the question of how **LIKES** and *likability* impact everyday life, particularly concerning female bodies, and how this affects women's contentment, one interpretation put forth by this work is that altering the word through physical manipulation after taking a photograph implies a lack of consent to those changes. This suggests that women, along with their images and data, can be reshaped for purposes beyond their own intentions. However, this reading could be countered by a live witnessed performance, documented for evidence, that showcases a refusal to conform. This image serves as a feminist declaration, advocating for women's rights and emphasising the significance of consent across various life domains, including relationships, bodily autonomy, and decision-making.

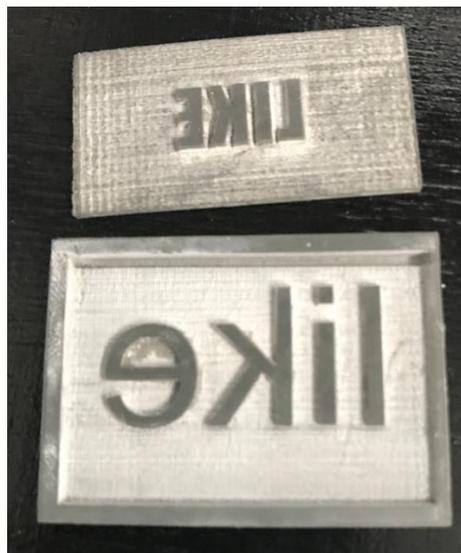
#### **4a.2 Like me (hr) and Like Me More**

Where *Branded Content* infers individualised competition through the title, the development of *Like Me* to include *and Like Me More* (Fig 44, page 140) provokes an actual competitive situation. *Like me (hr)* and *Like Me More* was set up as a poll, asking the simple question: 'Which image do you like more?' The design of the installation through the placement of A) the single self-portrait image versus B) a group of snap shot images evoked a sense of unfair competition or vying for attention. In order to guide the attendees' attention and incentivise engagement, the ink stamps and ink pads were positioned between options A and B, prompting individuals to choose a side and express their preference with a **LIKE**.



*Fig. 44 Installation images of Like me (hr) and Like Me More 2019 ©Liv Pennington*

The title can be read as a proposition, where the second part of the sentence, *Like Me More*, presents as a coded instruction to attendees to ink-stamp more **LIKES** on the second set of images. Rubber stamping the word **LIKE** or heart shape onto an image could symbolise the desire for validation, recognition, or positive feedback in the digital age. On the other hand, it introduces an element of irony or satire, highlighting the shallowness of seeking validation through digital interactions and the notion that value goes beyond simple approval metrics.



*Fig. 45 Documentation image of laser etched rubber ©Liv Pennington*

For this version of *Like me (hr)* and *Like Me More* I made the rubber stamps, using laser etching machine. I wanted greater control over the choice of the typeface,

and the font size than I could get if I bought the stamps from a shop. I chose to use **IMPACT** to evoke a familiar aesthetic associated with early meme culture, **Aerial** because of its connection to voice in this written submission and a typeface called **Mute**, that I had bought because of a couple of factors, I enjoyed the implications of its name and that it was made by a woman designer.

The ink-stamped **LIKES** have varying levels of transmission and visibility. They sit on the surface where they can be seen and counted by other visitors to the space. The paper selected for the *Like Me More* series had a slight gloss, which meant it was able to partially repel the ink from sinking in to its structural threads. The chemical coating on the paper could be considered an armour that the ink sits and slides on the surface of. Because it takes longer to dry out, it was also vulnerable to smearing (fig. 46 below).



Fig. 46 Detail *Like me more*, 2019 ©Liv Pennington

The printed paper in *Like Me* and *Like Me More* symbolically represents skin. Nancy Tuana argues that:

Various phenomena – gender/sexuality, ability, cognitive authority – once taken to be “natural” phenomena, have been studied by feminists and shown to be socially constructed. These phenomena are fully *real* in the sense that they affect lives and

have economic, social and psychological effects, but they are not *independent* of human interactions. Indeed, they are emergent from them. (Tuana 2008: 191 original emphasis)

Tuana's text prompted me to consider how **LIKES** as phenomena slipped off social media via eyes and skin and should be considered fully 'real'. Signalling a **LIKE** is boundary making, but as Karen Barad has noted, "boundaries do not sit still" (Barad 2008: 135). Boundaries are an ongoing open process, and the surveillance capitalist shadow text creates and puts boundaries in place by constraining what comes next and slyly presents this as freedom, choice, safety and care. Research by UCLA Psychologists George Slavich and Steve Cole (2013) has demonstrated that social experiences affect our genes and health. Their study suggests that the feeling of being excluded socially (unliked) was enough to create change at the level of DNA. As such, it could be said that the feeling of being unliked affects us:

Unwittingly, spontaneously causing a malfunction or disablement of the body that consciousness never directly witnesses. (Sparrow 2015: 26)

Therefore, not receiving **LIKES** can create a feeling that is registered in the body with physical effects, but the evidence is not necessary to the visible to the human eye. We are accustomed to thinking of **LIKES** as positives, with a greater number of them equating to success. However, in the context of this artwork, is it possible to argue that **LIKES** contribute to ignorance? When observing parts of an image disappear, when bits of information are covered in ink, preventing the next viewer from getting the full picture, one can contemplate whether **LIKES**, in this context, actually contribute to ignorance. The deliberate exclusion of information and the narrowing of content mimics a fundamental feature of communicative capitalism: the conversion of a message into a contribution, where:

communication functions symptomatically to produce its own negation. Or, to return to Agamben's terms, communicativity hinders communication. (Dean 2005: 58)

This artwork offers answers to how **LIKES** and *likability* affect everyday life, with a focus on female bodies in particular. It addresses how this phenomenon influences women's sense of contentment through the lens of the promise of *likability*. This promise fosters a performative optimism, a sentiment embodied by the act of rubber stamping the images, where the number of **LIKES** becomes associated with the fantasy of participation, and of abundance (Dean 2005). It's not only the images themselves that vie for attention and recognition, but on a meta level, it's also the strategic placement of each stamp by the viewer-as-liker that further contributes to this dynamic. The use of a poll gamifies crowd-sourced labour (viewer-as-liker), manifested through repetitive ink stamping. By obscuring the artwork's foundational labour beneath the accumulation of **LIKES**, it subtly implies the contrasting exertions of marketing versus making, of networking as working (for) the net that has become required for artists.

Those artists who come from inherited wealth, or those who have supportive partners who work in different industries are much more likely to be able to spend time on their practice, improving their practice and tending to their networks, and be able outsourcing their social media to their assistant. The promise of *likability* aligns with a narrative that William Deresiewicz identifies as

The idea that “people will do it anyway” – that if you’re a real artist you’ll make art no matter what (2020: 09)

he adds that this

Can be the product only of naivete or ignorance or privilege.  
(2020: 9)

That "people will do it anyway" is a marketing ploy linked to the meritocracy lure. The artist-as-content-producer sphere promotes a subscription model of accessing art, generating gated art communities with premium content. I oppose the capitalistic essence of social media, site ranking, and platform apps fostering competitive individualism, undermining my material interests. Using social media as mere shop windows relegates our art to promotional frames, neglecting

essential matters. If we use social media as mere shop windows for our work, our art becomes promotional materials in frames, akin to decoration, rather than addressing core issues. If *likability* is conceived as an effect of sexism and approached as a practical problem for women artists, this can provide a method for reorganising relations, for refusing those terms and conditions.

The **LIKE** economy has influenced everyday life, and changed the fabric of the Web (Gerlitz and Helmond 2013). In *Like me and Like me more*, we observe an absence of structural transformation, thereby leaving the existing architecture unchanged. While decoration can possess political significance, our collective presence in online spaces often renders us akin to digital wallpaper. En masse, we inadvertently contribute to covering up the cracks without genuinely addressing the underlying issues. It was initially disappointing that the method of stamping **LIKES** so that they overlaid each other could not happen. In being forced to look at the repulsion of ink, I started to imagine the paper as rebelling and protecting itself, rather than as a failure to produce the expected effects. As Barbara Bolt observes:

It is only when a tool fails or is unusable that we once again become aware of it. It becomes unready-to-hand. (2004: 67)

This experience then raised the question: What material never dries? I then started thinking about how could I create an artwork where the material process of capturing, storing and managing data was the (product) the art work. The experience of the stickiness of the ink led to working with the method of non-drying glue in exhibition-as-chapter #3 as a way of interacting with people and to capture their personal data exhaust. This is discussed further in chapter 5.

#### **4.a3 A-Frames**

The key developments of the second iteration of the *A-Frame* were: a change in material, from MDF to using off the shelf A-frames, the addition of text to the body of the a-frame and the inclusion of a small tablet displaying moving image. The series continues to explore the idea that the body being produced through the

distinct technique of **LIKES** is one that encourages women to be individually competitive, to advertise personal successes and failures, and to feel empowered (Banet-Weiser 2018). The three A-Frames (Fig. 47 below) were lightweight, plastic covered metal that could also clip in an A2 sized poster on both sides. Conventional A-frames are a common part of street furniture, they attempt to capture the attention of people passing by. I wanted to establish a connection with the public realm



*Fig. 47 Documentation of making A-Frames ©Liv Pennington*

and underscore modes of advertising, which were missing when I used MDF. It was crucial to highlight the physical movement of people and the potential for communal viewing. The A-Frames can serve as a representation of bodies in motion, referencing crowds passing by a single image within a space. Through this setup, the shared experience of people being present in a specific location and collectively observing the same visual content is evoked.

Social media is frequently linked with an excess of images, where a continuous stream of updated visual content can lead to a sense of overwhelming abundance. The A-Frames serve as a counterpoint to the experience of scrolling through a personalised online feed amid a sea of images. They evoke the idea of being in the same physical space at the same time, yet not witnessing the same image due to individualised settings. However, I am mindful of the importance of also directing attention towards what a person is not being exposed to, the absent aspects. This is addressed in the content of the moving image. It is this off screen, connection to

the body that gives the method of expanded photography its power to draw attention to onlife informational experiences.

Introducing a ready-made object introduced an industrial essence into the artwork. I softened this factory-made impression, by painting the A-frames unique colours (Fig 47 page 145). Employing the same colour selection technique as was used in the initial A-Frame test, a customised colour palette emerged, creating a link to the digital realm. The stems from the ability to personalise and customise elements of mass-produced objects which is closely tied to the Internet, digital design and the showcasing of objects on social media. Author Neil Gaiman observes,

that companies won't be manufacturing millions of identical things, but will need to make hundreds, perhaps thousands, of slightly different things. That their stores will be showrooms for things, and stockrooms will be history. (2014: ix)

I modified the new A-Frames, I shortened their legs, aligning the A-Frames' overall height once again with my inner leg measurement of 30 inches. Opting for custom-made gloss aerosol spray paints in this version, I sought to encourage associations with a polished, professional demeanour. The gloss finish also heightened reflections, such that when a viewer approached the sculpture, the frame had the potential to mirror the external world, underscoring the active role of materials and processes in shaping both our surroundings and human encounters.

A major development was the introduction small tablet capable of playing video, this replaced the placeholder card that had been important in e-a-c#1. A tablet was installed in the 'groin' area of each A-frame, each tablet a different looped short film in the style of a slide show. Each film was themed around different technical reasons for access being denied, such as 'Content is not available in your region, Content is not available on your device, and You don't have permission.' The images and text showed on screen for 6 seconds to be replaced by the next slide, the images played on screen as mirror images so that when viewed in the mirror they would be readable (Fig 48, page 147).



*Fig. 48 Installation image of A-Frame\_No\_money\_vulva 2019 ©Liv Pennington*

The recurring apologies attribute blame to technology, locations, and devices, avoiding explicit reference to human error. However, the inclusion of the personal pronoun “you” or “your” imparts a personal touch, and the mirror's presence further personalizes the experience. This centres the viewer and creates a composite view of themselves as an individual observing through the technology, forming a crucial node within the technological framework.

I composed three slogans. These slogans convey critical messages about power dynamics, individual worth, and the complexities of self-perception within contemporary society:

**"Those with POWER have no need for Empowerment sessions"**: suggests that individuals who already hold positions of power and influence in society do not require empowerment sessions or programs aimed at boosting confidence and agency. It highlights the inherent advantage and privilege that come with having power, as opposed to those who lack it and might benefit from such empowerment initiatives.

**"Not all likes are EQUAL"**: speaks to the nuanced nature of validation and recognition in the digital age. In the context of social media, where **LIKES** often symbolise approval and popularity, this slogan suggests that not all forms of approval carry the same weight or authenticity. It draws attention to the superficiality of online interactions and underscores the importance of meaningful connections beyond the metrics of **LIKES**.

**"There is NO money in you liking yourself"**: addresses the commercialisation of self-esteem and self-acceptance. The slogan critiques the commodification of self-improvement and questions the prevalent consumerist notion that one's self-worth should be tied to monetary gain. It implies that capitalism often benefits from people feeling dissatisfied with themselves, as this can lead to a perpetual desire for products and services promising to fill that void and create a cycle of consumption.

The slogans echo self-help catch-phrases and easily digestible messages that can cover most situations, often resembling the kind of content seen in the circulating memes of popular feminism (Banet-Weiser 2019). A fundamental aspect of popular feminism is its accessibility, and content aligned with popular feminism often gains visibility precisely because it avoids confronting the underlying structures of inequity. These statements also double up as super condensed one-line reflections of my research findings at this point. The text is reminiscent of the work of artist Barbara Kruger and Jenny Holzer, but my text differs in that it may sound direct, but visually it is not as bold or commanding. The text does not take

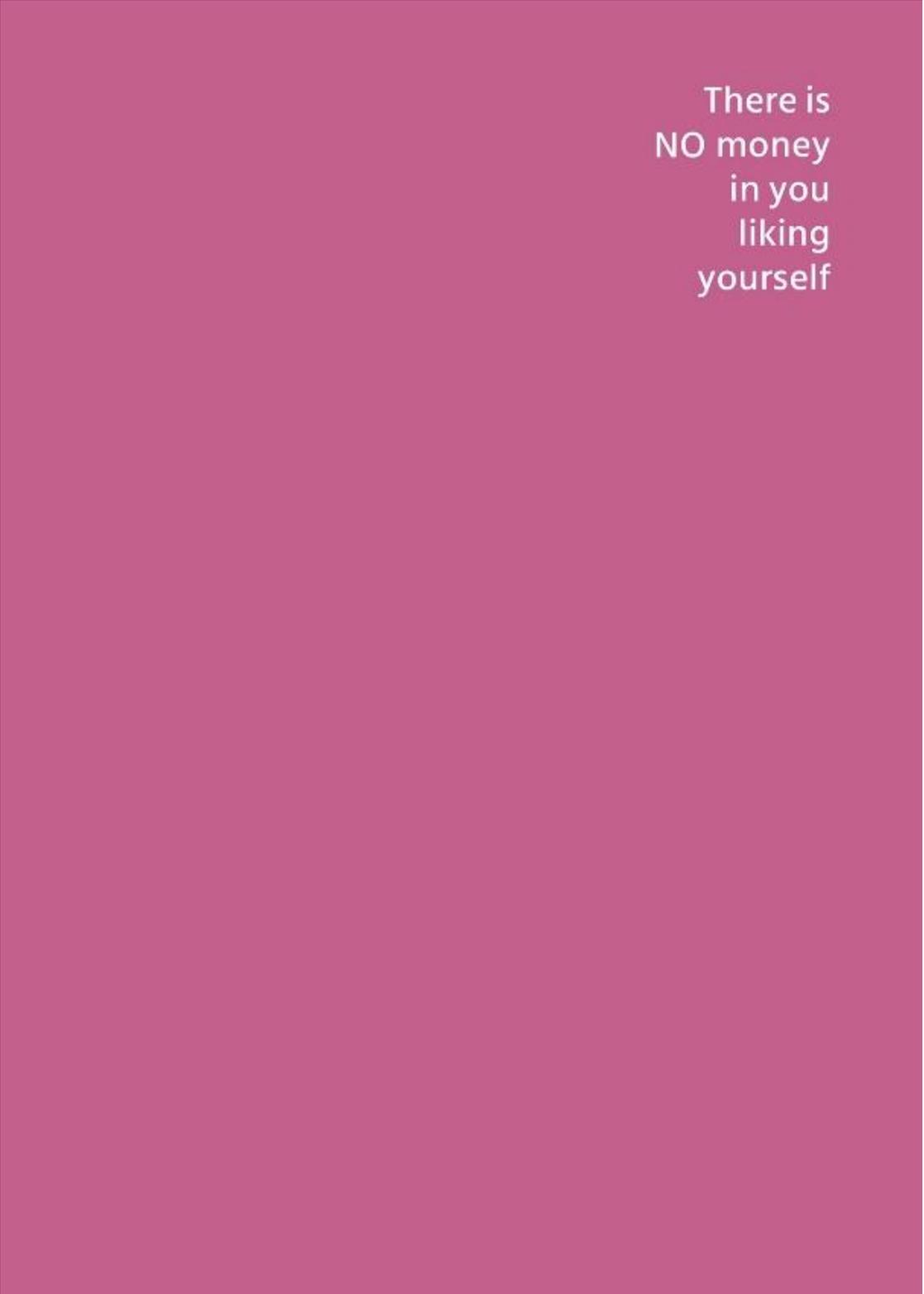
up the full space of the advertising board (Fig 49 below) and mostly hides in the corners (Fig 50 page 150), becoming more awkward to read because with two artworks the text is on its side.



*Fig. 49 Installation view L-R: A-Frame\_no money\_vulva 2019, A-Frame\_not all likes\_lips, A-Frame\_empowerment\_eye 2019 ( Ping-Pong balls) ©Liv Pennington*

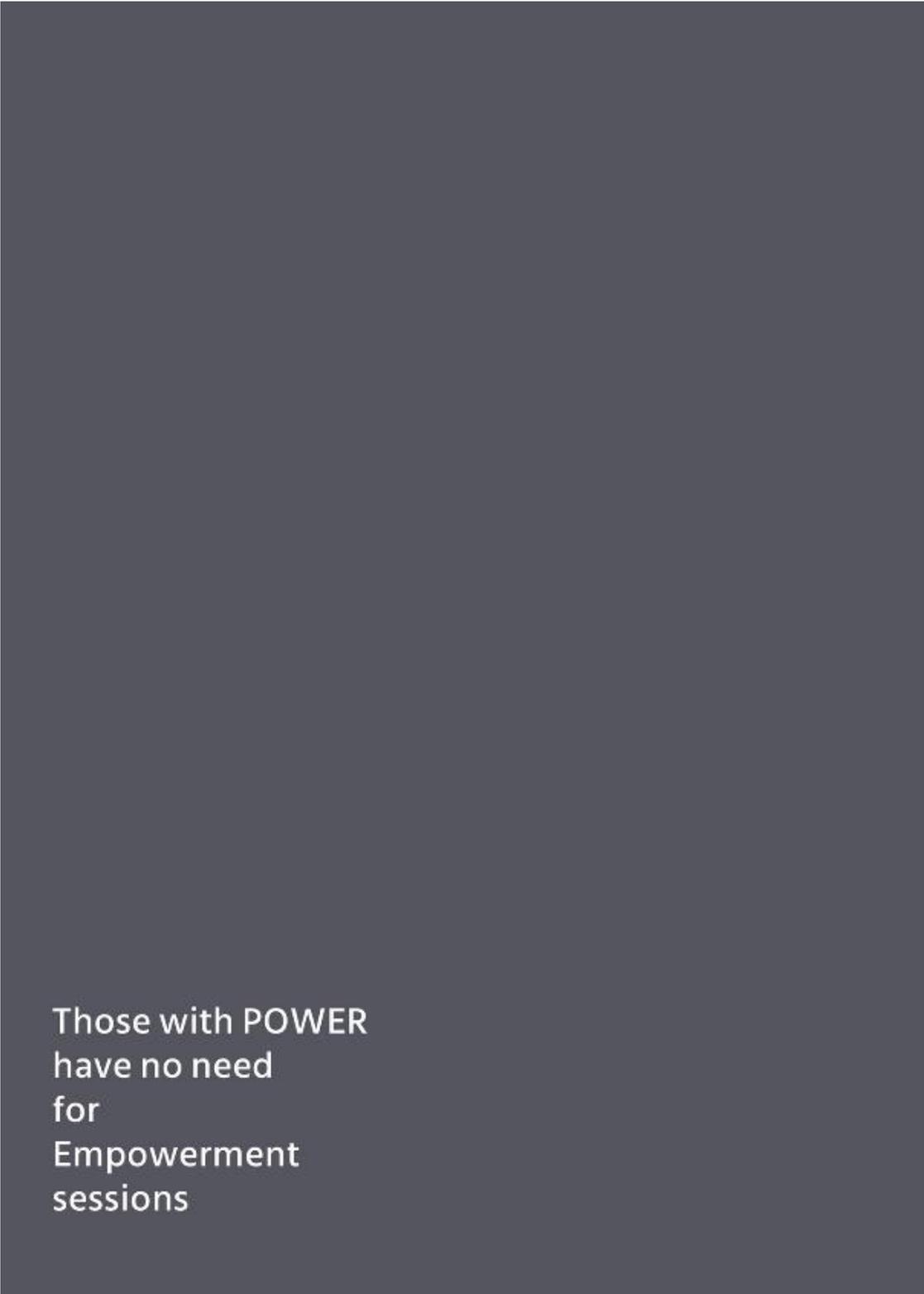
The *A-Frames* address how **LIKES** and *likability* affect everyday life, through drawing attention to the context of a neoliberal brand culture, where particular feminist expressions and ideologies become commodifiable, aligning with market-driven logics. *Likability* is linked to being individually responsible, you are the problem that needs to change (Banet-Weiser 2018: 13).

