hot, intelligent, and probably mentally ill: Representational selfies and subversion in contemporary girlblogging subcultures on Instagram

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Preface

Throughout my time in visual studies, I have found myself primarily interested in those aspects of visual culture that indicate how people identify themselves and relate to others. Most specifically, I am interested in how visual culture manifests in digital spaces. New media have cast us into an unprecedentedly visual world, and my favourite thing about working in visual studies has been learning how to understand that world, especially through theoretical lenses.

This project, which is the greatest scholarly endeavour I have undertaken to date, now finds itself at a confusing juncture, unsure of where to go next. It is still becoming certain of itself, gaining its footing as an interdisciplinary practice that progressively seems to straddle greater distances between fields. I consider this paper to be my first in-depth exploration of my interdisciplinary interests, and my first legitimate excavation of how they apply to the real world. In doing so, I am developing unique methodologies and systems of citation that I hope reflect the intellectual environment from which this work comes. I am still learning how this looks. So far, that learning has questioned what constitutes a conventional source, leading to deeper interrogations on how alternative knowledges survive and canonize themselves online; it has reconfigured captions and formatting slightly, as appropriate; it has allowed space for sparing personal interjection. It's still figuring itself out. However, all this figuring-out nonetheless contributes to what I can finally, somewhat certainly call my emerging practice. As I continue to build upon it, I believe this paper will serve as a foundational precedent from which I can extrude more mature output, routines, and lines of inquiry.

I see the work I have completed as part of my undergraduate thesis not as an end, but as a beginning, a means to the sturdier pieces that will germinate as my research progresses. Perhaps it is messy at times, but I wholeheartedly believe that despite this mess, it is doing exactly what it

needs to do to successfully situate itself among the knowledge I have gained, and the knowledge I have yet to gain.

The territory from which this analysis emerges is unique, if nothing else. I am grateful for the opportunities my education has provided me so far to learn, to be challenged, to form new intellectual and personal connections. Simultaneously, I am excited to see what it will become when I return to the world outside. As such, comments, annotations, and feedback are encouraged, from everyone. On the Internet, nothing is safe, and nothing is sacred.

Introduction

As of 1:47pm EST on February 2, 2025, the tag #selfie on Instagram contains over 449 million posts. Almost all of them are of young, ethnically ambiguous, conventionally attractive women. Citing Wikipedia, the automatically-generated Meta AI summary of a 'selfie' defines it as "a self portrait photograph or short video" that is "typically taken with a smartphone or camera" and "shared on social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and Snapchat."[1] It goes on to detail that the selfie is "an integral part of modern life" and that "there's no denying [its] impact on modern culture."[2] People take selfies at once-in-a-lifetime events and on their daily commute to work. For both users of social media and their ambivalent artificially intelligent assistants, there is no phenomenon that the selfie cannot touch.

However, despite their contemporary ubiquity, different users interact with selfies in different ways. One study which surveyed 3763 female and male social media users across adolescent, young adult, and adult age groups shows that adolescent females took and posted the most selfies, and were also more likely to edit and use filters on their selfies.[3] This prompts a question—why might young women be more compelled to take selfies? How might selfies manifest impulses towards self-observation? Why, then, might young women be compelled to observe themselves, to observe themselves observing themselves, and to take control over this reflexive observation as others begin to witness it?

Simultaneously, the phenomenon of "girlblogging" grew with the rise of social media in the early 2010s. Beginning primarily on Tumblr and subsequently moving onto Instagram, it

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[1] "Selfie," Wikipedia, March 3, 2022, https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Selfie.
[2] Meta AI definition accessed through Instagram search, "#selfie," 10 March 2025, 10:24am EST.
[3] Amandeep Dhir et al., "Do Age and Gender Differences Exist in Selfie-Related Behaviours?," *Computers in Human Behavior* 63 (October 2016): 549–55, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.05.053.

quickly expanded into an online subculture, bringing users—most of whom were adolescent girls and young adult women—together through discussions of music, movies, pop culture, and mental illness. In short time, girlblogging became an avenue through which users could identify themselves and their interests with others, specifically those interests that relate to the experience of being a girl in the world, both online and offline.[4]

Girlblogging content now subsists through collage-style image-based posts which copy the format and formula of the 2018 niche meme trend.[5] Through this content, distinct girlblogger personalities that identify with different figures, characters, and phenomena are revealing themselves. There are girlbloggers that read Joan Didion, drink dirty martinis, and have a hard time getting out of bed; there are girlbloggers that listen to Lana Del Rey, wear red lipstick, and dream about dating men who treat them like dirt; there are girlbloggers that idolize Sylvia Plath, post excessively about baby deer, and hate their bodies.[6] Although girlblogger genres can vary, they all succeed at bringing together seemingly disparate objects to curate a desirable aesthetic. Here, the term "aesthetic" refers to a particular type of beauty with which users identify, which can not only itself be described as aesthetic but can be described by a user as "their aesthetic."[7] Girlbloggers draw together unrelated people and objects to curate a particular "aesthetic" by which they define themselves. The girbloggers that read Joan Didion, drink dirty martinis, and have a hard time getting out of bed might describe themselves as 'dark academia core' or 'old money'; the girlbloggers that listen to Lana Del Rey, wear red lipstick, and dream about dating

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[4] A popular definition of "girlblogger" is available on Urban Dictionary: http://girlblogger.urbanup.com/17104479.
[5] "Niche Memes," Know Your Meme, November 2018, https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/niche-memes.
[6] Rayne Fisher-Quann, "Standing on the Shoulders of Complex Female Characters," internetprincess.substack.com, February 6, 2022, https://internetprincess.substack.com/p/standing-on-the-shoulders-of-complex.
[7] Sarah Spellings, "Do I Have an Aesthetic?," Vogue, May 25, 2021, https://www.vogue.com/article/do-i-have-an-aesthetic.

men who treat them like dirt might describe themselves as ‘new americana’ or ‘tradwife’; the girlbloggers that idolize Sylvia Plath, post excessively about baby deer, and hate their bodies might describe themselves as ‘coquette’ or ‘waifcore’. In all cases, girlbloggers find self-identification in linking unrelated things and people together to create genres of being.

Although Instagram has developed a multifaceted posting functionality, my analysis is interested specifically in posts—those that users upload to their profiles in image format that remain viewable until the user deletes or archives them—rather than reels, stories, or notes.[8] Specifically, it is interested in selfies—selfies as a photo of oneself taken by oneself to post on social media, and selfies as more abstracted visual depictions of the self intended to personally represent the self by use of figures, objects, and their contexts. Grant Bollmer and Katherine Guinness define a selfie “not as a picture of a “self,” but as a relational practice that defines a figure as distinct from a background,” proposing that the selfie delimits the self it depicts and casts the background away from awareness.[9] Working from this definition, selfies can be understood as an act that both delimits the self and de-limits the self—it distinguishes the self while simultaneously providing grounds for alternative representations of the self.

In *Understanding Media,* Marshall McLuhan argues that “with the arrival of electric technology, man extended, or set outside himself, a live model of the central nervous system itself.”[10] Following this idea of human self-extension by means of electric and digital technologies, we can consider the selfie an extension of oneself as one observes themselves.

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[8] Instagram, “Instagram Features,” about.instagram.com, accessed April 9, 2025, https://about.instagram.com/features.
[9] Grant Bollmer and Katherine Guinness, “Phenomenology for the Selfie,” Cultural Politics 13, no. 2 (July 2017): 156–76, https://doi.org/10.1215/17432197-4129113.
[10] Marshall Mcluhan, Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man (Berkeley, Calif.: Gingko Press, 1964), https://designopendata.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/understanding-media-mcluhan.pdf.

Selfies on social media, whether figurative or abstractly representative, are an attempt of a user to display themselves in a way over which they maintain control. Thus, the selfie functions not only as a picture of oneself, but as a means of representing one's personality, interests, and values.

With all this in mind, this paper draws on theories in art history, cinema studies, and media studies to understand how girlblogging delineates genres of girl-being online by using the representative selfie as a visual device through which to depict oneself to an online audience, and how that depiction may communicate agency and personal politics. By investigating the womanly history of the selfie through self-portraiture, photography, film, and social media, analyzing recurrent motifs within girlblogging content and understanding their relationships to each other, and piecing together these motifs' contexts to uncover what they represent as part of one 'selfie' or piece of content, it works towards an understanding of girlblogging as a sociopolitically implicated practice that situates itself on the intimate ground of self- and self-reflexive depiction on Instagram. Opposing the widely uncontested definition of a girlblog as "an online journal owned by a girl,"[11] and of a girlblogger as "someone chronically online saving soft, luxurious coquette posts on pinterest while listening to lana del rey and cigarettes after sex (sic.),"[12] I hope to reframe girlblogging as a grounds upon which girls online can either become complacent in systems of their own oppression through self-imposed adherence to patriarchal ideals of femininity, or assert their autonomy by using the girlblogging medium to criticize systems of patriarchal oppression using their own subculture-specific visual language.

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[11] Jordie, "Urban Dictionary: Girlblog," Urban Dictionary, May 3, 2005, http://girlblog.urbanup.com/1230632.
[12] diorcigarettedoll, "Urban Dictionary: Girlblogger," Urban Dictionary, March 27, 2022, https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=girlblogger.

Part 1: Looking and the Selfie in Art History

For women, looking in the mirror is as natural as looking towards the call of one's own name. For ages, existing as a woman has demanded a constant observation of oneself, in puddles, in mirrors, and now in the phone screen. The average person checks their phone over one hundred times a day[13]—the average woman confronts her reflection every time. Although cell phones and social media are 21st century phenomena, they carry the hegemonic precedent of surveillance with which the modern woman has always had to cope.

Figure 1. Titian, *Venus of Urbino,* oil on canvas, c. 1534. Image from Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.m.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tiziano_-_Venere_di_Urbino_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg#mw-jump-to-license.