The text files were made in Photoshop and the outputted as a giclée print. Giclée prints are commonly used to reproduce original paintings, drawings, and other traditional artworks because it is a more affordable alternative. It seemed fitting to use a paper associated with allowing an artwork to reach a broader audience, of gaining wider visibility through larger circulation.



There is  
NO money  
in you  
liking  
yourself

*Fig. 50 There is NO money in you liking yourself 2019 ©Liv Pennington*



Those with POWER  
have no need  
for  
Empowerment  
sessions

*Fig. 51 Those with POWER have no need for Empowerment sessions 2019 ©Liv Pennington*

The A-frame structure, as an expanded photographic practice-as-research sculpture, establishes visual and conceptual connections to photography. This prompts viewers to engage with the artwork in ways that echo the principles and techniques commonly employed in photography. Similar to how photographers' experiment with angles and perspectives to capture unique shots, the arrangement and alignment of the components within the A-frame structure create dynamic viewpoints. Individual elements within the artwork draw parallels to photography—specifically, the mirror's role in providing an extended real-time view, akin to the mechanism found in SLR cameras that enables instantaneous composition and optical scene previewing.

The A-frames nudge viewers to explore various physical positions if they are to access distinct elements of the piece. For a viewer to see the content being played on the mirror in focus they must physically move in and out, mimicking the operation of a zoom lens. Viewers are encouraged to explore diverse fields of view. In human vision, this refers to the area visible without moving the eyes or head, while in photography, it involves transitioning from a broader encompassing field to a narrower one by crouching closer to the mirror, thus concentrating on a specific area for magnification.

Although the A-frame creates a visual frame outlining the artwork's boundaries, the presence of the mirror and gloss paint extends these confines beyond the artwork itself, reflecting both the viewer and the space beyond. Employing mirrors, slideshows, angles, and layers, the *A-Frames* play with perspective and depth, adding a captivating dimensionality and visual intrigue. In a manner akin to photographers guiding viewers' gazes through compositional choices, the A-frame directs the observer's attention. The frame becomes a tool for emphasizing specific aspects within the artwork, akin to photographers' use of framing to guide the viewer's eye to a focal point.

In conventional photography, framing plays a pivotal role in determining what is included within the image and what is excluded. Interacting with the A-frame

requires physical engagement, prompting the viewer to actively bend, squat, and adopt various positions to access varying fields of view. Although the term "field of view" isn't explicitly used in social media, within the context of mass personal social platforms, I would offer it signifies the range of content an individual encounters upon logging in. This digital field of view is algorithmically determined, considering preferences, engagement history, network connections, simply put it is other bodies that determine what you are able to see.

The A-Frames underscore that contemporary artistic practice can be influenced by **LIKES** and *likability*, which is palpably included as a theme, raising questions about what we perceive when artists create work for, and also engage with, the world of social media.



*Fig. 52 A-Frame \_empowerment\_eye 2019 ©Liv Pennington*

In summary, the use of a modified off-the-shelf A-frame symbolises self-advertising, raises a connection to artist-as-business and the influence of social media. There is a history of artists incorporating advertising and consumer culture in their work as a way to critique or to explore the relationship between art, consumerism and the impact of media on our lives. American artist Andy Warhol (1928-1987) is widely recognised as one of the most famous figures to work with advertising in art history. His unconventional approach involved appropriating

images and merging brands and advertising visuals into vibrant, bold colours often as large screen prints. He intentionally transformed himself into a recognisable product, an act that defied norms during an era when being an artist wasn't typically associated with commercial appeal. In this context it was a rebellious act, where we now find ourselves is that there it is a growing mainstream expectation that everyone can and perhaps should become a brand and monetise every aspect of their life. So, one way to be rebellious in this new context would be to refuse the individualised competition offered by the economy of **LIKES**, to not have a USP (unique selling point) and to become generic, and part of a crowd.

#### 4.a4 Im.Pinged 2.0 to Glory Hole



*Fig. 53 Im.pinged 2.0 2019 (Laser cut ply, dimensions of Galaxy S9, IPad, iPhone11, colour match paint L-R to Artist-Researcher Lips, Vulva, Eye, 100 ping pong balls, IKEA book shelf) ©Liv Pennington*

The *A-Frames* and the hand-sized sculptures in *Im.Pinged 2.0* are visually linked by sharing the same colours and by being presented in groups of three. I am not overly superstitious or a religious person; for me the number of objects does not carry symbolic weight or mystical meaning. Though I recognise that the installation of *Im.pinged 2.0* (Fig 53, above) as a triptych on a shelf presents a single unified composition and creates a sense of ceremonial space used for displaying revered objects, a metaphorical altar to capitalism via IKEA's affordability and self-

assembly. I have used three objects to prevent a sense of duality in the viewing experience and it avoids creating a binary or competitive sensation, which I consciously employed in *Like me and Like me more*.

The change in materials from MDF to plywood and the use of a laser cutter rather than hand-cutting tools has resulted in a noticeable refinement of the *Im.pinged* 2.0 objects, evident in their sharper and smoother edges. Unlike their predecessors, these three sculptural objects showcase individual colour signatures instead of being uniformly painted in a single colour. Regrettably, the matte paint finish chosen for this version proved to be ill-suited, ultimately dimming the visual impact of the objects. In the next iteration I plan to experiment with adding yacht varnish to achieve a high gloss and transparent finish. This finish aims to emulate the glass-like coating typically associated with ceramic glaze. The intention behind this choice is to capture fingerprints and smudges left by individuals interacting with the artwork. Additionally, this technique will serve to accentuate a sense of fragility.

These three small sculptural objects attracted a similar amount of physical attention as the first iteration. There were occasions when their holes were without ping pong balls. The number of ping pong balls added to the gallery space was increased to seventy-five from fifty. Due to the gallery space's scale and uneven floor, the ping pong balls tended to cluster on one side, creating the illusion of sparse circulation throughout the area. In forthcoming versions of this artwork, which will extend beyond the scope of this research inquiry, the quantity of ping pong balls will be increased further, rendering it nearly impossible to walk across the floor without making contact with a ball.

*Glory Hole 1.0*, 2019 is a 3D printed resin sculpture (Fig. 54, page 156) that replicates the physical dimensions of an iPhone 11 and makes reference to its distinctive lens pattern (Fig 55, page 157). It then diverges and becomes a totally new object through the engineering of a distinctive hole the size of a ping pong ball and by being painted a single solid colour.



*Fig. 54 Glory Hole 1.0 2019 (3D printed resin, and part painted plinth, colour matched painted to a pixel from the artist researcher personal image collection) ©Liv Pennington*

This was my first use of 3D-printing technology and working with representational sculpture. I have continued working with the colour- picker and colour-matched paint process to emphasise personal branding as well as an implicit forensically identifiable data link.



*Fig. 55 Glory Hole 1.0 2019 ©Liv Pennington*

I applied the same colour paint to the upper two-thirds of the plinth, emphasising my presence in the form and as content. I made the decision to paint the plinth while installing the exhibition as the formal aesthetic of a white plinth emphasised

a seriousness and sombreness that felt at odds with the feel of *Glory Hole* (Fig. 56 below). Putting something or someone on a pedestal is usually read as a sign of admiration or elevating status. In partially painting the plinth pink, the object has leached colour into its physical surroundings, emphasising that the reach of the smart phone extends and expands beyond the object itself.



*Fig. 56 Documentation of installation. ©Liv Pennington*

The smart phone has played a pivotal role in pushing the boundaries of digital image making. It has contributed to the expansion of photographic practices, it has altered the relationship between photographers and their subjects, and redefined the ways in which images are produced, shared, and consumed in contemporary culture. It is symbolic of surveillance capitalism, the convergence of smart phone with social media has transformed daily life, it places people within both the physical and the virtual environment. That the products and services of

surveillance capitalists are not objects of value exchange, may seem counterintuitive due to the personal experiences of finding value through the use of ICTs. Individuals can gain several different use-values via smart phones; enjoyment, entertainment, employment and education. These are irrelevant to capitalism, new products and services are created as a means to keep the flow of behavioural data moving (Dean 2005, 2007). Social relations are subordinate to the extractive economic operations in which our personal experiences are scraped for behavioural data:

They accumulate vast domains of new knowledge *from us*, but not *for us*. (Zuboff 2019: 11)

Under surveillance capitalism, humans are firstly a source of raw material, and secondly a target for guaranteed outcomes. 'Instrumentarian power' is the new species of power made possible. Individuals may consider their use of ICTs in a variety of ways; as social, professional, creative, cultural but Zuboff's research makes it clear that "digital connection is now a means to others' commercial ends" (2019: 09) and being digitally connected is not "pro-social, innately inclusive, or naturally tending toward the democratization of knowledge" (2019: 09). Dean, in her article *The question of organisation* (2014) suggests the potential collusion between capitalist states and corporations. She proposes that if people become aware of the government's role in safeguarding the privileges of the capitalist elite, they might start to consider using the government differently to benefit various social classes or even eliminating the factors that contribute to social class divisions. It's this concept of making the invisible, visible – or perhaps better put, revealing clouded relations – that art can contribute to. This utilisation of the government could potentially lead to a transformative shift in the very nature of the state itself.

Within the context of this artwork, the smart phone appears to be birthing ping pong balls, each serving as symbolic representation of human future behaviours (fig. 54, page 155). This creative portrayal suggests that the networked technologies have the capability to give rise to a multitude of actions, decisions, and interactions that

collectively shape the course of human behaviour, but there is still an opening for a human led future when read with material feminism. Elizabeth Grosz considers that:

The future emerges from the interplay of a repetition of cultural/biological factors, and the emergence of new conditions of survival. (Grosz 2008: 43)

Which Karan Barad's concept of agential separability can seem to follow, she suggests that matter, due to its active and agential role in the iterative process of materialisation, doesn't determine interactions but rather constrains them. This perspective leads to the idea that 'The future is radically open at every turn' (Barad, 2008: 142).

Where the home button should be, there is a ping-pong-ball-sized hole. This is a deliberate conceptual choice rather than aesthetic consideration and links to the title, Glory Hole. The term glory hole is sexual slang for a hole drilled in a wall, often in the doors of public toilets. They are the legacy of the hook-up culture of the gay community, but over time their appeal has built a broader audience who want to receive or give anonymous sexual pleasure with no strings attached. The smart device stands in for the wall that acted to provide anonymity in a public space.

The hole is positioned at mouth level, evoking a desire for communication and intimate connection with others (Fig. 57, page 161). Simultaneously, it underscores the exchange facilitated by smartphones between anonymous surveillance capitalists and individual users. The home button, intrinsically tied to navigation and application access, takes on new meaning. By symbolically eliminating the biometric fingerprint sensor associated with security and transactions, the phone's appearance suggests unauthorized access for free pleasure, while retaining references to its recording functions through the camera lenses, microphone, and touch screen.



*Fig. 57 Glory Hole 1.0 – side view (2019) ©Liv Pennington*

Traditionally, a glory hole offers uncomplicated, immediate pleasure without forging relationships or new personal futures. Similarly, the smartphone presents conflicting experiences, it draws us closer while maintaining distance, and it appears private yet constantly leaks personal information through the secondary shadow text. The smart phone is not a protective wall, though it does appear that people attempt to use it as such, an example being the familiar sight of commuters on public transport staring at a screen to block out fellow travellers. The smart phone does not afford a screen of anonymity and every action committed through a networked smart device has the capacity to birth future consequences, as represented by the ping pong ball. Our interaction with the screen is similar to being penetrated; thoughts and perspectives infiltrate our permeable skin, and our digital social experiences impact our genes (Slavich and Cole 2013). Achieving true anonymity within the realm of online public interactions is nearly unattainable due to the widespread presence of networked cameras and smart devices that continuously record our actions and engagements:

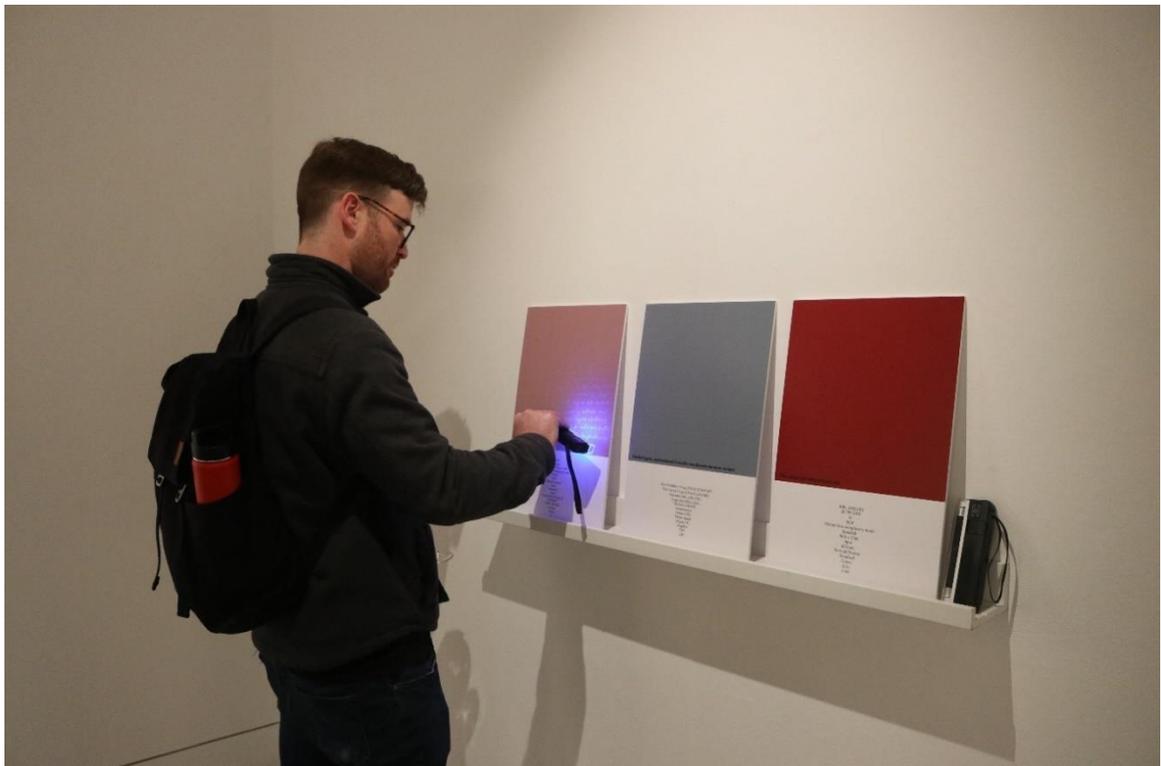
Being-in-the-world now often involves the spreading of our presence into a myriad of places and how the increasingly virtualization of social life has extracted (and abstracted) our presence and our very being into bits of data which are free-floating: both beyond our control or even our awareness. (Miller 2020: 23)

I contend that there's a need to change our perception of data as free-floating. This characterisation can be misleading as it implies unrestricted, aimless movement or detachment without clear origins. While it might seem free-floating to an individual using the Internet, from the viewpoint of data scrapers and collectors, it's anything but free—it's firmly held.

#### **4a.5 Full-Framed & Full Bodied**

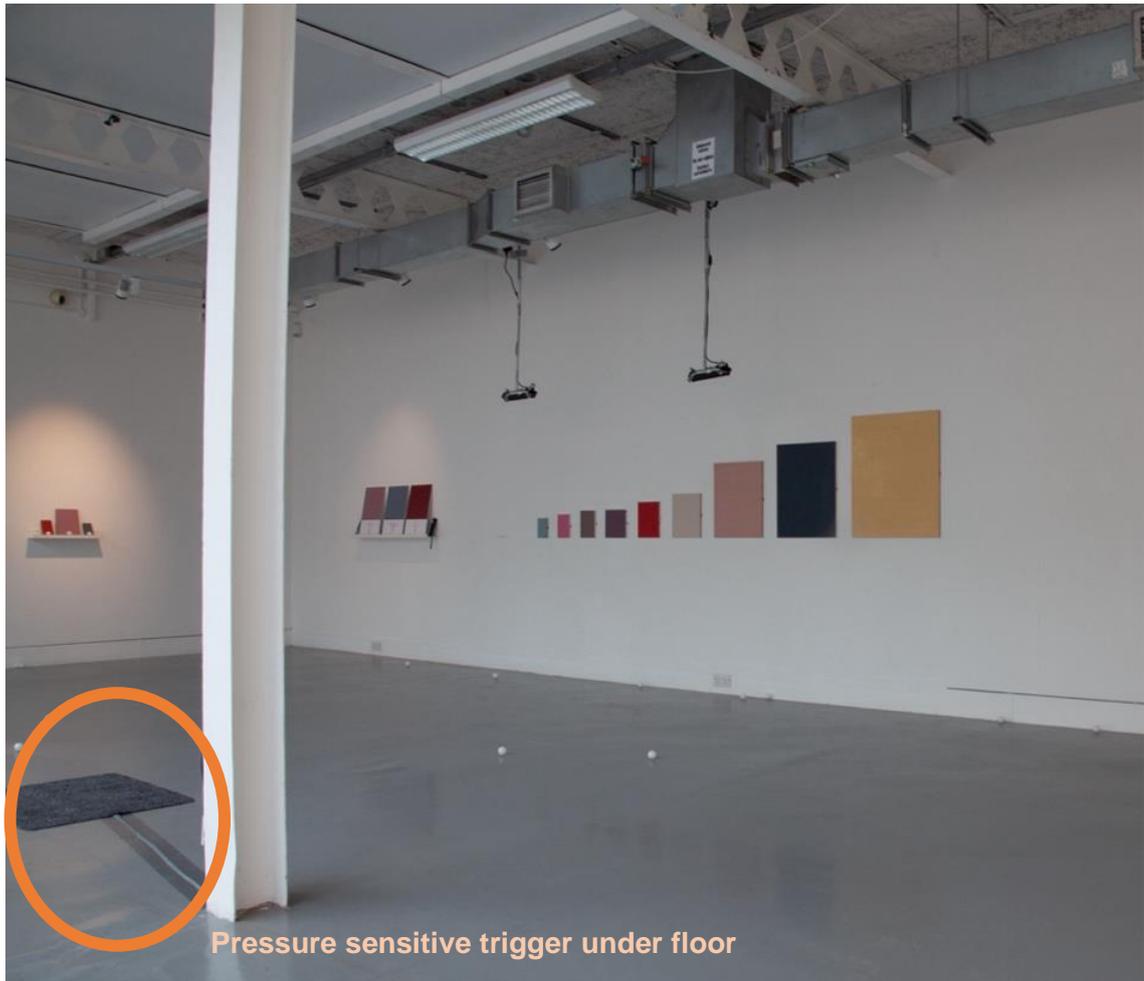
In the time between making *Single Pixel Stories* (2018) and then making *Full Framed and Full Bodied* (2019), Shoshana Zuboff's text *Surveillance Capitalism* (2019) was published. Her text provided the term shadow text and a clear concept that economic value and power was held with intentionally making certain

technological texts inaccessible to people. In e-a-c #1 I made artworks *Single Pixel Stories and AIBU*, which needed attendees to reveal hidden texts, but this was predominantly a solitary experience. In his book *Information Doesn't Want to Be Free: Laws for the Internet Age 2014*, Cory Doctorow examines the statement by Tim O'Reilly, one of the world's largest tech-book publishers, that "Obscurity is a far greater threat to authors and creative artists than piracy." Doctorow discusses this idea within the framework of the internet and the concerns surrounding copyright infringement and dismisses the fear of being copied with "Artists need to worry about fame before they worry about fortune." (2014: 38) How content is able to circulate online, is political, and we should direct our attention the systems that shape who is able to be visible, and how things are able to be visible, before worrying about personal economics.



*Fig. 58 Single Pixel Stories 2018 (Digital C-type mounted on foam board, 45cm x 30cm, black light torches) ©Liv Pennington*

*Full Framed and Full Bodied 2019* (Fig. 58) differs from *Single Pixel Stories 2018* as the visibility is connected to more than one body, the relation of friction and data flow is pushed further. This can be seen in the design of the installation. For



*Fig. 59 Installation view L-R Im.Pinged 2.0 2019, Single Pixel Stories 2018, Full Framed and Full Bodied 2019, 'Glory Hole 1.0 2019 ©Liv Pennington*

instance, the overhead blacklights could only be turned on by an attendee standing on the pressure-sensitive mat (Fig. 59 above), indicated by the orange circle. After stepping off the mat, there is a thirty-second interval before the lights extinguish, unless the mat is pressed again. This demands swift physical action if any of the UV paint writing and sketches are to be legible. By crafting an event that temporarily immobilises an individual, I recognise the PaR concept of "art as an event of stopping; of making an open clearing in the noise of the everyday" (Bolt 2004: 122). This holds a potential to disrupt the usual flow, providing an experiential encounter and, conceivably, conveying a message.

In the conceptual stages of this artwork, I had imagined people attending on their own finding the repetitive nature of going back and forth just for glimpses of an artwork amusing and annoying. I had hoped that gamifying the temporary lighting

would provoke individuals to make alliances. It is a simple proposition that community action has power to expose and transform existing structures, but as the installation also demonstrates, it is not simple to form and maintain new groupings. I was pleased to observe one group of attendees working together to maintain a constant light source (Fig. 60 below). With each person spending some time on the mat, the whole group was able to view the artworks in a less rushed manner.



*Fig. 60 Full Framed and Full Bodied 2019 Painted MDF and UV Ink, blacklight triggered by weight triggered sensor @Liv Pennington*

Barbara Bolt praises repetition in art practice, and practice-as-research for its revelatory attributes:

In the repetitive nature of practice, it is never a question of repetition of the same. (2004:37)

Repetition, as approached by artists, offers a distinct outcome: something novel, previously unexplored, or unforeseen. The enjoyment of repetition comes from the process, not from fulfilling an ultimate goal. Jodi Dean's discusses drive and repetition in relation to her concept of communicative capitalism. She identifies that the concept of drive as a category of political economy, this has significant

implications for understanding capitalism. This notion introduces a cyclical process that connects various opposing elements within capitalism, including creation and destruction, activity and passivity, freedom and necessity. Unlike explanations solely rooted in supply and demand or practical policies, capitalism becomes intricately entwined with a third dimension embodied by the "vanishing mediator" of the drive. This dimension encompasses the interplay between the abstract and the concrete, fantasy and truth, and knowledge and its inability to effect practical change. On a contrasting note, repetition is accumulated and harnessed to function as a tool for behavioural prediction and modification through the data accumulation practices of surveillance capitalists.

This artwork implicitly infers that repetition via community action is required to permanently expose the shadow text. I observed that people on their own gave up on viewing much sooner than those in pairs or groups. Capitalism follows the capitalist logic of growth and will look to absorb all interactions and all people as soon as possible. If we understand that:

Particular possibilities for acting exist at every moment, and these changing possibilities entail a responsibility to intervene in the world's becoming, to contest and rework what matters and what is excluded from mattering. (Barad 2008: 144)

Then Shoshana Zuboff's warning that, through the second shadow text, surveillance capitalists work towards actualising the present to direct the future:

Thanks to Big Other's capabilities, instrumentarian power aims for a condition of *certainty without terror* in the form of "guaranteed outcomes." Because it does not claim our bodies for some grotesque regime of pain and murder, we are prone to undervalue its effects and lower our guard. (2019: 378)

The world of 'guaranteed outcomes' projects an illusion of a calm, steady world but this world without surprises is economic and only for the investor class. For the majority of people, it means the imposition of specific limitations on certain possibilities, effectively closing off potential avenues of exploration and innovation.

#### 4.a6 Summary of CON\$ENT exhibition

In responding to the question of how can a contemporary artistic practice be seen to be influenced by **LIKES** and *likability*, I would offer that the influence is manifested in the CON\$ENT exhibition design and the key artworks can be observed to be influenced through several avenues: It could be said that my themes of identity politics, aesthetic labour and social media are popular themes, and displayed in a university setting they are subjects that have a higher likelihood of garnering likes and positive feedback from audiences. I conducted a poll with the aim of fostering a likable and approachable image. There was a clear call to action, I asked the audience to *like me and like me more*. The A-Frames are visually striking elements, and the inclusion and curation of O 2018 so that it was directly opposite the entrance, is knowingly leading with a work that is likely to catch the eye and generate attention because of the word 'cunt'. I sought to engage with an audience by offering fun experiences, of interacting or avoiding the ping pong balls. The use of interactive elements such as lighting triggered by standing on a floor mat, acts to encourage audience collaboration— quite literally increasing the visibility of the artwork and the artist's story.

I have noted and reflected on developments of the key individual artworks developed for the e-a-c#2. In reflecting on the e-a-c#2 as a cohesive experience, the overall feel of the exhibition was unsatisfying, because it embodied the theme of *likability* more than the provocation of competitive individualism associated with **LIKES**. This sentiment emerged because the tone appeared too subdued, too restrained to trigger any significant alarm. The prevailing softness, pinkness and quietness of the exhibited work, contributed to a palatable activism, where no real discomfort temporary or otherwise was created for the audience. Those who visited the space were presented with an enjoyable experience, or at the very least, I had not asked too much from visitors. The artworks retained what could be termed their professional *likability*, and therefore I remained *likable* – together we had not upset the group.

The sense of disappointment associated with surviving, coupled with the realisation that I wasn't effectively conveying what I perceived as an urgent crisis, prompted me to assess whether my approach was effective and to start to explore alternatives to the conventional exhibition format. I started to sketch out a concept of anti-virality: a notion centred around deliberately avoiding optimisation for online circulation. I decided that I would next try to create a character, that I could perform, comprised of attributes and features associated with being an *unlikable* woman. I, would through the method of an expanded performance lecture, in combination with my presentation material be: too much, outspoken, shrill, loud, take up too much space, aggressive, emotional, speak about myself, and enjoy myself, whilst performing the crisis, asking questions and appealing for help. I discuss the development of ideas, and the results in Chapter 5

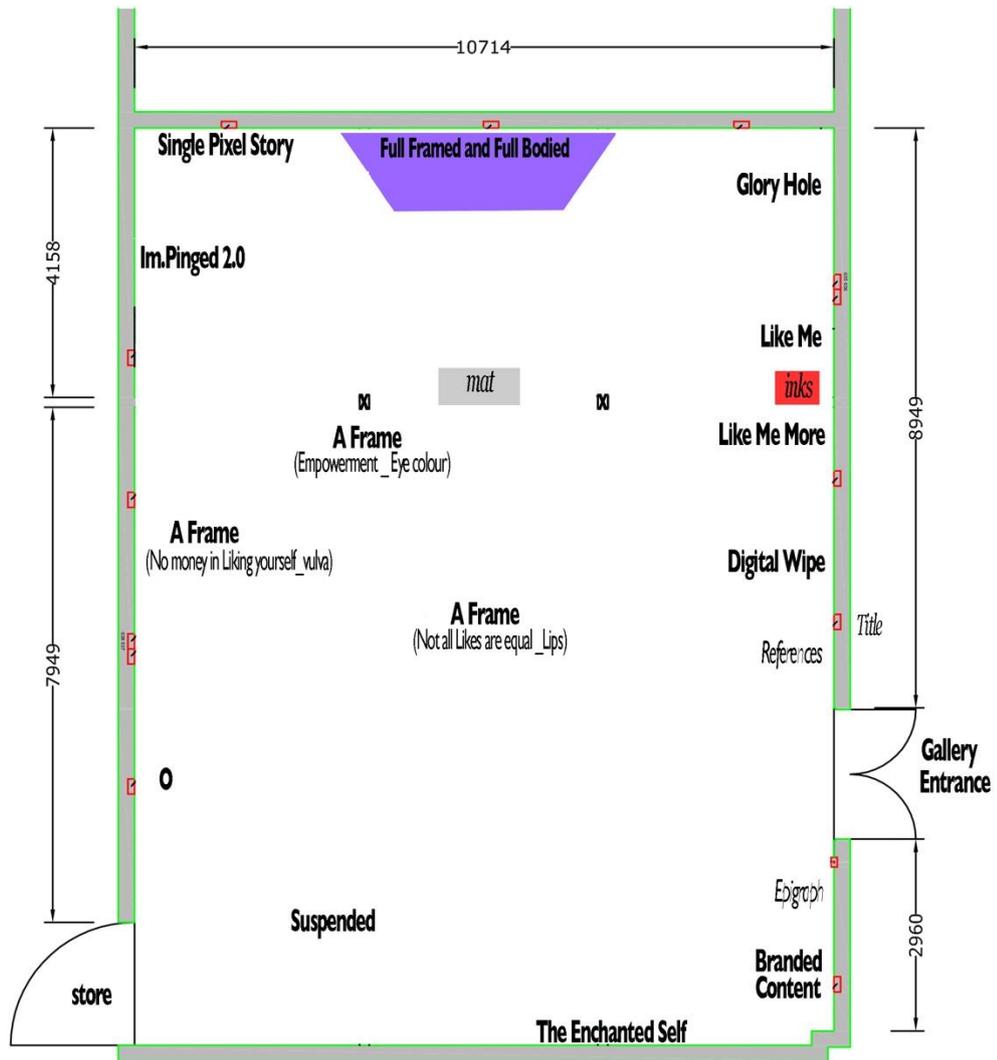
#### 4b. Exhibition-as-chapter 'CON\$ENT'



Fig. 61 CON\$ENT 2019 digital asset for twitter JPEG @Liv Pennington



Fig. 62 Documentation of exhibition title vinyl in situ 2019 @Liv Pennington



Herbert Read Gallery, UCA Canterbury, Floor Plan

KEY

 Plug socket

 Column

 Black Light coverage

Fig. 63 Exhibition installation plan for CON\$ENT, Herbert Read Gallery, UCA Canterbury, Floor Plan ©UCA

'The most likable people are those who cooperate with others, are helpful, share and follow the rules:

- Liable people are generally well adjusted
- They are smart (but not too smart!)
- They are often in a good mood.
- They can hold up their end of a conversation.
- But they make sure to give others a turn to speak, too.
- They are creative, especially at solving awkward social dilemmas.
- And perhaps most important: **they don't disrupt the group.** '

Mitch Prinstein (2017: 121)

'The presence of others who see what we see and hear what we hear assures us of the reality of the world and ourselves'

Hannah Arendt (1958: 50)

'Technological inevitability does not exist.'

Shoshana Zuboff, (2019: 15)

*Fig. 64 Epigraph Texts, installed as a vertical triptych to the left on entering the gallery.*



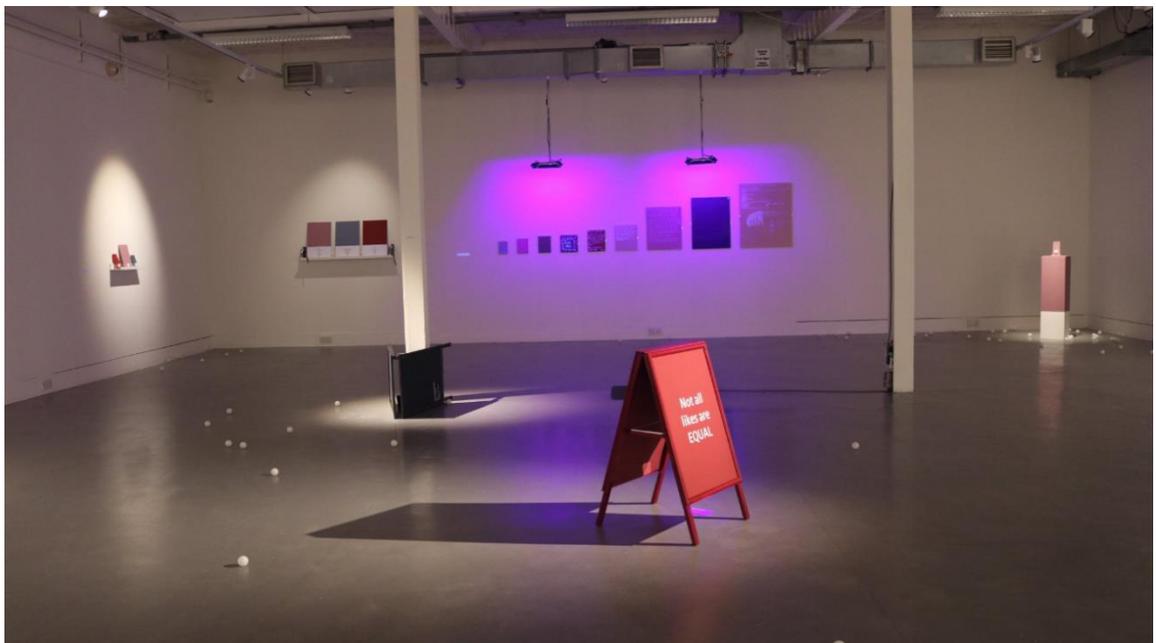
*Fig. 65 Installation view from centre of gallery L-R Epigraph Texts 2019, Branded Content 2019, The Enchanted Self 2016 – ongoing, Suspended 2016, Front of image A-Frame\_not all likes\_lips 2019 ©Liv Pennington*



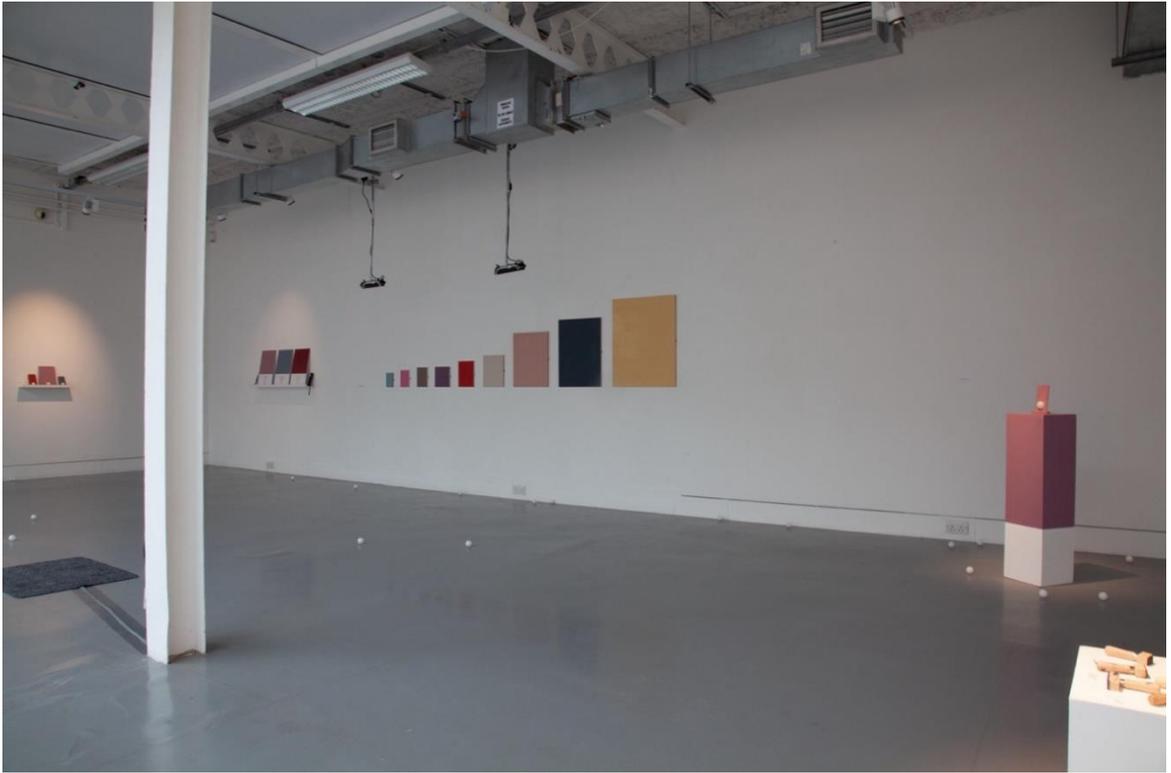
*Fig. 66 View of gallery from Branded Content 2019 ©Liv Pennington*