Figure 2. Sandro Botticelli, *The Birth of Venus,* tempera on canvas, c. 1485. Image from Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.m.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sandro_Botticelli_-_La_nascita_di_Venere_-_Google_Art_Project_-_edited.jpg.

The female form carries ubiquitous cultural meaning as an object. In the Renaissance period, works such as Titian's *Venus of Urbino* (fig. 1) and Sandro Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* (fig. 2) depicted the woman's body in the nude. These works gesture to an

[13] L'oreal Thompson Payton, "Americans Check Their Phones 144 Times a Day. Here's How to Cut Back," Fortune Well, July 19, 2023, https://fortune.com/well/2023/07/19/how-to-cut-back-screen-time/.

extensive tradition of depicting women in art, not as naked, but as *nude,* the distinction of which is crucial. Taking Titian's *Venus of Urbino* as an example, we see Venus laying on a bed, poised toward the viewer. She is unclothed, her chest borne towards the audience and her hand resting casually over her genitals. She holds flowers. She gazes directly at the viewer, as if to anticipate something. Similarly, Botticelli's painting shows Venus standing and looking towards the viewer, her hands and hair covering her breasts and genitals. Although in this instance, Venus does not make eye contact with the viewer as in *Venus of Urbino,* she gazes in their direction, almost appearing to intentionally subvert her gaze to avoid eye contact.

We can compare this with another famous painting of the same period—Michelangelo's *The Creation of Adam* (fig. 3), which depicts a naked Adam reaching out to God.[14] In this piece, Adam's body faces the viewer, while his head and gaze face God. Adam does not cover his genitals with his hand or his hair, and he does not attempt to engage the viewer in any way. Although painted on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, rather than on canvas as with *Venus of Urbino* and *The Birth of Venus,* there remains a clear distinction in the depictions of nude women and naked men. In *The Creation of Adam,* Adam addresses the environment of the painting by gazing upon it and reaching out to it. In so doing, the painting itself grants him agency as a subject—there is an impression that Adam,

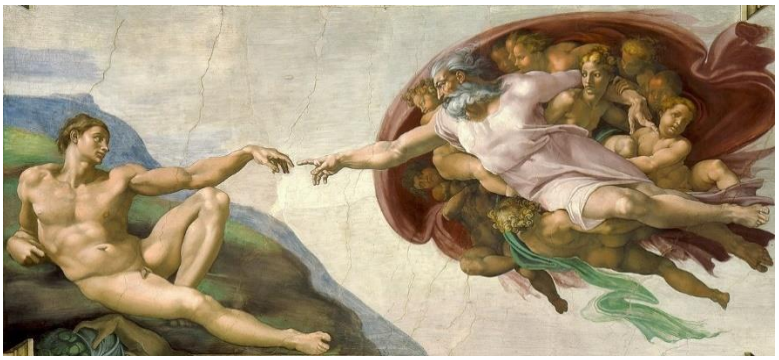

Figure 3. Michelangelo, *The Creation of Adam,* ceiling plaster, c. 1512. Image from Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:%27Adam%27s_Creation_Sistine_Chapel_ceiling%27_by_Michelangelo_JBU33cut.jpg.

[14] In an attempt to make my analysis clearer to readers unfamiliar with the Western art historical canon, I've focused here on more popular examples. For a more in-depth analysis on these phenomena within other works of Renaissance art, see Berger et al., as cited below.

in the company of God, can control and create his own destiny within the world of this painting. In contrast, Venus in both cases does not address the world of the painting—her gaze falls unto or slightly askew from the viewer, ignoring the environment around her. She becomes implicated without agency in the environment of the painting, relying on the viewer to dictate her agency for her. Viewers are not invited into *The Creation of Adam,* for it is Adam's world in which he is the main subject. Viewers are readily invited into *Venus of Urbino* and *The Birth of Venus.* These paintings are the viewer's world, in which Venus is merely an object unto which they may project meaning.

Here we return to that crucial difference between nakedness and nudity. In their seminal text *Ways of Seeing,* Berger et al. write about the nude woman depicted in Western art. They assert that "In the nudes of European painting we can discover some of the criteria and conventions by which women have been seen and judged as sights."[15] Of Lely's *Nell Gwyn* (Appendix 1), they note the following:

> "…nakedness is not, however, an expression of her own feelings; it is a sign of her submission to the owner's feelings or demands. (The owner of both woman and painting.) The painting, when the King showed it to others, demonstrated this submission and his guests envied him. It is worth noticing that in other non-European traditions—in Indian art, Persian art, African art, Pre-Columbian art—nakedness is never supine in this way…We can now begin to see the difference between nakedness and nudity in the European tradition."[16].

[15] John Berger, Ways of Seeing (London: Penguin, 1972), 47.
[16] John Berger, Ways of Seeing (London: Penguin, 1972), 52-53.