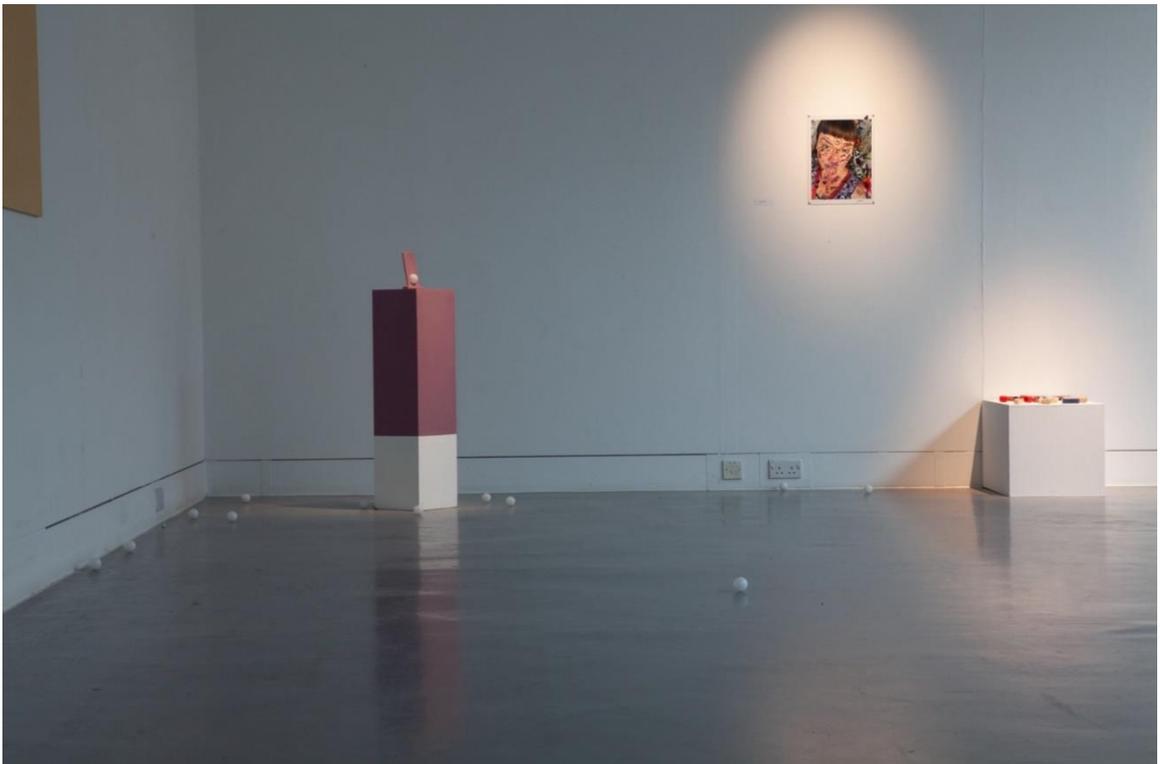
*Fig. 67 Installation view L-R Suspended 2018, O (2018), A-Frame\_No\_vulva 2019 ©Liv Pennington*



*Fig. 68 Installation view L-R Im.Pinged 2.0 2019, Single Pixel Stories 2018, Full Framed and Full Bodied 2019, Glory Hole 1.0 2019, Front centre: A-Frame not all likes\_lips 2019 ©Liv Pennington*



*Fig. 69 Installation view L-R Im.Pinged 2.0 2019, Single Pixel Stories 2019, Full Framed and Full Bodied 2019,, Glory Hole 1.0 2019 ©Liv Pennington*



*Fig. 70 Installation View L-R Glory Hole 1.0 2019, Like me (hr) 2019 (Table with rubber stamps and ink pads) ©Liv Pennington*

## 5a. How I don't want you to have to like me (IDWYTLM) became CONTEST

In this first section, I introduce a reflection on the rehearsed expanded performance lecture *I Don't Want You To Like ME (IDWYTLM) 2020*, but due to the constraints of the Covid-19 pandemic was reformatted for presentation via web conferencing technology. I want to acknowledge that my primary aim was not to facilitate the audience's transition from a group of individuals to a cohesive community with shared responsibility, rather, it can be read as a call for a temporary allyship of survivors. Jodi Dean's book *Comrade 2019* offers an explanation for my tendency to focus on creating groups from individuals. She offers that the concept of survivors and systems,

correspond to neoliberal capitalism's dismantling of social institutions, and to the intensifications of capitalism via networked, personalized digital media and informatization that I call "communicative capitalism." (2019: 11)

In the second section, I discuss how examining the concluding research artwork CONTEST through Dean's survivor and system framework reveals a noticeable shift in how my practice has evolved in its treatment of individuals to construct an image. This artwork marks the first instance of composing individual elements into a cohesive singular image, in the written reflection I contemplate whether the work could potentially symbolise a 'turn toward the arrangements of the many, the institutions of the common and the struggles of the exploited.' (Dean 2019: 14)

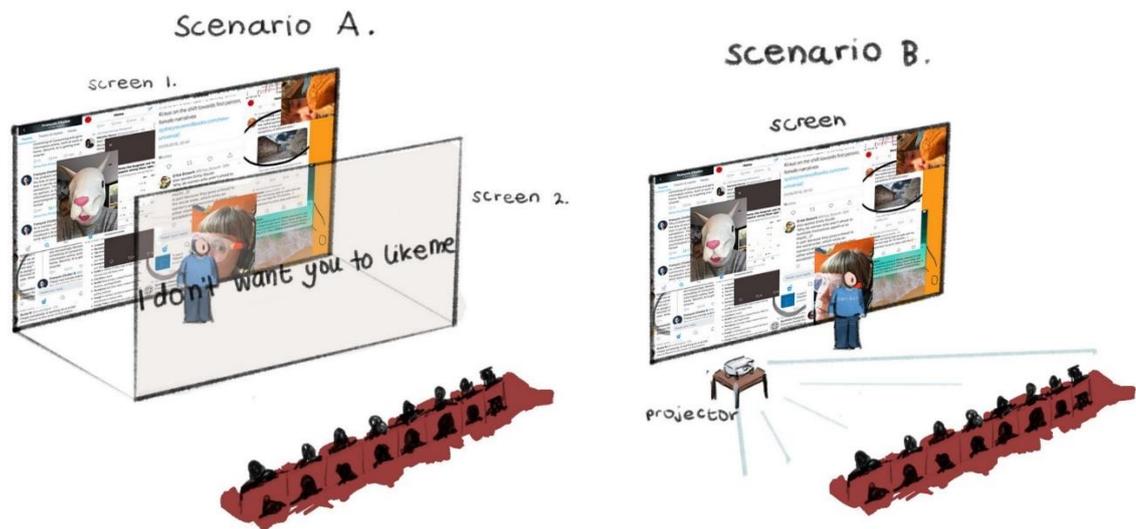
The palatable tone of e-ac-#2, prompted me to start sketching how I could create work that was less agreeable, acceptable, and deliberately physically more challenging to engage with. I decided that I would experiment further with creating work that attempted to refuse virality, by this I mean artwork that is not optimised to circulate quickly online, and to explore what it means to be anti-viral. This path led me to submit an abstract and proposal for the University for the Creative Arts' 2020 student research conference titled 'Futurity'. This decision was motivated by the conference's unique format, offering seven-minute slots for performing

research in an open-mic style. I aimed to test my ability to perform unlikability by adopting a 'semi-fictional character' persona. This persona, representing an 'unlikable woman', would allow me to shift the focus away from myself and create a space for reflection for both the audience and myself. I imagined that this persona with her expansive visuals, and use of objects as performative elements would be able to reshape spatial relationships. As a vehicle to channel emotional and attention-seeking qualities in a constructive manner, that drew attention to the material effects of **LIKES** on the body of the audience. This approach aimed to appeal for assistance, concluding with a call to action, encouraging engagement with the politics of content. In the context of arts research, the concept of a performance lecture revolves around viewing the audience as individuals who share a common life context.

My research for this performance started with an exploration of *likability* in various contexts, such as leadership (Clugston 2018, Menedez 2019), politics (Doble 2011, Barbara Lee Family Foundation, 2016, Cillizza 2016, Cauterucci 2019), literature (Weiner 2013, Gay 2014), and the arts (Thornton 2008, Paper Monument 2009). This examination revealed common patterns of traits associated with unlikable women, such as ambition, assertiveness (often misconstrued as aggression), shrill, cold, loud, profane, self-interested and being overly emotional (perceived as hysterical). While I am comfortable with public speaking, I am not a trained actress, which influenced my decision to treat the projected visuals as an extended aspect of my character, that the visuals would symbolise the form of what I was saying, not the content.

Drawing inspiration from these characteristics, I took them as a foundation for designing and guiding the visual elements of the performance. The aim was to create an atmosphere that was both silent and hysterical. To achieve this, there would be no accompanying sound track, my voice would be deadpan, and cold. The visual footage employed exaggerated editing techniques, incorporating an excess of images and rapid cuts. I started to create scenarios involving two screens. The imagery was structured to convey symbolic outbursts, achieved through the utilisation of two projectors. These projectors initially displayed the

same content but eventually diverged, each screen presenting its own distinct material. This visual approach created a dynamic and visually vibrant space, characterised by a sense of frenetic energy.



*Fig. 71 Illustration of scenario A and scenario B ©Atli Myers*

I developed two distinct installation scenarios (Fig. 71). In scenario A, I would position myself between two screens, one a conventional lecture screen, the other fabricated from layers of semi-translucent mesh. In scenario B, there would be a projector on stage, that points back out at the audience, making the audience materially the second screen, as well as supplying content through their reactions and engagement.

I decided that I would use the conference to test scenario B, as it highlighted the audience's active role in the experience, making them integral participants rather than passive observers. Using the audience's bodies to generate multiple screens could metaphorically represent the various ways individuals perceive and interact with the same content, or resemble how content can be customised for individual experiences.



*Fig. 72 Illustration of Con\$ent sweatshirt design ©Atli Myers*

I crafted a 950-word script for the performance and designed text for a blue oversized sweatshirt (Fig.72) drawing inspiration from Branded Content in e-a-c#2. The visual component of the performance deliberately deviates from the steady deadpan vocal rhythm, creating a striking juxtaposition. The visual presentation adopts a bombastic style, characterised by rapid edits and cuts that generate an uncomfortable hyper-speed of information change on screen. This technique serves to convey a sense of hysteria, panic, and references traits of unlikable women of loudness, dominance, and aggression. The visuals maintain an unrelenting pace, punctuated by moments of shifting between colour and black-and-white imagery, inducing temporary retinal impressions. The intention is to induce visual fatigue, encouraging viewers to close their eyelids as a respite. The goal is to challenge comfortable information absorption, deliberately making consumption a challenging endeavour.

The visual presentation was comprised from all the still images stored on my smartphone's photo app, totalling 9,542 images labelled 'recent,' this included 1239 screenshots, 10 bursts, 12 panoramas, 35 live photos, 15 slo-mo, and 265 selfies. There could be forty-fifty images on screen at any one moment, layering over one another. One goal was to symbolically overwhelm the audience with over-sharing, to emphasise content circulation and flow. The aim is to immerse them in a state of visual and physical bombardment. The images bounce onto their bodies and onto those around them, while the projector light adds to the fatigue of

watching. This deliberate approach seeks to evoke a sense of overwhelming sensory experience, emphasising the onlife connection between data and bodies, that bodies give social media, the Internet a material presence in the world.

I had hoped by standing in between two projection screens, to evoke an understanding that in this digital networked realm, our personal control over still or moving images is null; images can be captured, disseminated, multiplied, fragmented across networks, and stored across myriad devices, servers, and clouds. An image file's existence might linger in storage as mere bytes, detached from its original form. Within the networked digital image sphere, the image detaches from the attributes of the portrayed individual or event, and the data itself garners more esteem than the image, the individual, or their interactions (Dean 2005, Zuboff 2019, Tarnoff 2022). It is important to this research to keep reminding readers that the body that is socialising, working online and exploring digital spaces is materially the same body anchored offline. The performance through using two projectors symbolically demonstrated that the boundaries between the digital and analogue worlds are not rigid; there is no clear offline or online separation. In essence, the concept of "in real life" (IRL) no longer applies, as our lives "away from keyboard" (AFK) are still intricately connected to the Internet through our smartphones and other Internet-enabled devices.

Among the collected screenshots, there was a notable quote by Sara Ahmed, referencing her "citation as a feminist memory" concept from her work "Living a Feminist Life" (2017). Ahmed underscores citation as a conscious and political act that challenges dominant voices, while also revealing the often-overlooked labour and contributions of marginalised individuals. This resonated strongly with my research journey's intention. Ahmed's call for acknowledging marginalised voices through citation aligns with the essence of my artworks and performance, both focused on unveiling concealed elements using technical language. These screenshots primarily showcased content from academics, activists, feminists, institutions, and organisations, providing valuable recommendations, quotes, and opinions for further exploration.

Ahmed's notion of "citation as a feminist memory" extends beyond academic discourse, resonating with the dynamics of social media posts and **LIKES**. In a digital landscape where information is disseminated rapidly, the act of citing and referencing takes on a parallel role. Just as citations reshape our understanding of knowledge, social media posts and **LIKES** become markers that shape our collective perception of trends, opinions, and societal narratives. Much like the overlooked labour Ahmed highlights, it is understandable that the act of liking a post can be perceived as an active engaged contribution, as an action capable of amplifying marginalised voices and challenging dominant narratives. It is this fantasy that Dean repeatedly warns against. I have used an excess of screen grabs as citations, as an optimistic gesture to their potential to remain outside of future profit-driven systems.



*Fig. 73 Illustration of The T-shirt gun, and designs for T-shirts ©Atli Myers*

In the performance's last two minutes, I would engage the audience directly, using the inclusive pronoun 'we' to frame seventeen questions. This approach is intended to foster a sense of connection and complicity between myself and the audience. As the final question **'How do we resist a world where you HAVE TO like me?'** is posed, I planned to fire a T-shirt gun, launching T-shirts with slogans taken from artworks in e-a-c#2 (Fig 73) above the audience's heads. This unexpected and engaging interaction is intended to create moments that are both

uncomfortable and humorous, thereby enhancing the impact of the performance's message.

The final question emerges from the intricate challenge of creating and sharing politically charged artworks while simultaneously aiming to avoid bolstering the systems being criticised. This question is both a call for help, and a call for action. Essentially, while the notion of art nurturing positive social change is alluring, it often overlooks the profound influence that legal regulations and economic circumstances have on the feasibility or obstruction of such aspirations. I am aware that the PaR methodology of performing expanded and intensified communication, may not deliver radical action,

Expanded and intensified communicativity has neither enhanced opportunities for the articulation of political struggles nor enlivened radical democratic practices – although it has exacerbated left fragmentation, amplified the voices of right-wing extremists, and delivered ever more eyeballs to corporate advertisers. (Dean 2007: 277)

However, my current vision does not involve proposing a new political framework, instead, I aim to share my perspective on the present state of affairs. Through the performance of a semi-fictional character, employing a blend of documentary, survey, and a plea for assistance, I aspire to evoke a response. I acknowledge that I am uncertain about the most effective forms of action to achieve success, nevertheless, as referenced in my speech, and the final seventeen questions there are historical examples that reveal that successful labour disputes have historically materialised as strikes and labour withdrawal.

I am aware of the phallic symbolism that arises when a woman fires a T-shirt gun, releasing promotional material over an audience as a form of reward, irrespective of the audiences' level of enthusiasm or commitment. This act can potentially represent a conscious divergence from traditional gender roles and power dynamics. By repurposing a device often associated with forceful and assertive actions into a tool for audience gratification, a visual and symbolic tension emerges

within the imagery. Is the woman still challenging societal norms and prevailing expectations, or mimicking them. This interplay between the phallic symbol and the promotional gesture has the potential to evoke feelings of empowerment, disruption, but also a heightened sense of loss, of not winning. This act at the end of a visual presentation on *likability* establishes a connection between the practice of gratifying an audience with merchandise and signalling a **LIKE**, highlighting a parallel between the two.

The influence of VALIE EXPORT's work *Aktionshose: Genitalpanik (Action Pants: Genital Panic)* 1969 is evident in my use of the gun and the expanded screen. These elements are employed to provoke the audience to shift from passive consumption of content to an active engagement with reality. Just as EXPORT's work challenged traditional notions of spectatorship, my performance seeks to disrupt conventional modes of viewing and encourage a more critical examination of the media we encounter. Dean proposes that the ideal participant in information age is the consumer:

a ready recipient of multiple messages from friends and advertisers. Just as the global participant joins virtual struggles from anywhere, she chooses, so does the global consumer make purchases, consume ads, and contribute to the circulating content of communicative capitalism. (Dean 2007: 229)

She observes a shift in our concept of social belonging, transitioning from roles like "worker" or "citizen" to an affiliation with "consumer." This shift signifies a movement from roles deeply tied to symbolic associations to identities influenced by patterns of consumption. This progression towards imaginary identities suggests that our sense of belonging is increasingly moulded by our engagement with products, services, and cultural representations. In both the unperformed performance and the web conference presentation, my aim was to tap into this shift and appeal for action through our identities as artists.

In adapting the presentation for web conferencing, I had to acknowledge the reality of whether it was possible to create a live visually extravagant and overwhelming

experience via off the shelf web conferencing technology. While the presentation could be considered communal and synchronous, it is a highly individualised experience. Each conference attendee had control over audio levels, there was a variety of viewing screen sizes, depending on device. The visual impact could be impacted by variations in brightness, contrast, and colour balance. In web conferences, participants' broadband quality significantly impacts the experience. A strong connection ensures smooth communication, while weak connectivity causes audio/video issues, latency, frozen video, hindered content sharing, disrupted interactivity, and compromised conference performance, particularly in larger groups. When adapting to web-conferencing technology, I had to forego the second projector method. Instead, I shifted the focus to the content and pacing of my words, rather than an excess of visuals. Looking back, I realise that I might have leaned too heavily towards conventionality, closely adhering to the structure of a typical research presentation.

In both formats, the opening slide presents the title "I Don't Want You to Like Me," and the closing slides shift focus to "I Don't Want You to **HAVE TO** Like Me." My intention was to disrupt the audience by highlighting our complicity—our involvement, whether conscious or not, in facilitating various negative aspects. While aiming to cultivate common interest, my performance also appealed to self-interest. The amended closing title, "I Don't Want You to **HAVE TO** Like Me," emphasises external pressure and obligation, underlining the theme of coercion and the desire to challenge it. The opening title is both symptomatic and descriptive, the final slide indicates a situation I have identified as needing to be changed, it is a problem that has to be solved.

When I express my invitation for others to join forces, it carries an implicit recognition of the potency inherent in numbers, that as a 'we,' we have the capacity to effect change. Jodi Dean calls this 'the power of the number, of the many' (2019) her concept is closely tied to the potential emergence of a novel political landscape if people can get organised. Within my planned performance and the presentation that I gave, I was going to try and form a cohesive group through the form of an appeal that, but the group that I imagined was still self-interested. Dean links

survivors to identity politics, individualism and allyship – a situation that she says is not capable of forming a collective (2019). In reflecting on my use of the survey method over the research inquiry it is evident that I keep trying to form groups out of individuals, and it is fitting that this also the method used for the concluding research work.

Web conferencing can be a suitable choice for certain contexts, offering global reach, overcoming geographical barriers, enhancing accessibility, and reducing costs. However, in the context of my initial goals, it highlighted a range of challenges. These included technical glitches, barriers to interaction, the absence of atmosphere, limited non-verbal cues, and potential difficulties in maintaining engagement. During the group presentation, participants were muted, and when I shared my screen, the lack of body language and non-verbal cues made it difficult to gauge the remote viewers' attention. In most comedic and academic settings conducted in person, there's an effort to connect with the audience through non-verbal cues like eye contact, smiles, or gestures. In this instance, the absence of a physical setting led to a lack of vibrancy and energy, affecting the overall ambiance of the presentation. On this particular occasion there was a distinct lack of joy, and the absence of a physical setting definitely affect the overall ambiance and energy of the presentation.

In summarising this section, the combined experience of rehearsing but not performing IDWYTLM and having to present a less sensory, restricted physical format over web conferencing amplified the different temporal rhythms of sensations of virtual and physical proximity. The experience of feeling a virtual proximity to an audience, but physically separated acted to guide my reflection on how I felt that I had been 'touched' by the experience. It raised the question of **How can thinking of LIKES as agentic matter in the world support a rise anti-capitalist feminist consciousness-raising?**

My response is that viewing **LIKES** as agentic matter in the world aligns with an anti-capitalist feminist consciousness-raising by highlighting the underlying power

dynamics and social implications of seemingly innocuous online interactions. Instead of dismissing **LIKES** as trivial digital gestures, this perspective recognises them as active agents that contribute to shaping individual behaviour, societal norms, and economic structures. By acknowledging the agency of **LIKES**, anti-capitalist feminists can draw attention to how platforms manipulate and profit from users' engagement, often reinforcing patriarchal and consumerist agendas. This awareness prompts critical examination of how technology perpetuates unequal power relations and encourages a collective understanding of the need for alternative, equitable digital environments. Consequently, this approach empowers individuals to resist the commodification of their experiences, advocate for more democratic online spaces, and participate in activism that challenges the capital-driven status quo.

While proposing alternative technological systems is beyond this researcher's expertise, it is within the scope of future commitments to the inquiry to identify counternarratives, gather connections, and integrate them into artworks, performance lectures, and artist talks for broader dissemination. It's crucial to redirect focus towards what is being lost- the capacity to shape one's own life experience. The price of this subordination should be widely exposed across diverse public venues:

Subordinates of all kinds exercise their capacity for critical self-reflection every day – that is why masters are thwarted, frustrated and, sometimes, overthrown. But unless masters are overthrown, unless subordinates engage in political action, no amount of critical reflection will end their subjection and bring them freedom. (Pateman 1988: 205)

While the concept of participation holds weight in democratic systems, its significance diminishes in the context of the Internet and the web. If we investigate the nature of our improved content production, the answer becomes clear: we are becoming better economic subjects, not better citizens. Art-as-content is a problem about capitalism, and women's art-as-content is a problem about fraternal patriarchal capitalism. So how do 'we' contest this?

## 5b. CONTEST

*CONTEST*, is an expansive photographic artwork, created with the support of twenty-seven hosts during the period from May to October 2021.

The material process of capturing, storing, and managing data drives the aesthetic concept of *CONTEST* serving as the artwork itself, blurring the distinction between the concept and the physical manifestation. My intention was to spotlight the ordinary, imperceptible, and extensive methods through which our personal data is gathered, extracted, and amassed. The word “**contest**” has been chosen for the artwork because of its double association: firstly, with competition. Its second meaning infers opposition, reflecting my consideration of strategies of digital non-participation as opposition to the use of social media spaces and the Internet as they exist currently. The texts of Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* (2019), Jodi Dean, *Question of Organisation* (2014) *Comrade* (2019), and William Deresiewicz, *The Death of the Artist* (2020) have been instructive in shaping this phase of the research.

The context of the Covid-19 pandemic, including lockdowns and restrictions that occurred from March 2020 to July 2021, significantly influenced the trajectory of this work. The experience of presenting *I Don't Want You To Like Me* (IDWYTLM) through web conferencing technology, marked by its anti-climactic nature, acted as a catalytic force. It prompted the exploration of alternative avenues to showcase physical art pieces directly to audiences, thus bypassing the intermediary of a screen. The solution was inspired by Mail art, also known as "correspondence art" or "postal art," an artistic movement that emerged in the 1960s. During this period, artists chose to send postcards containing drawings or written verses through the postal system, diverging from conventional channels of selling or showcasing their creations. The symbolic resemblance to 'packetization' in computer networks, where data is divided into smaller units known as packets before transmission, reinforced the appropriateness of this approach. The initial concept was straightforward: applying a substance similar to fly-trap glue to partially coat an image. These adhesive-coated images, referred to as "sticky images," would be sent out to people, a select group of individuals from both my professional and social circles who would host the artwork for a predefined duration. They would

return their artwork (packet) so that I could reassemble the pieces into a larger message.

In the following section, I will describe how I made purposeful attempts to perform the actions of a likable surveillance capitalist, by making appeals to existing networks for support, then applying extractive processes to create CONTEST. For artists and individuals utilising social media for income generation, public accounts expose their posted content to the dynamics of **LIKEs** and the effects of the **LIKE** economy. When livelihood depends on *likability*, it evolves into a conscious practice and physical performance. Consequently, an artist's ability to conform to an art world's social and cultural norms can dictate their success or failure. In my endeavour, I aimed to collect and exploit the data byproducts of a group of twenty-seven individuals from my social and professional circles using analogue methods. While data exhaust is typically linked to online activities, Zuboff highlights its value in surveillance capitalism, particularly Google's realization of its economic potential, and its role in behaviour prediction and modification (2019).

The conditions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, spanning from March 2021 to July 19, 2021, led to substantial limitations on offline social interactions, with other individuals seen as potential sources of infection. The regulations governing the assembly and interaction of groups of individuals offline remained subject to government evaluation. This circumstance enhanced the appeal of collecting physical data using analogue methods. In this context, human data gained an active material quality due to its association with the possibility of contagion. The pandemic prompted a situation where a significant portion of the UK population could envision how the invisible traces of a body, such as exhalations, could lead to remarkably new events through transmission, giving rise to networks of "traced" connections to other bodies. Importantly, these bodily effects did not require direct person-to-person interaction to manifest, echoing the principles demonstrated in the second shadow text.

I chose to label the individuals as "hosts" in order to underscore the social dimension of hosting guests temporarily. This term also draws parallels with computer technology, where a host is a device that facilitates network access through a user interface, as well as the biological concept of harbouring a parasite and providing nourishment. I curated and assessed an initial list of potential hosts, taking into account factors like their reliability and availability. Jodi Dean defines a networks value through the following considerations:

How many other links is it related to? Are those links related to other links? How many? Google captures this value, the link's social substance and its place within a general system of social relations (Dean 2014: 5)

Network value describes the social relation of a link. In the context of this artwork, I am the link between the twenty-seven people who supported its creation. CONTEST looks to materialise my professional network links, to draw attention to the tension between status and *likability*. An artist who works online becomes a communication manager that has to make calculations of the usefulness of being visible and of network links. They have to weigh up the advantages of collaborating with their networks, or whether they should compete, in order for their body of artwork to gain status.

To determine suitability, I also considered whether I had strong social ties with them. I excluded individuals living overseas due to the uncertain state of the postal service at the time. The process involved creating lists of names on paper and seeking connections to form groups. Some names on the list carried risks due to weaker social connections, but I evaluated that their association was more beneficial to me than vice versa. This was validated when these potential hosts did not respond to my initial or follow-up emails. I had anticipated potential rejection and prepared for such responses. The absence of a response is intriguing, as it unveils a power imbalance. Having encountered Slavich and Cole's research on DNA response to exclusion during this inquiry, I could now envisage my cells reacting to my perception of insufficient *likability*.

By immersing myself in the role of a surveillance capitalist and seeking innovative ways to use the data collected from the willing and unwitting hosts, I began to adopt the perspective of an artist-as-business. In the online realm, artists-as-businesses function as internet businesses, engaging in surveillance and extraction activities by meticulously scrutinising and analysing analytics derived from their websites, social media channels, and electronic newsletters. Arts organisations, and art funders run courses to support this behaviour, encouraging artists to understand their audiences and to

help you to explore and harness the benefits of technology to achieve your goals, find new ways to reach and engage audiences, develop sustainable business models, and maximise income opportunities. (Arts Council 2023)

Within the confines of a capitalist framework, institutions often encourage us, both through education and funding mechanisms, to extract value from our artistic content with the aim of becoming more proficient businesses. However, this process inadvertently propels artists into the realm of active users of a second shadow text, ultimately gamifying their lives. In this context, gamification involves striving to excel within existing systems without necessarily seeking to transform them. The second shadow text, functioning as a comprehensive database, effectively obscures the extensive hours, repetitive tasks, routines, and the often-mundane aspects of artistic labour.

This particular brand of capitalism gives rise to a sense of dependency and cynicism. Notably, the majority of artists-as-businesses operate as sole proprietors, necessitating their engagement in a myriad of roles: administrator, accountant, communication manager, perception manager, fundraiser, salesperson, producer, director, and customer service representative. Concurrently, many artists must also secure paid employment, often in fields tangentially related to the arts, in order to sustain their livelihood while attempting to cultivate their artistic practice. This multifaceted balancing act underscores the complex and demanding nature of an artist's journey within this system.

While the hosts were well-informed about my primary objective, which centred on the collection of analogue data through the hosted artworks, they were less aware that their interactions, conversations, return behaviour of the artworks, and even the documented installation process were also contributing to the data pool for analysis. Drawing inspiration from deceptive tactics employed by specific web applications, services that ostensibly offer one function, like fertility tracking apps, while surreptitiously selling user location data to third parties. I developed a similar approach, which involved following Google's strategy of capturing all data related to the hosts involved in this process of making this artwork, just in case it might be useful in the future. The terms and conditions of my ethics form were carefully structured to accommodate this method.

The creation of the artwork was approached with a careful consideration of both consent and the potential for withdrawal. In line with this approach, I adopted a method reminiscent of packetization. Each individual host's data was organised and encapsulated within individual pixel tiles. These pixel tiles played a crucial role in maintaining the clarity of the written message, while the absence of a tile did not compromise the overall meaning of the artwork. I was dedicated to upholding the hosts' rights to withdraw from the study, with the option to have their data deleted and erased if they chose to do so.

The selection of pixels as a reference point for this artwork was driven by their status as the smallest units within a digital image, serving as the foundational components for anything visible on a computer display. The uncompromising nature of a pixel's form is noteworthy, it remains as a singular numeric colour value, impervious to alteration. When a pixel is detached from its original image, it often lacks intricate detail due to the digital environment's copy-and-paste capabilities. Depending on its resolution, a pixel can seamlessly blend into other images or contexts without raising suspicion. Grids of pixels only coalesce into a recognisable image when viewed at a larger scale and within a broader context. Pixelation is commonly used within images to conceal sensitive details or ensure anonymity. My decision to accentuate pixelation directs focus towards the process and materiality, rather than representation.

I extracted twenty-seven-pixel tiles from a self-generated image. Using Photoshop, I zoomed into the centre of my mouth until the pixels filled the screen. Employing the marquee tool, I selected a three by nine grid of pixels and then copied and pasted this selection into a new document. This grid served as both a map and a palette for producing twenty-seven distinct digital prints, each measuring ten square centimetres. These pixel tiles symbolically connect to my smile and my mouth, embodying the potential for conversation and consumption. The specific origin of the pixels wasn't disclosed to the hosts, and no inquiries were made about it, revealing a certain level of trust or ambivalence, a phenomenon I've come to recognise in the context of social media usage.



*Fig. 74 Documentation, working on the panoramic 2021 ©Liv Pennington*

Initially, my intention was to craft a solitary artwork using twenty-seven pixels arranged in a three by nine grid, with a single slogan 'Like with me' painted on with a sticky clear solution. However, the resulting almost panoramic rectangular format, which alluded to a landscape, felt wrong (Fig 74 above). This prompted me to engage in experimentation. The final decision was made to divide the rectangle into three squares, each encompassing a three-by-three grid, this acted to underscore the square construction of the pixel. As a consequence of this aesthetic shift, I revisited the list of people seeking out patterns of connections and disparities. The twenty-seven individuals were subsequently clustered into three distinct groups, each composed of nine hosts, with their own group slogan:

**Group 1.** Nine individuals explicitly connected to my PhD, made up of my three supervisors, two referees and four critical friends. **‘Like with me’** is the slogan written in the sticky mixture on the pixels.

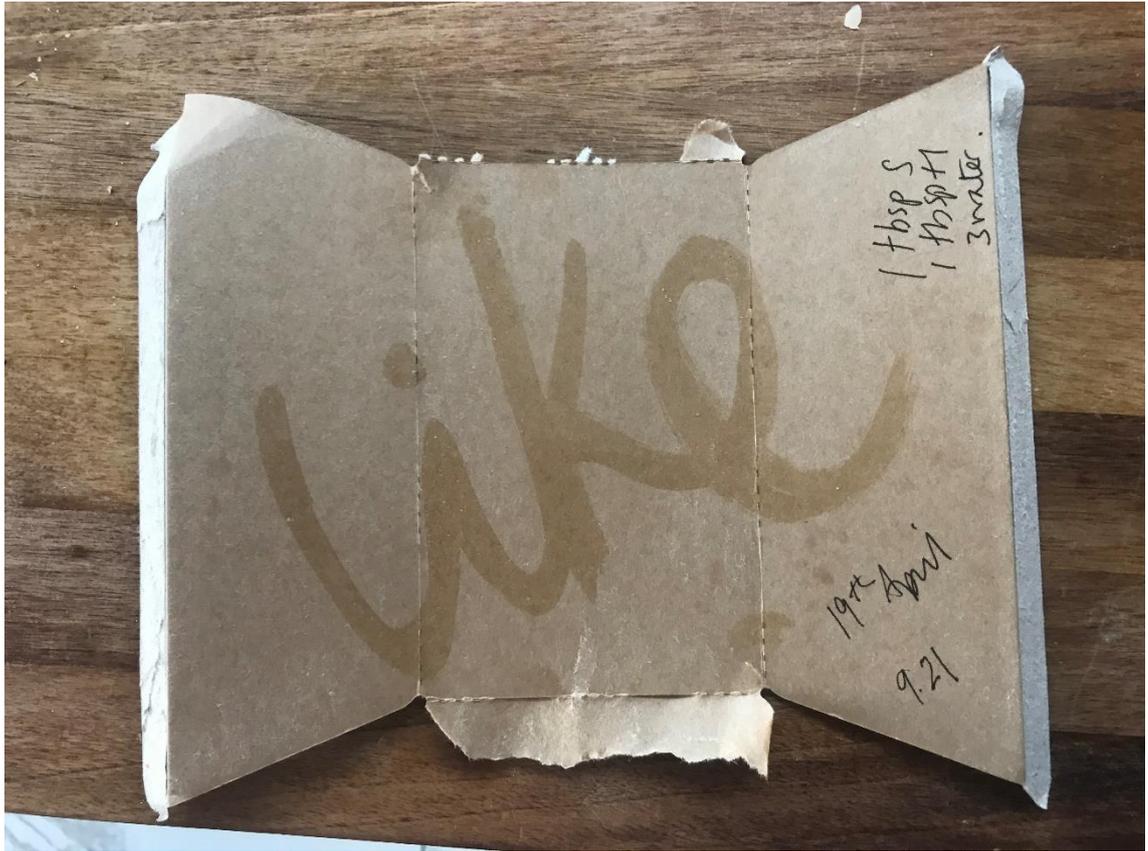
**Group 2.** Nine individuals who I would like to work with further, made up of artists, critics and curators who have supported my career. This groups slogan is **‘Links Matter.’**

**Group 3.** Nine individuals who support me practically, materially, emotionally and economically, made up of family and friends. **‘Keep in Touch’** is the slogan for this group.

In retrospect these groups fall into Dean’s model of the ally, she critiques the terms of allyship as temporary, of being limiting and that people join together under self-interest. It seems self-evident that as I attempt to expose how capitalist practices are extracting data, that I might end up modelling capitalist practices. I take note of Dean’s warning that by instructing,

allies on how to feel, think, and act if they want to consider themselves as people who are on the right side of the oppressed. Their awareness is what needs to change. (Dean 2019: 17)

and acknowledge that I performed this appeal for allyship in *IDWYTLM 2020*. By examining *CONTEST* through the lens of Dean's survivor and system frameworks, the appeal for allyship is present, though one can discern a shift in how my research practice has evolved its approach to using individual survey responses to construct an image. This marks the first instance where individual components are joined together to create a unified image, and message.



*Fig. 75 Digital image of experiment, testing ratio of sugar, honey and water 2021©Liv Pennington*

In the studio, I engaged in experimentation by varying the ratios of sugar, honey, and water to create a range of mixtures (Fig. 75 above). This blend of materials has historical connections with sugaring, a hair removal technique predominantly used by women and directly contrasting slow drying. I conducted tests with matte, lustre, and gloss surfaces to assess the drying speed of the mixtures, their tendency to run, or their capacity to retain stickiness. I affixed the paper pieces to the studio wall to gauge when visible debris might accumulate. I examined the papers at regular intervals, and after a span of six weeks, I identified the mixture that retained its form and stickiness sufficiently for collecting exhaust data. I ultimately settled on a one-month duration for the process, a choice rooted in simplicity for hosts to recall. This decision also carried temporal associations with the female body, such as menstruation, and with economic cycles of payments and charges.



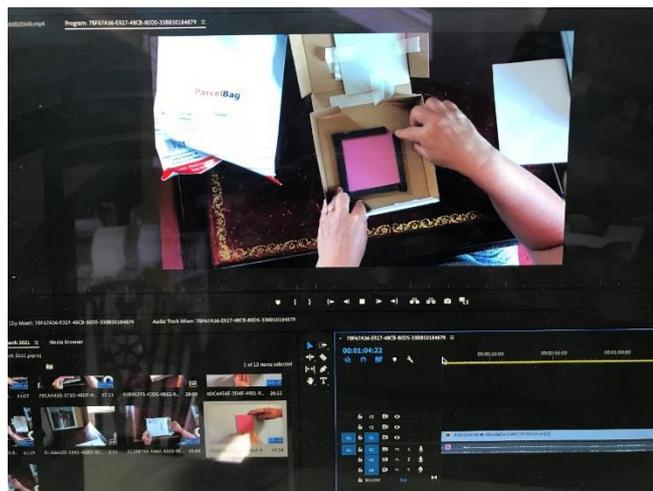
*Fig. 76 Detail of *Life with me*, just after painting on sticky mixture ©Liv Pennington 2021*

The practicalities of painting a coherent text across the pixel-tile grid with the honey and sugar mixture meant the group of tiles had to be treated as a single entity for the message to be made (Fig. 76 above). The pixel tiles were then packed individually and sent to their hosts. Twenty-six hosts emailed or texted a digital image of their hosted work in situ, twenty-five hosts returned their artwork after hosting. I aimed to optimize the overall user experience, striving to match the convenience often associated with digital platforms. Therefore, I recognised the necessity for the artwork to be compact enough to fit through a standard letterbox (Fig 77, page 195). This approach aimed to spare hosts the inconvenience of queuing at post offices, especially given the prevailing concerns about interactions with strangers during that period.



*Fig. 77 Packing CONTEST for posting ©Liv Pennington 2021*

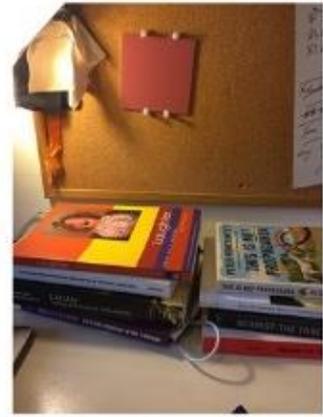
My default position was to create an installation guide on paper for hosts, this approach aligned with my analogue data collection and management methodology. However, after several unsuccessful attempts, it became apparent that I lacked the time and resources to individually guide all twenty-seven participants through the process. Consequently, I opted for a generic yet focused video as a viable solution. Employing video content and digital hosting as a means to convey instructions aligns with the "strategic and provisional usefulness" concept advocated by scholars like Elizabeth Grosz (1994, 2004), Stacy Alaimo, and Susan Hekman (2008).