Drawing on Kenneth Clark's analysis of the nude, this essay further notes that the 'nude' extends beyond art and into other media. It states that "to be nude is to be seen naked by others and yet not recognized for oneself. A naked body has to be seen as an object in order to become a nude…nudity is placed on display."[17] We can follow this tradition into contemporary photography, specifically through the pin-up photography of the 20th century.

According to Mary Ellen Snodgrass in *World Clothing and Fashion: An Encyclopedia of History, Culture, and Social Influence,* pin-up photos are "an expression of liberal post-Victorian popular culture" and depict "scantily clad women in magazines, calendars, posters, and other media for easy male viewing."[18] One of the most famous pinup examples, featuring actress Betty Grable wearing a white bathing suit and high heels (fig. 4), shares many qualities with the nude Renaissance paintings made three hundred years prior. Like Venus, Grable makes cheeky eye contact with the viewer, suggestively posed yet adequately censored. With her gaze, she invites the viewer into her picture-narrative; she invites ownership. Indeed, the pin-up context meant that pin-up images were reproduced and owned by multiple men—this image

Figure 4. Betty Grable, 1943. Image from walterfilm.com, https://www.walterfilm.com/shop/select-by-size/8-x-10-20-x-25-cm/betty-grable-iconic-wwii-pin-up-1943-photo-by-frank-powolny/.

[17] John Berger, Ways of Seeing (London: Penguin, 1972), 54.
[18] Mary Ellen Snodgrass, World Clothing and Fashion: An Encyclopedia of History, Culture, and Social Influence.(Routledge, 2017), 456.

in particular sold over a million copies per year in the 1940s.[19]

Figure 5. Kim Kardashian in Paper Magazine, 2014. Image from Paper Magazine, https://www.papermag.com/break-the-internet-kim-kardashian-cover#rebelltitem17.

Although pin-ups began to decrease in popularity towards the end of the 20th century, contemporary iterations of them persist. Infamously, Kim Kardashian posed in her own version of a pin-up that "broke the Internet" in 2014 (fig. 5).[20] In it, she looks to the camera as Venus or Betty Grable might, suggestively posed and, despite the photo being revealing, still with her breasts and genitals censored. Although created for a contemporary media environment, this photo directly references the poses seen in pin-up photos and Renaissance art, continuing the tradition of the female nude.

Kim Kardashian is known for far more than a provocative magazine cover. She is one of the Internet's most notorious selfie-takers, and as of February 13, 2025, her Instagram account has 358 million followers.[21] In her article *The Age of Instagram Face,* Jia Tolentino calls Kardashian "'patient zero' for Instagram Face,"—which Tolentino defines as young, with poreless skin, plump and high cheekbones, catlike eyes, long eyelashes, a small nose, and full lips[22]—going on to highlight Kardashian's 2015 book, *Selfish,* a

[19] Ibid.
[20] David Hershkovits, "How Kim Kardashian Broke the Internet with Her Butt," the Guardian (The Guardian, December 17, 2014), https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2014/dec/17/kim-kardashian-butt-break-the-internet-paper-magazine.
[21] Instagram, "@kimkardashian," https://www.instagram.com/kimkardashian?igsh=emZ1M2ZsbGtyZjBz. Accessed 13 February 2025.
[22] Jia Tolentino, "The Age of Instagram Face," The New Yorker, December 12, 2019, https://www.newyorker.com/culture/decade-in-review/the-age-of-instagram-face.

coffee-table book that consists entirely of her own selfies.[23] It seems Kardashian has built her career out of putting her femininity on display, much of which she does through selfies on her Instagram page.

The selfie's affect of self-imposed display is not unique to Kardashian—arguably, anyone who takes a selfie participates in this reflexive spectacle. However, to set the subject matter of the selfie temporarily aside, the act of selfie-taking can, like the male gaze, also find its place in the art historical canon. The act of self-portraiture dates back centuries in both painting and photography. In his book, *How To See The World,* Nicholas Mirzoeff notes that "the selfie resonates not because it is new, but because it expresses, develops, expands and intensifies the long history of the self-portrait."[24] The selfie is thus an intuitive extension of self-portraiture that has adapted to its contemporary media environment.

Taking various examples from modern painting and photography, Konrad Chmielecki creates a focused comparison of the selfie to self-portraiture by Albrecht Dürer and Andrzej Dudek-Dürer. On Dürer's portraits—of which he specifically references *Christ as the Man of Sorrows* and *Self-Portrait in a Fur Collar* (Appendix 2, 3)—he hypothesizes the following:

> While it would be a stretch to equate a smartphone "selfie" with Dürer's self-portraits, there is a shared underlying impulse. Despite the differing mediums and pictorial quality, both forms of self-representation likely originate from the same narcissistic source: the human need to express and capture one's self-image.[25]

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[23] Ibid.
[24] Nicholas Mirzoeff, How to See the World (New York: Basic Books, A Member Of The Perseus Books Group, 2016), 31.
[25] Konrad Chmielecki, "The Visual Culture of the Selfie from the Perspective of 'Culture of Narcissism'":, Perspektywy Kultury 46, no. 3 (2024): 317–42, https://doi.org/10.35765/pk.2024.4603.20.