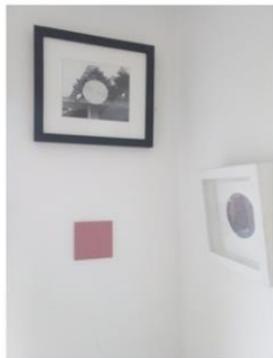
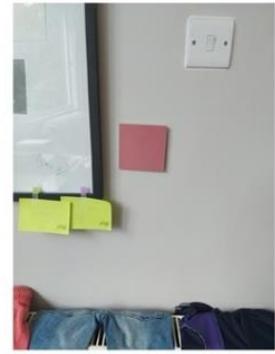
*Fig. 78 Photo of editing process 'How to care for your hosted artwork' ©Liv Pennington 2021*

During the period of Covid-19 regulations, which mandated remote work and online interactions, my exposure to "how-to videos" increased significantly. The decision to create a how-to video represented an extension of my role as a likable surveillance capitalist into the digital realm (Fig. 78 page 195). Notably, how-to videos enjoy immense popularity on platforms like YouTube, with a staggering 86% of viewers regularly consuming such content (YouTube, 2018). Given this context, opting for a video format seemed apt, especially when considering the potential implications of data downloads and associated storage demands associated with emailing movie files to each individual. To distribute the video, titled *Hosted Artwork Care Instructions*, I selected Vimeo over the more widely known YouTube. This choice was influenced by Vimeo's lack of advertisements and its superior privacy system.

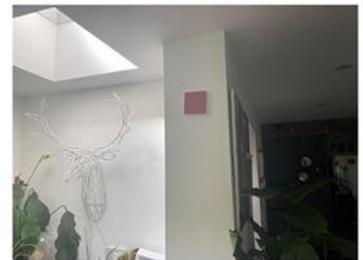
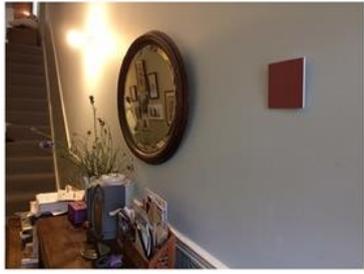
The act of conscientiously choosing where to host online content is a way of caring for those you invite to access the space for interaction with your work. *IDWYTLM* 2020 had effectively illuminated the dilemma of putting an audience in an uncomfortable spot when requesting their attention. This experience prompted my re-evaluation of my presence on specific platforms and an extended contemplation of the level of consent I'm soliciting from others to sustain my livelihood. Though I recognise that my individual actions might not substantially repel digital intrusions, the decision not to extend invitations to certain spaces ought to be regarded as a small yet significant form of resistance. Presently, the video is available on my personal website, accessible via a password-protected link, specifically for the purpose of this research submission. For viewing the video, the link can be found in the references. The hosts were asked to install the artwork in a space of their choice, take and email me an image, then return the artwork to me in the pre-paid self-addressed box after one month.



*Fig. 79 Like with me 2021 (Composite digital print) 30cm x 30 cm ©Liv Pennington*



*Fig. 80 Links matter 2021 (Composite digital print, 30cm x 30 cm) ©Liv Pennington*



*Fig. 81 Keep in touch, 2021 Composite digital print 30 cm x 30cm) ©Liv Pennington*

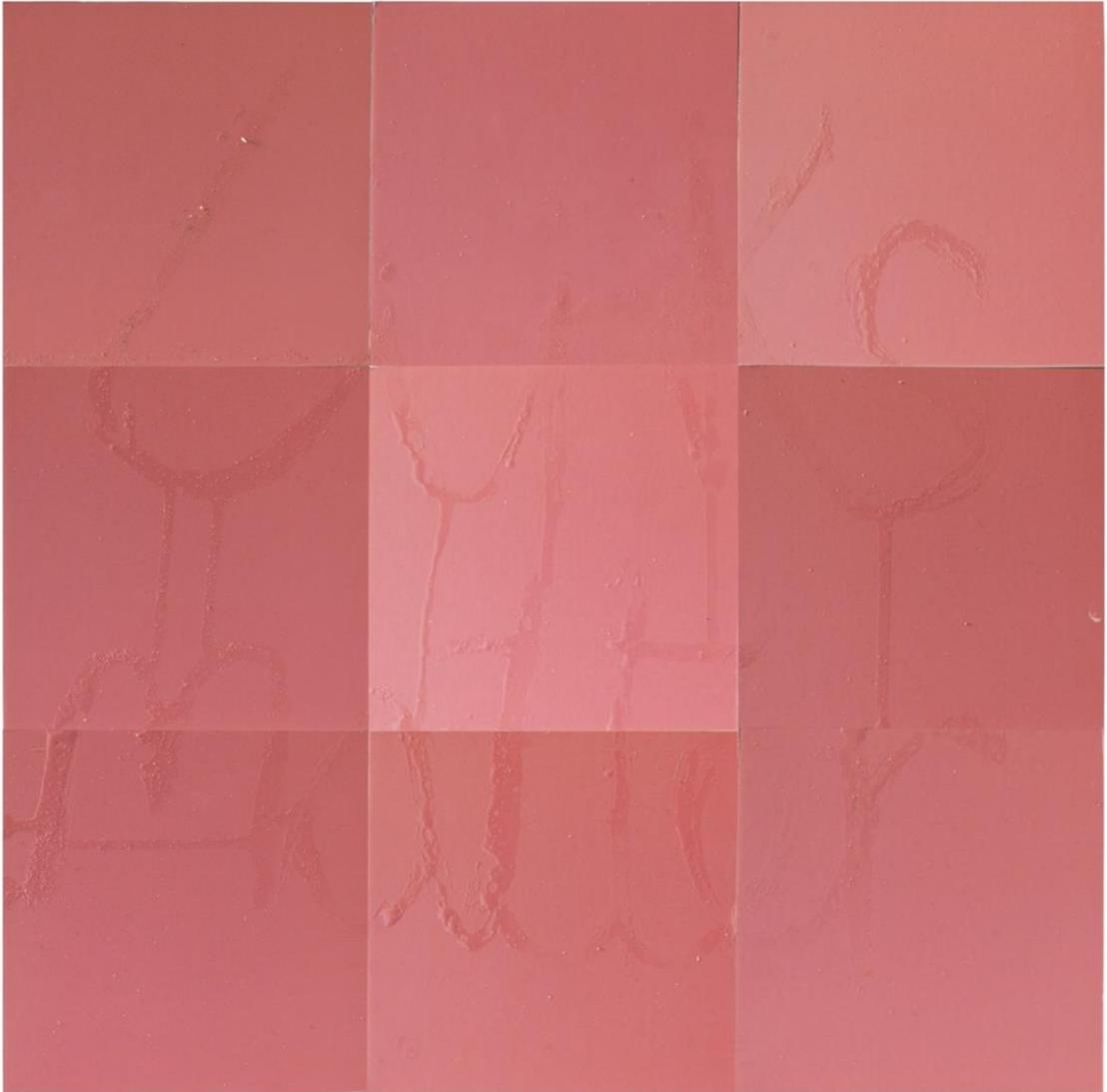
By asking people to host my artworks, I am asking them to be responsible, and to demonstrate care, whilst my 'artistic' actions draw attention to how personal networks are in a digital social context are increasingly being approached as something to be leveraged.

Traditional artworks, like books can be shelved, placed on a wall, placed in public, they can be;

Treasured. Lent. Passed on. Books belong to the people who acquire them, but they are also a responsibility, something to be curated and looked after. (Doctorow 2014: 15)

The majority of the twenty-six submitted images provided a glimpse into the worlds of their respective hosts. Notably, three images contained no personal details, each representing one host from different groups. Some hosts may have inadvertently revealed more than they initially intended; for example, the visible books hinted at potential personality traits and offered insights into their professional fields. A discernible pattern emerged: certain hosts seemed to embrace the pixel tile as an artwork in their living space, placing it among paintings and drawings on walls or mantelpieces. Others treated the tile as a transient guest, as evidenced by images of it propped on shelves or still within its packaging. White and cream painted walls frequently served as backdrops. Notably, in the *Keep in touch* cluster, one host (Fig. 81 middle row, first image) intentionally positioned the tile on a wall with a known leak, suggesting an attempt to wash away data. I aggregated and arranged the digital images provided by the hosts into a grid layout that corresponded to the positioning of their respective tiles. My intention was not to conduct an exhaustive content analysis of the environmental images submitted by the hosts, but rather to highlight the vast amount of data that could potentially be extracted from them.

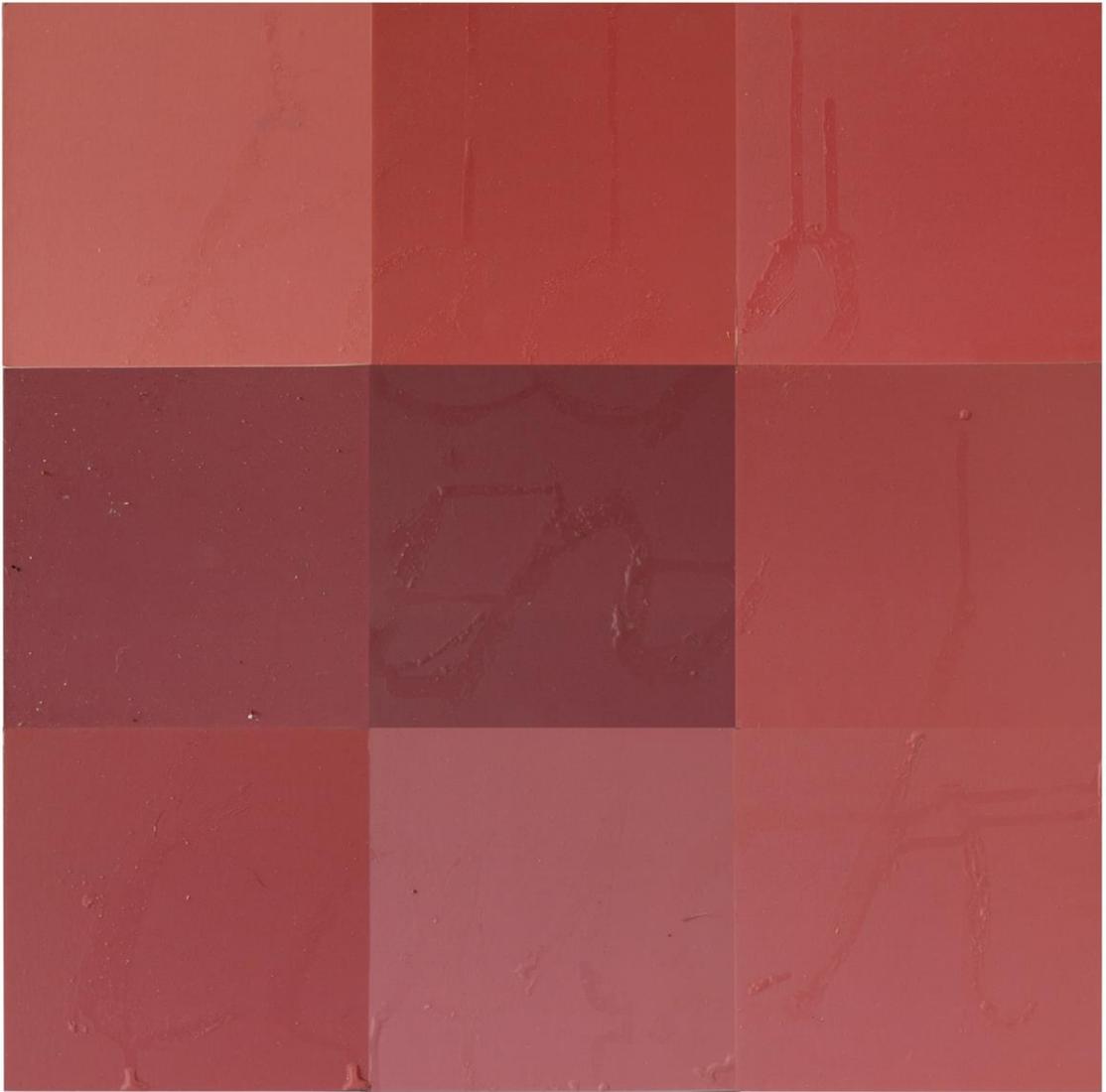
Upon receiving the artwork, I proceeded to capture two distinct types of digital images. The initial images were taken within a controlled studio environment, utilizing flash lighting in combination with a professional-grade digital camera equipped with a macro lens. These conditions facilitated the creation of high-quality raw image files. Subsequently, I imported these raw files into Photoshop, employing digital compositing techniques to reproduce a nine-pixel tile grid (see figures 82, 83, and 84, pages 201-203). Following this, I produced a digital c-type print. The print dimensions were deliberately chosen to be 105cm x 105cm, with the aim of rendering some of the microscopic data discernible to the naked eye.



*Fig. 82 Links matter 2021 (Composite digital print, 105cm x 105cm) 2021 ©Liv Pennington*



*Fig. 83 Like with me 2021 (Composite digital c-type 105cm x 105cm) ©Liv Pennington*



*Fig. 84 Keep in touch 2021 (Composite digital c-type 105cm x 105cm) ©Liv Pennington*



*Fig. 85 examples of data taken from tiles from Like with me (2021) ©Liv Pennington*

For the second photoshoot, I utilised a x1000 USB microscope directly connected to a laptop for capturing still images. This experience was incredibly revealing (Fig. 85 above). Many hosts had expressed apologies for what they considered as providing minimal data contributions, believing they had offered very little. However, it became apparent that their naked-eye view didn't capture the intricate details, a concept resonating with Zuboff's idea that familiar perspectives often render the unprecedented unseen (2019). Shifting to a microscopic lens unveiled a plethora of diverse materials adhered to the sticky mixture. I was able to document the detritus in reasonable detail (Fig. 86, page 205) but unable to forensically ascertain what each item was. It is not relevant to know exactly what data has been gathered or whether we are looking at a cat flea or a bed bug. As Tiziana Terranova states:

You can observe and kill an individual entity, anatomize it, and you still won't find out what it is that will make it act in a certain way once it acts as an element within a population open to flows.

You can collect as much data as you want about individual users,  
but this won't give you the dynamic of the overall network.  
(2004:104)

It was the process of collecting, managing and organising the data from my  
networks that was important.



*Fig. 86 unknown insect from CONTEST 2021 ©Liv Pennington*

Drawing upon a lineage of feminist artists, the approach of this work resonates particularly with French artist Sophie Calle (b. 1953). Calle's artistic practice revolves around the exploration and manipulation of rules, both in her approach to creating art and in engaging with the subjects of her work. She often employs self-imposed constraints, and instructions to guide her artistic process, giving structure to her projects. Calle's works straddle the boundaries of privacy and intimacy, often blurring personal and public lines, inviting viewers into her life and emotions. This challenges conventional norms and societal expectations, creating a space where rules are both adhered to and subverted, providing fresh insights into human relationships, emotions, and experiences. Renowned for her distinctive blend of text, photography, and installation, Sophie Calle employs a deadpan style that

merges her data-gathering methods with the presentation of seemingly absurd scenarios in a straightforward and emotionally detached manner. This approach manages to strike a balance between humour and seriousness, it is an approach that I look to emulate.

Comparatively, our approach shares methodological similarities with the use of the survey method, and for establishing personal rules for gathering, organising, and presenting material. There are instances where we have both used the labour of others to create our work, this is exemplified for Calle in her project *Take Care of Yourself* 2007 where she responds to a breakup letter by enlisting 107 women to interpret it through diverse mediums, showcasing the complex reactions to emotional situations. Calle consistently pushes the limits of traditional boundaries surrounding privacy and observation in her work. While she typically assumes the role of the observer, her personal everyday life is frequently the subject of the investigations and there are instances where she intentionally becomes the observed subject captured on camera, as seen in her works *The Shadow* (1981) and *Double Blind* (1992) and in *Take Care* 2007. *CONTEST* through using three different technical camera lenses attempts to push the boundaries of privacy and observation as a means to draw attention to the politics of content, and my drift towards becoming an anti-social social person.

In my artworks, I tend to employ concise text in artworks closer to the slogans used by artists Barbara Kruger and Jenny Holzer, rather than Sophie Calle's detailed narratives and accompanying texts. However, this research endeavour has revealed an interesting shift. While performing as a gallery host in e-a-c#1 *CONTENT* 2019 and during the performance-presentation of *IDWYTL* 2020, I've noticed a growing inclination to engage directly with audiences. This observation has led me to explore the potential of oral storytelling, enabling me to interact and improvise with the audience in a more immediate way. This leaning towards oral communication and its implications will be further discussed in the forthcoming sections of the conclusion, as it influences my future artistic endeavours.

## Chapter summary

*CONTEST* marks the first instance where I have reassembled individual elements into a cohesive singular image, that could potentially symbolise a ‘turn toward the arrangements of the many, the institutions of the common and the struggles of the exploited.’ (Dean 2019: 14) I have not fully liberated myself from this preoccupation with the individual, or with surviving, but I have shown that my artistic practice has transitioned towards to going beyond it. *CONTEST* stands as the work that comes closest to distancing itself from mere engagement with survivors and systems. It serves as the culmination of my research journey, depending on your political standpoint it can showcase a positive trajectory towards a more communal approach of knowledge building.

The *CONTEST* project's artworks align with Zuboff's analysis of social media platforms within surveillance capitalism's context. These platforms act both as data collection avenues and advertising spaces. Similarly, my artworks serve both as conduits for data collection and by placing these artworks with hosts I transform their spaces into billboards promoting my research, potentially broadening my reach and professional prospects in the art world. However, I recognise instances where I fell short of fully embodying the surveillance capitalist role. I didn't maximise the value of network connections and data obtained from hosts. In the realm of capitalist success, artists are expected to expand their reach across various metrics. For instance, I didn't prompt hosts to share images or videos of the artwork on their social media accounts, despite a potential reach of around 27,250 people based on follower counts. This may seem like a missed marketing opportunity for cross-promotion, where hosts and I could enhance visibility by endorsing each other's profiles. Yet, from an artistic standpoint, I believe hosts were not deprived of a unique experience or a chance for fresh insights. My decision to forego this avenue spared them from the unpaid labour associated with promotional efforts among friends.

The concept that an artwork derives meaning from its interaction with the viewer is intuitive and desirable. Such engagement activates the artwork and opens the

potential for fresh perspectives through novel materials and discourse. Yet, when an artwork's primary aim is to cater to selfie-taking individuals, its focus may not be on delivering transformative experiences. Instead, its goal is to extend its online presence through screens, functioning more as an economic environment to navigate than an object to deeply contemplate, essentially becoming a form of marketing.

Two noteworthy findings emerged from this process. Firstly, the research artwork has highlighted the unpredictability of human behaviour. Notably, two hosts from group 1, comprising supervisors, referees, and critical friends did not return their assigned artworks despite my efforts to streamline the process and minimise the hosts' effort. Despite follow-up reminder emails urging the return of the artwork, these hosts did not fulfil their social obligation. This unexpected outcome, instead of undermining the artwork's integrity, adds an element of intrigue. It has been observed by scientists in the context of data sharing the primary challenges in this context are social rather than technical. The source of friction arises when users deliberately withhold information, not due to technical limitations, but simply because they choose not to share it (Zuboff 2019: 79) This event also adds credence to why web applications and social media platforms attempt to make their default settings opt out, rather than opt in. This failure to perform as the researcher expected offered a glimpse of how we may resist digital strategies, such as pushing for opt-in consent and to look to community-driven alternatives to off-the-shelf corporate platforms. The second finding is the importance of using a different lens. In the case of this artwork, this was undertaken both metaphorically and technically to look in different ways to establish new stories and reveal other worlds.

The major difference between *IDWYTLM* and *CONTEST* is that I chose to employ *likability* as a method to appeal for data collection in *CONTEST*, where as in *IDWYTLM* I try to point out the futility of *likability* through manifesting unlikable women traits in the form of my behaviour combined with A/V live performance.

## 6 Conclusion

My research began with the hypothesis, if women and [our] art have to be *likable* to be seen for social media, does that make us content?