Following his analysis of Dudek-Dürer's portraits, which he asserts use self-portraiture and photography as a tool "for questioning realness," Chmielecki concludes that "the selfie, much like traditional self-portraits in art history, taps into similar mechanisms of self-representation and self-obsession. This urge to control and curate one's self-image, evident throughout art history, is now vividly manifested in the selfie shared online."[26] Although the selfie itself is a new media device, the impulse to, and act of selfie-taking is well-established in dominant canons of art history.

In the postmodern period, however, this act was called into question. Particularly, artists began to create works that interrogated not only how they depicted themselves, but how others around them expected them to depict themselves, with notable waves of inquiry occurring through works by women artists. Cindy Sherman's series of *Untitled Film Stills* was integral to this movement (fig. 6 and Appendix 4-7). Inspired by Laura Mulvey's work on the male gaze in her essay, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,* Sherman photographed herself in several poses, situations, and contexts that explore the archetypes of performance that defined women's presence in cinema. Her photographs riff on the film still as marketing material and collectible, attempting to differentiate herself and her era from that in which women were considered objects, rather than subjects within narratives. According to Mirzoeff, Sherman's manipulation of the dominant

Figure 6. Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Still #21*, 1978. Image from MoMA, https://www.moma.org/artists/5392-cindy-sherman.

[26] Ibid.

patriarchal cinematic gaze "claimed the right to be the [self she] wanted to be. Her photographs re-perform the way women are represented to say something important about the actual experience of women in daily life."[27]

Sherman's work serves as a touchstone through which to synthesize the relationship between self-portraiture and the objectification of women through looking. Through the painted female nude, to the scantily clad pin-up girl, to the woman ironically recreating the archetypes of her own oppression, and finally to the contemporary self-spectacle, the selfie cannot function as neutral to the woman who has, for centuries, been oppressed by being looked upon. It is through the dominant canons of art that we can begin to understand this relationship, and to examine how this oppressive looking manifests through the selfie, the contemporary form of self portraiture.

In her seminal essay, Laura Mulvey argues the following about the relationship between men, who look, and women, who are looked upon, in a cinematic context:

> In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*.[28]

I will now argue that this very gaze, this to-be-looked-at-ness, has reached far beyond the scope of cinema and made its way into other contemporary visual media. Indeed, the oppressive gaze that has objectified women throughout several centuries and media of art history has found its

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[27] Nicholas Mirzoeff, How to See the World (New York: Basic Books, A Member Of The Perseus Books Group, 2016), 55.
[28] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Screen 16, no. 3 (October 1, 1975): 6–18, https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/16.3.6.

place on social media, specifically through the phenomenon of the selfie. As a result, users of this media—specifically of Instagram, upon which my analysis focuses—that operate within the girlblogging subculture begin to appropriate the medium of the selfie to designate girlblogging as a grounds for girls and women online to excavate their relationship to contemporary femininity through pop cultural self-representation.

Part 2: Contemporary Girlblogging on Instagram

On 8 December 2024, Instagram user @beezlebrp reposts a tweet from Twitter user @ULTRAGLOSS (fig. 7). It reads, "i love girls who treat the internet like their private diary like yes babe you ARE spiraling but you're spiraling for Us <3".[29] In the comments, one user writes, "I need to be the entertainer I was born to be". Another user writes "is this play abt me".[30] Another writes "me while my euphoria arc is happening.", in reference to the popular HBO show *Euphoria*.[31] All gesture towards the same phenomenon; girls exist on the Internet, girls suffer, and on the Internet girls feel compelled to make a spectacle of their suffering. The original tweet capitalizes the word "Us," implying a specific kind of subjecthood occupied by the "girls'"

Figure 7. Post from @beezlebrp, December 8 2024. Accessed April 9 2025, https://www.instagram.com/p/DDVlkdaKYEO/?igsh=MWhqYm03cWltMGhhbA==.

[29] See Figure 7.
[30] "abt" is a shorthand writing of "about," often used on social media.
[31] Euphoria is a show that follows high schoolers through their struggles with addiction, sex, love, loss, and mental health. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Euphoria_(American_TV_series).

audience. It implies that when girls suffer on the Internet, they suffer for the gaze of an omnipresent Other.[32]

In *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,* Mulvey writes that "there are circumstances in which looking itself is a source of pleasure, just as, in the reverse formation, there is pleasure in being looked at."[33] She draws on psychoanalysis to interrogate the woman's role in cinema, writing that the woman in cinema is defined by her absence of a penis, that "she can exist only in relation to castration and cannot transcend it."[34] She, the woman, thus represents a narrative canvas onto which the male can project his desires. She bears meaning—she does not make it. Similarly, Andrea Long Chu argues that femaleness is inherently self-negating. She defines 'female' as a state of being "in which the self is sacrificed to make room for the desires of another…To be female is to let someone else do your desiring for you, at your own expense."[35] Although writing in different contexts, these definitions of femaleness are foundationally the same; to be female is to lack.

This lack is directly referenced in some girlblogging content. For example, posts from @moonflowerette (Appendix 8), @cntybug (Appendix 9), and @brokenpoet_21 (Appendix 10) all directly reference wanting from a lack of something. Interestingly, all three display a propensity for suffering, communicating an aversion to their own desires and an inclination to suppress them—the post by @moonflowerette even expresses disgust towards desire, as if to

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[32] You may notice my use of "girls" in this section, as opposed to women/femmes. On Instagram, the use of the term "girls" to refer to women dominates such that it approximates orthodoxy. This could be because many users within these spheres are indeed girls, often preteens and teenagers. More insidiously, the near-exclusive use of "girls" to refer to women within the girlblogging subculture could infantilize women so that they better fit within current girlblogging aesthetics. This may be intentional, or it may not be. Regardless, it would benefit from further research.

[33] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Screen 16, no. 3 (October 1, 1975): 6–18, https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/16.3.6.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Andrea Long Chu, Females (Brooklyn, Ny: Verso, 2019), 11.

attempt absolution from it. In all three of these posts, desire and wanting are explicitly referenced. Furthermore, both the post by @cntybug and the post by @brokenpoet_21 reference a complacency to the act of desiring. Both speculate about an alternative world in which the original poster (OP)[36] realizes their desires, however both posts ground themselves in an opposite reality, in which the OP has desires but cannot satisfy them. More poignantly, another post by user @aloeverapuss shows a screenshot of a TikTok, in which a young feminine-presenting person poses behind the text "Can't let my male lovers know that my fascination and liking for them stems from the fact that I want to be a man myself" (fig. 8). Although this post can be taken literally, it is perhaps more revealing to consider that this person desires maleness in response to the lack that femininity imposes upon them. Perhaps they do not necessarily want to be a man, rather, they want the security and inherent fulfillment that, based on the above definitions, are exclusive to manhood.

Figure 8. Post from @aloeverapuss, September 7 2024. Accessed April 9 2025, https://www.instagram.com/p/C_o_joLNk50/?igsh=dXJ4ZXNnOWtkeW42.

The desire/lack expressed within this content is often communicated using an array of objects, media, and characters. Among these, specific motifs begin to reveal themselves. For example, commonly referenced media include the movies *Black Swan* (2010), *The Virgin Suicides* (1999), and *Girl, Interrupted* (1999). Although there exists no documented symbolic lexicon by which this content constructs itself, users within these subcultural circles seem to

[36] OP is a commonly used acronym on many Internet fora, referring to the 'original poster' of the post.

develop a shared language that layers meaning onto their content, depending on which of these objects/media/characters they choose to represent themselves in a particular instance. Jodi Dean analyzes the phenomenon of subcultural languages within online blogging communities in her book, *Blog Theory,* citing the Žižekian concept of the decline in symbolic efficiency. She argues:

> If the efficiency of a symbol designates its mobility, its ability to transmit significance not simply from one person to another but from one setting to another, the decline of symbolic efficiency points to an immobility or failure of transmission. Blogs provide a clear example…Terms and styles of expression that make sense to an "in-group" can shock, insult, or enrage folks who just happen upon a blog.[37]

Further on this concept, Dean proposes that the decline of symbolic efficiency "designates the fundamental uncertainty accompanying the impossibility of totalization: that is, of fully anchoring or pinning down meaning."[38] This theory assists an understanding of the symbols used across girlblogging content as constitutive of a subcultural language, even if their specific meaning remains nebulous. To members of the "in-group"—the girlblogging subculture—these visual symbols carry a meaning, perhaps a 'vibe',[39] understandable to its members but inarticulable on paper. In the case of contemporary girlblogging, the language it has constructed is almost entirely visual, and communicates through objects, media, and characters isolated from their contexts and placed alongside each other to represent, directly or indirectly, the user posting the content.

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[37] Jodi Dean, Blog Theory : Feedback and Capture in the Circuits of Drive (Cambridge ; Malden, Ma: Polity, 2011), 5.
[38] Jodi Dean, Blog Theory : Feedback and Capture in the Circuits of Drive (Cambridge ; Malden, Ma: Polity, 2011), 6.
[39] Junaid Yar Khalid, "Urban Dictionary: Vibe," Urban Dictionary, May 12, 2004, http://vibe.urbanup.com/665279.

Outside of the more explicit examples previously mentioned, girlblogging content generally seems to express a desire or lack, which stands as an integral part of the girlhood experience that this subculture portrays. What exactly this desire/lack longs for is not always clear, however, I assert that it is not the destination of desire that defines this content, but rather, the origin; swaths of this content gesture towards a yearning for escapism from the experience of girlhood, especially those that may liberate girls from their patriarchal shackles by allowing them to construct themselves outside of the male gaze.