I set out to explore the implications of *likability* and **LIKES** on women, and for their art practice, through living life as inquiry and developing methods in expanded photographic practices. This research inquiry did not set out to redefine how the female body is socially portrayed, but rather to explore any connection between *likability* and **LIKES**. I aimed to comprehend the role of social media as onlife spaces, their impact on women's self-image practices, and creative livelihoods. In summarising my research, I emphasise that it's descriptive, not prescriptive. It's not against technology, but questions the direction of its deployment. When critiquing workplaces, I challenge structures, not art-workers. The Internet, Web and social media platforms are intricate, and while they might seem diverse on the surface, an individual's presence there doesn't necessarily translate to influence in broader societal aspects, such as institutional politics. Instead of attempting to create an alternative 'empowering' image, I have directed my expanded photographic approach to prompt questions and discussions. While this inquiry adds to feminist awareness, it isn't forceful or extreme in its push for change. My intention is to incite, confront, and disturb, rather than simply tell or conclude.

This research project makes clear that the production of *likable* content for circulation forecloses political possibilities, through its relationship to being a better individual economic subject. Acts of status are being conflated with communality. There is a conceptual distinction between being included and having influence. An individual can be formally included but unable to exercise influence (Arnstein 1969). People need to reject the economic myth of *likability* because it encourages that we should accept inclusion as a substitute for influence. The research inquiry has shown that the fraternal patriarchal surveillance capitalist market acts to promote meritocracy and push the concept that *likability* can be converted to status, which can then be cashed in for economic tokens.

I consider that in not recognising the material impact of the digital we remain unwitting accomplices to forces that are opposed to helping to create an equal society. For women artists, who create self-generated images, the circulation of their work through social media places them within the economy of visibility. This visibility exposes them to the risk of sexism in various forms, including surveillance, shaming and criticism. Additionally, it influences the critical reception and appreciation of their artwork by peers and colleagues. By continuing to use social media spaces as they currently are structured and regulated is to accept that feminist artworks are reformatted to circulate in an economy of visibility and they will be shaped by the economic priorities of neoliberal practices and capitalism.

As I developed ways of working, of using the e-a-c method to organise subsets of information, my survivor's mentality, which might be described in shorthand as an 'intense attachment to identity allyship' (Dean 2019: 13) became more apparent in my gradual withdrawal from social media platforms and refusal to use certain apps. I find it near impossible to think of the use of social media as anything other than harmful and consider harm as an embedded feature that generates value for the billionaire class of technocrats. This is perhaps a weakness of the inquiry and closer attention could have been paid to enjoyment. I recognise that others who use social image sites find pleasure, intimacy and escapement but it seems that the general harm as detailed by Zuboff (2019), Crary (2022) and Tarnoff (2022) should attract greater attention.

### **Development of Research**

I used the form of the condition-ing report in Chapter 2, to offer a definition of the **likable female image in onlife** as *a portrayal or representation of a woman that is seen positively and is attractive or appealing to others. It is typically a self-generated image connected to social media through a self-awareness that the image will circulate online and whilst open to receiving **LIKES** could also be a target of abuse.* I established how the concept of living an inquiry onlife as an artistic inquiry supports the imaginative exploration of the material effects of **LIKES**

on the body, and bodies of artwork. Then showcased that the interactions between capitalism and emerging technologies serve as the primary contextual elements, influences, and factors that shape and affect the *likable* female image in the digital age.

My interpretation of the in situ social media works by Amalia Ulman and Celeste Barber addresses two key questions:

Firstly, how can contemporary artistic practices be seen to be influenced by **LIKES** and *likability*? Through their satirical and parodic approach, both women engage with and critique various aspects of popular culture, the performative nature of social media, and the societal pressure to conform to *likable* standards. Their work not only serves as analysis but also showcases a nuanced practical understanding of leveraging **LIKES** as a business strategy.

Secondly, how do **LIKES** and *likability* affect everyday life, and female bodies in particular, and how does this affect women's content(ment)? Ulman and Barber's creative work shed light on the conventional portrayal of a *likable* female body within the realms of social media. They emphasise the careful management of one's image to align with prevailing norms, avoiding actions that might disrupt the dominant group, in their respective fields. Additionally, their work highlights that a *likable* female figure, who relies on self-generated content as a business model, cannot afford to risk losing their audience or access to the platform they operate on. This dual perspective, critique and strategic adaptation demonstrates the complexities and multifaceted nature of navigating the world of onlife *likability*.

Chapter 3 introduces the exhibition-as-chapter method, a framework crafted to push material experimentation to the fore and subject it to public evaluation. While the e-a-c's draw inspiration from the operative nature of databases, they don't read as conventional databases. They provide a structured way to manage and present artworks in a research space. The e-a-c serves dual functions as a survey and filtering system. As a survey of research-in-progress it supported engaging with different artworks to identify common themes, patterns, and connections among

the ideas of **LIKES**, *likability* and content being explored. A survey aids in informing the development of new insights and subsequent research stages, contributing to an understanding of how individual artworks have evolved. Creating multiple e-a-cs was primarily aimed at enabling data filtering, where the exhibition is evaluated, and pertinent artworks are selected for potential advancement, while extraneous elements are discarded. Data filtering is integral to data processing, allowing researchers to focus on relevant subsets for their objectives, enhancing accuracy and efficiency by eliminating noise or irrelevant data. My intention was for the layering of e-a-c's to enhance the research's rigor while concurrently refining the inquiry.

The first e-a-c#1, titled CONTENT, presented in chapter 3b is a material response to Jodi Dean's concept of communicative capitalism, while addressing circulation through multiple layers. E-a-c #1 served as an initial attempt to challenge the idealised image of an engaged online citizen. The collection of artworks aimed to evoke both unease and disbelief among viewers, illustrating that women often feel compelled to modify their bodies and images to conform to prevailing social and cultural norms, seeking approval and **LIKES**. Circulation serves as the foundational theme for all artworks within e-a-c#1, and this approach involves various methods to interrupt a person's smooth movement through the exhibition space. Disruption is achieved through introducing overwhelming fragrances, loose ping pong balls, artworks that turn away from the viewer, requiring unconventional viewing angles, and using text that requires a torch for visibility. I purposefully created "squeeze points" in the gallery, to nudge visitors to interact with one another addressing the "filter bubble" phenomenon. By promoting circular movement and unconventional bodily actions for viewing art, I aimed to materialise the unseen labour linked to content circulation. My goal was to raise awareness about the information gatekeeping perpetuated by online code and algorithms.

In using expanded photographic methods, I successfully prompted visitors of the first e-a-c to engage in a sequence of physical movements and to use tools in order to access specific artworks. The e-a-c was a successful step in showing that when

people interact with artworks that represent the ideas of **LIKES** and content circulation, it can effectively demonstrate how the Internet, information and communication technologies (ICTs), social media, and networking platforms control the access to and benefit from the movement of content. An outcome of this e-a-c#1 was that I began to think of **LIKES** as agentic matter, and the following question how do **LIKES** and *likability* affect everyday life, and female bodies in particular, and how does this affect women's content(ment) was generated. This questioned has been responded to in chapter 2, and through subsequent e-a-c's.

The development of key works from the second e-a-c CON\$ENT are discussed in Chapter 4a. I used the two key questions: how can contemporary artistic practices be seen to be influenced by **LIKES** and *likability* and how do **LIKES** and *likability* affect everyday life, and female bodies in particular, and how does this affect women's content(ment)? These questions were employed as invitations to make material responses that translated online behaviours into physical forms, to refine existing artworks and to create new works.

In answering the first question, I had not expected my own exhibition to present so clearly as *likable*, and to demonstrably be an answer to the question. It seems that while studying *likability*, I unintentionally produced an exhibition that ended up embodying the very *likable* traits I was exploring. This was an important lesson and development. I present documentation of the second public iteration of e-a-c CON\$ENT in Chapter 4b. The overall impression of the exhibition was dissatisfying, primarily due to its emphasis on professional *likability* rather than the confrontational nature associated with **LIKES** and status. This sentiment arose from a perceived lack of intensity and alarm in the presentation. The soft, pink, and quiet aesthetic of the artworks contributed to a comfortable activism, failing to evoke substantial discomfort for the audience. The visitors encountered an enjoyable experience, without being challenged extensively. The artworks as a collective maintained their professional *likability*, ensuring that I, the artist remained inoffensive and likable, ultimately not upsetting the group.

The studio practice demonstrated that my physicality had made a distinct impact on the artworks, coinciding with my gradual withdrawal from an online presence. I found it unexpectedly striking how much I desired visibility, representation and this can be seen in the two approaches taken in this exhibition, where on the one hand I am represented in a fairly conventional figurative manner such as *Branded Content*, *Like Me*, *Suspended* and in the work *Digital Wipe*. Then in a more abstract generic style through the use of customised paints, written texts and sculptural forms in *A-Frames 2.0*, *Im.pinged 2,0*, *Glory Hole* and *Full Framed & Full Bodied*. This is an early indicator of working through Deans stalemate of the survivor and system, of clinging onto identity, as I tried to find ways to transform conditions.

In chapter 5, I traced the journey of how an unperformed expanded performance lecture *IDWYTLM* contributed to the final research artwork *CONTEST*. The use of “expanded” as a descriptor before performance lecture, is to emphasis excess. Throughout the course of this research inquiry, my goals where to physicalise the effects of imperceptible online actions, of labour, and circulation. By employing two projectors, and incorporating objects as performative elements, I sought to reshape spatial relationships and symbolise the material effects of **LIKES** on the body. I wanted to be excessive, expansive and to give physical form to something abstract and conceptual. My aim was to create an outcome that surpasses what was made visible, aligning with the notion that:

The goal is that the coupling of visibility and politics can be productive of something, such as social change, that exceeds the visibility. 'Politics,' then, is a descriptor of the practices of visibility (Banet-Weiser 2019: 22).

The primary distinction between *IDWYTLM* and *CONTEST* lies in my strategic use of *likability* in the latter as a means to prompt data collection. In *CONTEST*, *likability* serves as a method to engage participants. Conversely, in *IDWYTLM*, I aimed to highlight the futility of *likability* by embodying traits traditionally considered unlikable through my behaviour and live audio-visual performance.

In *CONTEST*, the focus shifts away from the 'I' of individual survivor narratives, as

reflected in its subtitles: *Lie with Me*, *Keep in Touch*, and *Links Matter*. These titles mark a departure from my earlier works such as *The Enchanted Self*, *Am I Being Unreasonable*, and *I Don't Want You to Like Me*, all of which emphasised personal connection. Instead, these works take on an outward perspective, highlighting interactions among multiple individuals, even as I fail at optimising my surveillance capitalist credentials.

The artworks made in the course of this research inquiry avoid a circular process where a digital file becomes an object and then back again to a digital file, which would position my work closer to Internet art rather than expanded photography. When the research artworks go online, they are uploaded or posted as digital files of documentation of an artwork or an interaction with an artwork – but they are not the artwork. The artworks want to be social; they are open to new relationships with different art objects and new audiences in different physical spaces.

### **Other spaces of inquiry considered**

The other spaces of inquiry that I considered were, firstly, taking a phenomenological approach to studying the lived experiences of other women artists who work and seek livelihoods through their practice in onlife. This consideration arose after receiving feedback from a group of women I consider as 'critical friends,' aged 40-60 and established in art and the creative sectors. Their inquiries centred on the impact of online platforms, the web, and how maintaining an online presence affected their creative work. Observations highlighted the time-consuming nature of online engagement, diverting their focus from artistic production. I contemplated crafting audio-video interviews, culminating in a documentary-style film capturing women artists' online working experiences. Such a film could offer valuable insights to artists, funders, and art organisations. While I don't disregard potential future involvement in this field, it's noteworthy that capable researchers like Dr. Susan Jones are actively examining the intricate relationship between artists' livelihoods, arts policy, and contemporary visual arts structures (Jones, 2022). Given my strengths, I concluded that my contributions

could be more impactful by enhancing existing research through freelance roles as an arts programmer.

Secondly, I briefly considered exploring the character of the un/likable mother. During the first e-a-c *CONTENT*, I engaged a filmmaker to record interviews with my three sons, who were aged four, nine, and eleven at the time. They answered a series of questions within the gallery space, surrounded by my artworks. The questions were designed to capture their thoughts on the artworks, their interpretations of the artworks' messages, their perceptions of what I was doing, and whether they believed it was worth my time away from them. The insertion of my sons in the research at this point would have narrowed the focus towards the maternal while a rich area of study, was dismissed. As their parent, I hold the responsibility to provide informed consent before featuring them in public content. What struck me as rather ironic was that, in my role of exploring the hypothesis that being *likable* and needing **LIKES** could be detrimental to artists, this notion shouldn't be confined solely to artists but expanded to encompass everyone. It was my contemplation during the reflection on e-a-c#1 that initiated my withdrawal from certain online platforms. Given this, it became apparent that including my sons in this research inquiry posed a definite conflict in my duty of care toward research participants. The filmed footage remains unseen by the public to date due to ethical concerns, specifically a child's right to privacy in the digital realm.

## **Contributions**

My original contribution to knowledge is the identification and development of an argument demonstrating that **LIKES** and *likability* have material consequences for bodies, for female bodies in particular, through a creative onlife material practice. This PaR research inquiry applies Jodi Dean's theory of communicative capitalism to creative practice, specifically developing methods in expanded photography to materialise the knowledge that online platforms have become inequality machines, rewarding the few while positioning the harms and risks with the majority.

This research project makes clear that if people continue to produce likable content for circulation, that they are training to become better individual economic subjects and that political possibilities will remain foreclosed.

Approaching life as “onlife” offers a way to understand the material effects of **LIKES** and the **LIKE** economy. How they contribute to shape the body, an art practice and the wider world in a manner that benefits the few who own the means by which people access the Internet and the few who own online platforms. In addition, my research extends works by Prinstein (2017) Menendez (2019) to include “onlife” in the analysis of a feminist art practice. The refusal to partake digitally with particular networked communication corporations, where possible, should be taken seriously, to begin the erosion of monopoly services and to populating new independent, federated sites. I acknowledge the seeming futility of this, when it is impossible to know where my data body is, has been and will go, and with which other bodies it will be reassembled and co-produced (Miller 2020).

The sharing of artistic approaches that demonstrate how **LIKES** and *likability* have material consequences with artists, educators, policy-makers, and government officials helps us better understand the complex ways in which multiple forms of oppression and privilege intersect. Artists can use the research to gain a better understanding of the shaping power of the second text and to consider how their online presence may be used nefariously to uphold discriminatory practices. This understanding can empower them to make informed decisions about their engagement. Art educators responsible for designing and facilitating professional practice modules in Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE) settings could incorporate an understanding of how **LIKES** and *likability* have material consequences for marginalised individuals and society as a whole into these professional practice modules. By doing so, educators can empower students to become conscientious and ethical creators who make informed decisions and constructive contributions to the digital realm. This educational approach not only prepares students for their professional journeys but also equips them with the skills necessary to navigate the intricate dynamics of the online environment, all while maintaining a commitment to integrity and respect for their peers.

This research inquiry could help policymakers and educators empathise with the experiences of marginalised individuals who may not receive as many **LIKES** or followers due to systemic biases. Furthermore, this research has the potential to engage policymakers, educators, and funders in a meaningful conversation about the urgent need for more equitable funding practices. Such a discussion goes beyond the notion that higher social media metrics equate to higher-quality engagement. This research could serve as the first step in guiding policymakers and funders to reevaluate their current approaches, ultimately leading to a more just distribution of resources.

### **Future questions**

A question generated by the research, marked for future exploration is **Can an art practice of digital non-participation and a refusal of LIKES challenge the status quo?**

Demonstrating the answer to this question will pose a challenge, requiring study extending beyond the research timeframe. Given the dominance of the onlife capitalist market, my research practice involved raising awareness about environmental conditions and their repercussions, which was initiated by publicly sharing the research process via exhibition-as-chapters, public exhibitions along with presentations at conferences, festivals, and art events. I'm convinced that it demands collective action and fresh governmental regulations. Through engagement with material feminists and the concept of 'onlife' during this research, it becomes evident that treating online and offline as separate domains is illogical.

Consequently, digital non-participation doesn't just involve working solely with analogue forms; it encompasses rejecting harmful technologies, platforms, and ideologies. It might involve developing a method of being anti-likable rather than unlikable. They both involve not conforming to traditional standards of *likability*; however, the distinction lies in intent and approach. "Anti-likable" implies a deliberate choice to deviate from *likability* norms, often with a purpose, while "unlikable" may refer to not meeting those norms without necessarily intending to do so. Embracing an anti-likable approach in a creative practice involves being

conscious of the possibility of virality and deliberately rejecting the idea of tailoring one's appearance, and the photogenic quality of artwork for optimal consumption on smartphones.

In the later stages of this living onlife as inquiry research journey, I began describing myself as an "anti-social social person" when explaining my choice not to use certain apps or social media platforms. I found myself clarifying why I couldn't be found on WhatsApp, Facebook, or Instagram. While I did have an Instagram account for research purposes, following Celeste Barber and Amalia Ulman, I refrained from posting and have no followers. After completing this research, I plan to delete the account. Labelling myself as an anti-social social person served as a semi-apologetic explanation for my political stance and resistance to conforming with the social expectations of being available for attention and connection. It was my way of acknowledging my reluctance to engage with social connections that involve corporate data extraction. The term was used humorously to soften the impact of being perceived as non-compliant and to maintain my *likability*, ensuring inclusion in future events rather than exclusion. I believe that the term "anti-social social person" has valuable potential as it humorously highlights the intricate expectations of an online presence. It describes someone who might not be very active on social media platforms while displaying sociable and outgoing behaviour in offline interactions. It's a way of acknowledging the complexity of human behaviour and the diverse roles we navigate. I aim to develop the persona of the anti-social social person for future 'live art' events.

This research inquiry has begun to establish the argument for refusing contractual *likability* and explain why an economy of **LIKES** is not beneficial for both artists and all Internet users. The forms that this refusal can encompass require further testing beginning with; Elinor Carmi's refusal to consent to the:

type of thinking that pretends to empower people by providing them 'freedom of choice (2020: 17)

This perspective resists simplistic solutions and refuses to accept that the current online ecosystem is functioning well for individuals. My starting point for future study to answer this question, is to explore how Erik Olin Wright's reformist socialism, *How to be an anti-capitalist for the 21st Century* (2018) might work in combination with Jodi Dean new communism *Comrade* (2019); to think through what is possible beyond a reformist managing of what is possible, and a refusal to accept the status quo. Dean and Wright both advocate for collective action; Dean's focus on how to recover revolutionary commitment could complement Wright's strategy for "eroding capitalism." Wright advocates for a diverse range of strategies with varying temporal impacts, all contributing to a gradual transition, rather than relying on a single conquering strategy. This approach seems to hold more promise for effective change. To erode capitalism, Wright suggests employing state interventions to diminish capitalism's influence from above, while simultaneously nurturing democratic structures of social ownership.

### **Future work**

In contemplating where my work has led, or where I want it to lead, the post-research state of tenderness brings a heightened awareness of how unimaginable it would be to ask friends, family, and peers to enter brick and mortar spaces that perpetuate racism, sexism, classism, ageism, homophobia, and misogyny just to support my career and potential economic gain. So, why replicate such dynamics online? In part this demonstrates that an online/offline binary persists in the general imaginary, that the concept of onlife is not that well known. In light of this, I will keep working to physicalise onlife, and the shaping influences of fraternal capitalism. I will develop *AIBU*, and to do so I will make applications to funders and to suitable commissioning and residency programmes as they arise.

The living onlife as inquiry research process has changed me, I have become an **anti-social social person**, I want access to conversation, to socialise, to learn and to educate in spaces that are not driven by data extraction. I want to attend events where there isn't incessant photography for marketing purposes. I intend to create and support projects whilst embracing life as an anti-social social person. My

online presence will be deliberate; I've opted to limit my use of specific platforms and aim to distance myself further. In situations where social media is used as part of my artist livelihood, I will make sure to employ and request specific hashtags that denote self-promotion, affiliations, and the pursuit of an artist's livelihood. Examples of these hashtags could include #artistadvert and #selfpromo. Acknowledging that I live an onlife, my primary focus will be on crafting works for the offline public sphere. When working online, I will adhere to ethical principles.