This could be why a great deal of this content communicates through depictions of contemporary films and characters that centre women's narratives. For example, films that make frequent appearances within girlblogging content on Instagram, in addition to those mentioned above, are Sophia Coppola's *Priscilla* (2023) and Amy Heckerling's *Clueless* (1995).[40] All of these films centre women characters and, with the exception of *Black Swan,* are directed or written by women; they are women's narratives constructed under a woman's gaze. Of course, there remain questions about the gaze that exists within the medium of film itself, for as Mulvey has suggested, "the position of the spectators in the cinema is blatantly one of repression of their exhibitionism," and the woman in cinema is coded for this spectatorship to visually signal eroticism.[41] However, it must be considered that contemporary girlbloggers access and interact with this content from outside the academic spheres of cinema and visual studies. The

[40] A lot of girlblogging content is enamored with the films, work, and life of Sofia Coppola. I think this further supports an analysis of girlblogging through a film-theoretical lens, as I believe that this inclination results from Coppola's position as a successful woman film director that creates narratives based on and in femininity—she is a pop example of subverting the male gaze that many girls use this content to attempt to escape. This may prove an avenue for further research.

[41] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Screen 16, no. 3 (October 1, 1975): 6–18, https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/16.3.6.

imperfection of their medium does not prohibit these films from acting as liberatory media for the audience members—often girls—who see themselves reflected within them.

Furthermore, many of the motifs employed in girlblogging content imply a state of madness or unwellness. This aligns with the especially popular use of characters from *Black Swan* and *The Virgin Suicides,* whose narratives follow women and girls engaging in erratic, self-harming behaviour and falling mentally ill. In her thesis work, Julianna Little argues that when Victorian-era women fell ill with what was then termed "hysteria," they were relieved of their regular expectations of submissive domesticity. "Hysteria, then, became a socially accepted, even stylish sick role for women. Though it came at a cost of pain, disability, and at times disfigurement for many, hysteria became a way that women could express (in most cases unconsciously) dissatisfaction with one or several aspects of their lives."[42] She continues, writing that "Many women, overwhelmed with domestic demands, did not wish to "get well." Hysteria became an alternate role for those unable to accept their life situation."[43] This history[44] provides an alternative perspective on contemporary girlblogging, and potentially reframes its commonly used symbols of madness and unwellness as freeing. Thus these films, often referenced in girlblogging content, may represent a destination for girlblogging's shared subcultural desire; to liberate oneself from the male gaze, from girlhood, through illness.

When these films and characters appear in girlblogging content, they can become washed of their context. An oft-iterated format in girlblogging collages together objects, media, and human figures (such as fictional characters and celebrities) such that they communicate a message or

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[42] Julianna Little, "'Frailty, Thy Name Is Woman': Depictions of Female Madness," Theses and Dissertations, January 1, 2015, https://doi.org/10.25772/WJJP-RB57, 27.
[43] Julianna Little, "'Frailty, Thy Name Is Woman': Depictions of Female Madness," Theses and Dissertations, January 1, 2015, https://doi.org/10.25772/WJJP-RB57, 28.
[44] I am tempted to call it hyst-ory, but I can't imagine that would benefit my credibility.

feeling that is generated from their unique proximity to each other.[45] Through this decontextualization, these objects, media, and figures become, in a sense, flattened. Mary Ann Doane's work in "Film and the Masquerade" clarifies this concept in the cinematic context:

> The woman's beauty, her very desirability, becomes a function of certain practices of imaging—framing, lighting, camera movement, angle. She is thus, as Laura Mulvey pointed out, more closely associated with the surface of the image than its illusory depths, its constructed 3-dimensional space which the man is destined to inhabit and hence control.[46]

Working from this idea, the 2-dimensional realm of girlblogging content places the films and characters it references on this superficial plane. However, it does so not out of ignorance, but with intention. Doane argues further that "For the female spectator there is a certain kind of over-presence of the image—she *is* the image. Given the closeness of this relationship, the female spectator's desire can be described only in terms of a kind of narcissism—the female look demands a becoming."[47] It can be construed, then, that the look of girls that is present within girlblogging similarly demands its subjects—its users—to become a version of feminine that is presented within its content. The display of objects, media, and figures alongside each other gestures towards a specific type of femininity into which the posting user desires to fit. In abstracting these objects/media/figures, they create a distance between themselves and the femininity they desire, effectively allowing them to masquerade this femininity to satisfy that desire. On this act of masquerade, Doane asserts:

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[45] For examples, see Figures 9 and 10.
[46] Mary Ann Doane, "Film and the Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator," Screen 23, no. 3-4 (September 1, 1982): 74–88.
[47] Ibid.

> Masquerade, on the other hand, involves a realignment of femininity, the recovery, or more accurately, simulation, of the missing gap or distance. To masquerade is to manufacture a lack in the form of a certain distance between oneself and one's image…The effectivity of the masquerade lies precisely in its potential to manufacture a distance from the image, to generate a problematic within which the image is manipulable, producible, and readable by the woman.[48]

Considering this act of masquerade through intentionally distanced representation, the function of girlblogging is revealed not as an innocent method of engagement and expression but as grounds upon which girls may create distance between themselves and the gender-specific tropes and depictions that are portrayed through the objects/media/figures they abstract, enabling them to understand their relationship to and through said tropes and depictions. Girlbloggers engage in a masquerade of representation through the abstracted collages that they create, and in the meaning that can be drawn from these displayed collections, girlbloggers and girls at large can begin to understand the expectations that are implied in existing as a girl within a culture dominated by visual media. Through this content, they process their relationships to femininity and work through its joys and its horrors on their own terms, using motifs and narratives with which they are familiar.