Some key aspects of working online involve:

**Privacy:** respecting the privacy of people's personal data, ensuring secure handling. Obtaining explicit consent.

**Transparency and Honesty:** Being transparent about my business practices and affiliations.

**Intellectual property:** Respecting copyright and intellectual property rights. Properly crediting when using and sharing content. Obtaining permissions.

**Digital Inclusivity:** Ensuring accessibility and inclusivity for all users, through thoughtful and considered design.

**Environmental Impact:** avoiding excess energy consumption and e-waste.

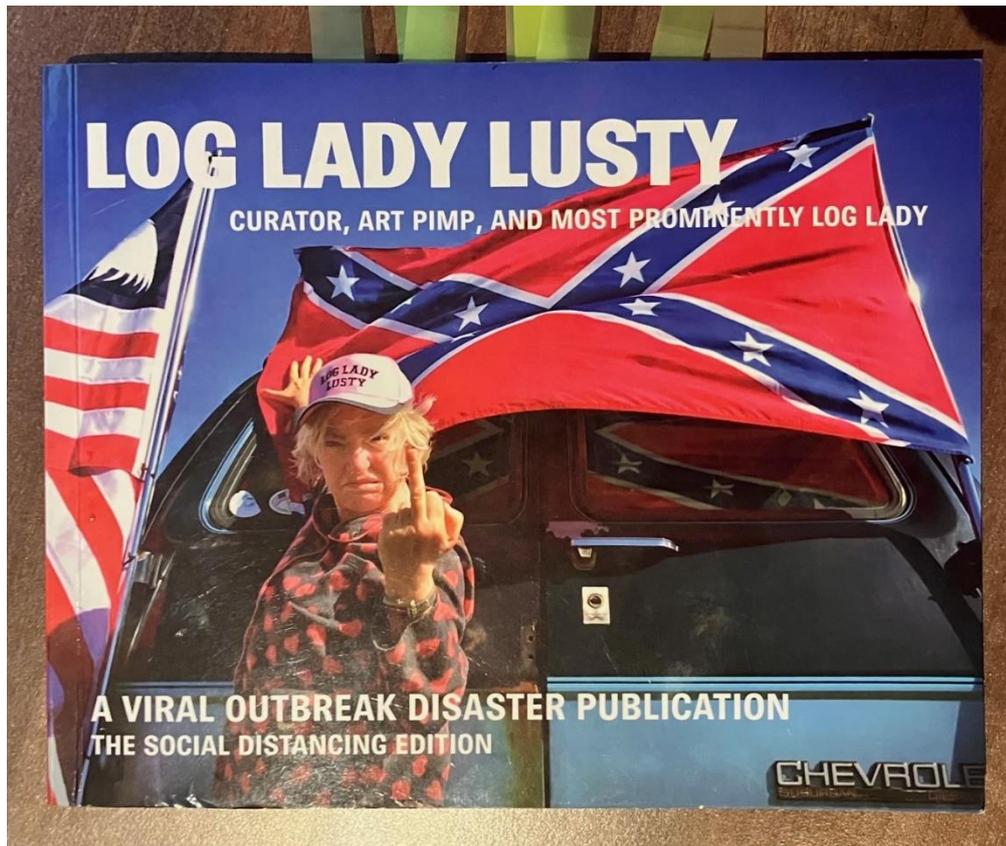
The research inquiry has pushed the boundaries of my artistic practice, to experiment with new mediums, to position my art in spaces other than the gallery and I think towards a more conscious and conscientious socially engaged practice. I will continue to develop ways of making artworks with and through other people's labour, shifting from extractive processes to taking participation seriously, inspired by Sherry Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation (1969) and to progress the character of the **anti-social social person**.

The research inquiry has led me away from traditional academia, encouraging me to share my knowledge, expertise, and insights with diverse audiences. This journey encompasses active engagement with community groups, online platforms, workshops, and public events. The aim is to reach out through alternative public venues and foster a broader understanding of the current state

of media monopoly, as illuminated by Terranova (2004), Dean (2005, 2007, 2014), and Zuboff (2019). This method aligns with Terranova's guidance to challenge the dominance of media monopolies. In the context of media monopoly, the objective shifts towards dismantling the grip of this authoritative control by establishing as a wide array of alternative communication channels as possible. These encompass everything from festivals and the Internet to demonstrations, workshops, screenings, dancing, and public performances (Terranova 2004: 17).

By expanding public awareness, the pressing need for a series of alternative public venues can be highlighted, and a virtuous loop started. These venues would serve as spaces where messages are delivered, connections are forged, enjoyment is experienced, and curiosity is aroused. The goal to encourage individuals to move away from reflexive communication for its own sake, and to create space and connections for politics to occur. The research inquiry underscores the importance of collaborative efforts to advocate for new regulations that enforce accountability within the market, ultimately aiming to transform market systems. In my freelance capacities, particularly in roles involving public programming and community engagement project design, I prioritise and will continue to prioritise meaningful participation (Arnstein 1969). When working with students and community groups, I will actively promote existing counternarratives such as the Feminist Internet, the Algorithmic Justice League, and the Distributed AI Research Institute (DAIR).

In the course of this research inquiry, I have had informal, 'off the record' conversations with other artists about *Likability* and **LIKES**. In the latter stages of this research inquiry, I had contact with Norwegian-British photographer Lil-Ann Chepstow-Lusty (b.1960), where we discussed her photo series *LOG LADY LUSTY – CURATOR, ART PIMP AND MOST PROMINENTLY. A VIRAL OUTBREAK DISASTER PUBLICATION. THE SOCIAL DISTANCING EDITION*, published in book form in 2020 (Fig. 87 page 223).



*Fig. 87* LOG LADY LUSTY – CURATOR, ART PIMP AND MOST PROMINENTLY. A VIRAL OUTBREAK DISASTER PUBLICATION. THE SOCIAL DISTANCING EDITION - Front Cover ©L Chepstow-Lusty

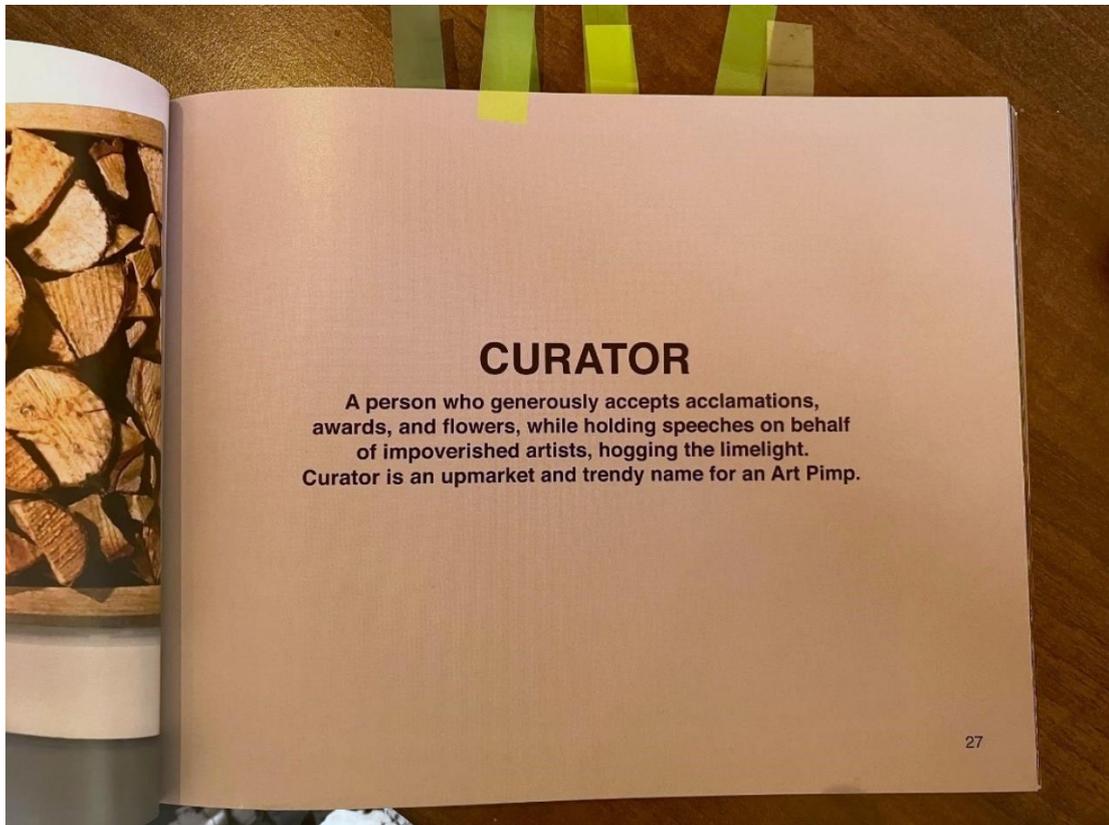
Lil-Ann Chepstow-Lusty is well known in Norway, her practice supported by a stipend from the Norwegian government and her work has been collected by national institutions. Her work is less known, and infrequently shown in the UK. Chepstow-Lusty established a dedicated Facebook page for Log Lady Lusty and commenced posting on December 2, 2018, with her final post dating back to December 3, 2021.



Fig. 88 LOG LADY LUSTY – CURATOR, ART PIMP AND MOST PROMINENTLY. A VIRAL OUTBREAK DISASTER PUBLICATION. THE SOCIAL DISTANCING EDITION - page 113 ©L Chepstow-Lusty

Chepstow-Lusty found the notion of continuous live-action role play (LARP) in these spaces unnecessary. It was still very much a performance directed at the camera and book format, rather than a specific platform, this distinction is evident in the fact that she had shared only around 35% of the images online that appear in the book. I am attracted to her humour, enthusiasm and the genuine heartfelt admiration that she held for her eccentric 'entitled' character. She was bemused at the access playing 'Log Lady' had given her to people, and to places that being Lil-Ann just didn't. This inquiry had clarified my personal stance: I do not aspire to become a viral figure, and my artistic practice is shifting me away from being in front of the camera. However, I'm captivated by women artists who skilfully embrace being unlikable, whilst having fun being visible on camera. I found it particularly intriguing that Chepstow-Lusty (Fig 88, above), who throughout her established career focused on photographing others, rarely stepping into her own images, was now spurred to step out from behind the camera. I wanted to know more about why she chose this time to explore *likability* in relation to entitlement

and celebrity. After a few conversations, we both agreed to continue discussing her work in a more formal manner, outside the scope of this research inquiry. Upon concluding my inquiry, our plan is to collaborate on documenting her career. As Log Lady expressed it, I would serve as her 'Art Pimp' (Fig 89, below) and advocate for her work to be shown in a brick-and-mortar venue in England.



*Fig. 89* LOG LADY LUSTY – CURATOR, ART PIMP AND MOST PROMINENTLY. A VIRAL OUTBREAK DISASTER PUBLICATION. THE SOCIAL DISTANCING EDITION - page 27 ©L Chepstow-Lusty

### **Near Future**

Living onlife as inquiry, means that my art practice contains autobiographical elements, and as I grow older the focus of my curiosity, rage and joy is likely to be aimed at ageism, the treatment of teenagers and the exploration of caring-practices. Inspired by grassroots women's movements, the concept of the generic (Dean 2019) and their practical applications, I plan to incorporate this knowledge, and take the questions raised by the inquiry into my future artworks, presentations, and conversations to contribute to positive change and to challenge fraternal capitalist practices.

I have been motivated to reactivate the *Withdrawing Room* to coincide with the sixth Creative Folkestone Triennial, when I will be openly inviting people back into my home to see exhibitions, films, to attend talks and art-theory book club. I have been led physically out onto the streets to work in the world of 'live art' an entirely uncharted territory for me, to deliver and perform *Exeter Mobile Art School* with artist Jonathan Wright for Arts Week Exeter 2023. I have been awarded commissions in areas that I previously would not have considered, for example I have been invited by Art in Romney March (2023) to make a site sensitive artwork that responds not only to the title *A Siren's Call* and the site of St George's Church, Ivychurch, Kent and also to the creative work of *a.dress*, a,

campaign using textile art, poetry, film and conversations to raise awareness about fast fashion's devastating contribution to climate crisis...[and] a collaboration between local textile artists, poets, climate activists, women's activists, fashion designers, and women and girls who love to upcycle clothes. (Thorn 2022)

In 2024, I will have a solo show titled ***always too much and never enough***, at Strange Cargo, Folkestone. The exhibition is part retrospective in format and features selected photographic and expanded photographic works from a twenty-five-year career, including doctoral research and new artworks developed from the inquiry. In understanding the importance of personal networks, the struggles of working for free, and the value of accessible opportunities, I am now determined to work on projects and with teams that prioritise community building, whilst they demonstrate care for individuals. My goal is to be courageous, to work collaboratively with others, to create and programme exuberant art that takes a public stand against inequalities. To see the outcomes of this developing practice, please see [www.livpennington.com](http://www.livpennington.com)

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## Appendices

A1. Text with highlights for IDWYTLM performance

*I Don't want you to like me (IDWYTLM) – first text*

950 - 1000 words for 7 minutes performance

Opening slide = I DON'T WANT YOU TO HAVE TO LIKE ME

The scope of this research is primarily focused on the experiences of women in western capitalist societies. The main reason for this, is the experience of, and access to computational photography, networked devices and social media platforms (SLIDE 2). We are given a sense that there are too many images – it is worth reminding ourselves, that just under half the world do not have internet access, and there is a gender gap – globally women have less access to technology and connectivity.

I stand here today, in the middle of two projections – trying to create a scene in a stream. Why the need to create a scene, rather than set the scene?

Nathan Jurgenson in his book 'The Social Photo' uses the term 'stream' to refer to the aggregate of social photography, where the value is looking at the contributions, the aggregate, not a single image in isolation. 'Scene' refers to both analogue photography and the use by artists wanting to create a 'special scene'.

The need to create a scene comes from a conflation of my personal identities; of being middle aged, a feminist in constant progress, an academic researcher with imposter syndrome and a photographer in mourning for the filtering out of still images (3 SLIDE STATISTICS Photo – STILL MOVING PHOTO). I want to be able to create a scene, and be the recipient of the many freedoms that this can incorporate.

We cannot control the context of our artworks reception. (4 SLIDE CONTEXT COUNTS), the process and intention of these works once in these spaces may not count.

Performing likability has always had different value responses, rules that depend on sex, gender, race, age, class, wealth, location, religion. Now to be able to 'like' or be 'liked' on social media platforms is to accept that you need to operate within the terms and conditions of a global corporate organisation, or be shadow blocked, de-boosted, suspended or deleted.

The acting of 'liking' has lost individual people their job, relationships, their freedom.

I think it is impossible for artworks that centre women, their bodies, their lived experiences to not be experienced in part as social photos as they circulate in/through the spaces designed for social photos.

The 2009 introduction of the Like button on Facebook pages, then incorporated onto other platforms is relatively recent but it amplifies entrenched misogynistic patterns of behaviour, and encourages self-surveillance and self-objectification. I consider that being a likable female subject, with a likable female image maintains the fantasy of being an active, engaged subject that Jodi Dean (2004) states contribute to the circulation of content, and forfeits the space for antagonistic dialogue. Dean does not totally dismiss the possibility that networked communications can have political affect but highlights that it is context dependent.

(SLIDE: Side effects)

The more our individual likes are registered, the more data sets that can be created, feeding a technological loopback that sustains individualisation whilst gently enforcing likability. It is movement between what is known and what is considered you should know. TO QUOTE SHOSHANA ZUBOFF 'Competitive

pressures produced this shift, in which automated machine processes not only *know* our behaviour but also *shape* our behaviour at scale.' (Zuboff, 2019:8) **SLIDE: Baby Likes**

Social images are being generated to be liked, through systems that To QUOTE Artist, Academic Hito Steyerl 'has rules and norms hardwired into its platforms, and they represent a mix of juridical, moral, aesthetic, technological, commercial, and bluntly hidden parameters and effects. You could end up airbrushed, wanted, redirected, taxed, deleted, remodelled, or replaced in your own picture'. **(SLIDE: BUTT)**

My interest in these social image spaces is personal and professional, how do I survive and thrive in a social space, that I consider to be mis-presented as a professional opportunity. These social image spaces are becoming increasingly difficult to avoid, both in our personal and professional lives. The terms and conditions for certain funding applications and employment contracts for artists, freelancers, academics now include the requirement to post to social media posts, frequently on the artist/employees own channel. **(Slide: photo gallery)**

It is optimistic to think that we can change the systems for sharing, viewing and taking social photographs from within the platforms.

For those who use photography daily, hourly – being considered a 'photographer' isn't a relevant consideration (Jurgenson 2020) – but there is a desire to take relevant photographs. Photographs that will be liked, photographs that are seen, acknowledged – and secure a return. **(SLIDE: Surgery)**

Making images matters, and because images are matter, they take up space, they have volume and they can exert pressure. It is the idea that images are pressurised and can pressurise the body that has resonated with me. **(SLIDE: Baby Like)**

Social photos are communication – conversation. Which also means they can be exclusionary, misunderstood, abusive, controlling and poorly timed jokes.

The social image space, presents itself as an advocate of meritocracy, that if I, we, try harder, or able to game the algorithm, we will be rewarded with visibility, more followers, a higher status. We can be a certain type of successful – it could be called TO QUOTE (Arruzza, Bhattacharya, Fraser, 2019) 'a remarkable vision of equal opportunity domination'. (SLIDE: Lips and quotes)

Artists, making and sharing photography and digital imagery in challenging and innovative ways are creating a minute fraction of the images being made and shared today. The viewing of images on these platforms cannot be done in isolation from advertising, or the expectation of shareholders. Slide: Like our page

Even viewing artworks in the most commercial of Away From Key Board galleries, the merchandise is still just about separated out into a shop. Slide: buy likes

If visibility is economic, and entangled with power - then those with the power to be visible, to give visibility, and to impose invisibility have a direct influence on the construction of the body, and its presentation at a cellular level, remotely from a distance.

So:

1. Is any visibility better than no visibility?
2. Would we encourage students, colleagues, family and friend to enter and participate in a physical space that was known to be racist, misogynistic, sexist, ageist, classist?
3. So why do digital social image spaces differ?
4. Why do women have to be more likable than men?
5. Are women really more likable than men?
6. Why is it ok to call for BP, Shell, and Sackler to de-invest in the arts but not for Facebook, Instagram or TikTok

7. Why is it ok for artists to exhibit, platform themselves and their work on Facebook, Instagram or TikTok?
8. Will it always be ok for artists to make use of these spaces?
9. What are alternative online social spaces?
10. How do we make the shift to thinking of image sharing sites, as stripping data, of contributing to surveillance technologies, of feeding nudging and behavioural AI
11. Would artists care more about using these social image sites if they came with a climate change warning?
12. Would we take and share less images if they came with a energy usage calculation?
13. Do women take more photos than men?
14. What happens to art works that are formatted to travel digitally? What happens to the function, the impact, the experience of an artwork when it is met in the social image space?
15. Can these social spaces be reshaped from the inside, at this point in time. I would have to say no.
16. If women remain likable, it is almost impossible to challenge and change structural inequality, as the onus is on women to keep updating but ultimately remain the same.
17. My leaving questions is how do we resist a world where you 'have to like me'

CLOSING SLIDE TEXT: I DON'T WANT YOU **TO HAVE TO LIKE**