On a near-ubiquitous medium upon which girls, especially those who share elements of their personal lives, are voyeuristically watched, deprived of the agency to create their own meaning through the eyes of their viewers, girlblogging exists as a protective measure of processing the experience of femininity that removes its users from the scopophilic spotlight. As

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[48] Ibid.

such, this content exists in direct relation to the user that creates it, acting as a medium through which they may employ these motifs to represent themselves—in other words, to take a selfie. In the following section, I will argue that this content has its place in the canon of self-portraiture that includes selfies, and that it constitutes a circling back to modes of self-representation that, although they do not explicitly depict the self as it physically manifests, hold potential for one to accurately depict themselves through assortments of objects while deflecting the voyeuristic gaze that defines how they are perceived by others online.

Part 3: Girlblogging as Representative Selfie

Girlblogging is widely defined as an innocent, and even naïve practice. The first Urban Dictionary definition cited in the introduction of this paper—"an online journal owned by a girl"[49]—is taken for granted in other writing and media, although it does not encompass the critical nuance of the girlblogging subculture.[50] Some articles online delve deeper into girlblogging as a phenomenon, beginning to scratch a surface-level understanding of how users within the girlblogging subculture act in relation to each other and instrumentalize the subculture itself to process their relationships to femininity.[51,52] However, there lacks an acknowledgement of the theoretical and phenomenological precedents to which girlblogging can be considered a successor.

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[49] Jordie, "Urban Dictionary: Girlblog," Urban Dictionary, May 3, 2005, http://girlblog.urbanup.com/1230632.
[50] "2022: Girlblogging - University of Wollongong – UOW," Uow.edu.au, 2022, https://www.uow.edu.au/events/2022/girlblogging.php.
[51] Shreya Pandya, "Online Culture to Societal Influence — the Growing Trend of 'Girlblogging,'" Medium, 2025, https://medium.com/the-unscripted/online-culture-to-societal-influence-the-growing-trend-of-girlblogging-08be7b087cde#:~:text=Through%20their%20narratives%20and%20discussions,that%20supports%20and%20validates%20them.
[52] Biz Sherbert, "Intimacy and the Machine: Slouching towards Girlblogging," Various Artists, January 28, 2022, https://various-artists.com/girlblogger/.

This analysis began with a chronology of women's representation and the selfie throughout art history, understanding them as separate yet increasingly related. It then moved onto a dissection of girlblogging content and the symbols that users within the girlblogging subculture employ to represent themselves and relate to each other. Now, considering these two lines of inquiry in tandem, I argue that girlblogging is a phenomenological continuation of the selfie, in that it delineates the self from a background through representative objects, thus giving it a place in the art historical canon and validating its analysis through theories relevant to contemporary understandings of art and visual culture.

In their article, "Phenomenology for the Selfie," Grant Bollmer and Katherine Guinness designate the selfie as a technical assemblage. They argue:

> The selfie should be thought of not as a form of documentation, not as a picture of a "self," but as a relational practice that defines a figure as distinct from a background. In the process, this delimits whatever can be thought to be a self, and it causes a background to recede from awareness.[53]

They distinguish the selfie as an act of "symbolic distinction." According to their argument, the selfie separates its subject from their environs, creating "a self as distinct from the background in which they are located…The photographer looks at their own body in the screen of the smartphone, at themselves in relationship to what the phone's camera and screen project back toward their own eye."[54] This analysis invites photos besides the traditional selfie—a picture of oneself—to phenomenologically constitute a selfie. They take the "shelfie" trend as an example

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[53] Grant Bollmer and Katherine Guinness, "Phenomenology for the Selfie," Cultural Politics 13, no. 2 (July 2017): 156–76, https://doi.org/10.1215/17432197-4129113.
[54] Ibid.

(Appendix 11). The "shelfie" is a selfie taken of one's shelf rather than of oneself. Popular choices include bookshelves, movie shelves, music shelves, or cosmetic and makeup shelves.[55]

What distinguishes the shelfie so crucially from the selfie—and what makes the shelfie critical to this analysis—is that it is a selfie that does not show its subject. The subject of a shelfie chooses to represent themselves through a depiction of their hobbies, their interests, things they identify with rather than through a depiction of themselves. With this in mind, Bollmer's and Guinness's argument can be applied to content within the girlblogging subculture in order to understand it as a style of representational selfie. If the selfie is understood as a method of self-representation which functions as a means of navigating relations rather than an object with concrete parameters of existence, the visual language of girlblogging content can be understood as a method through which users within the girlblogging subculture construct themselves, and identify and relate to themselves and others in a phenomenon similar to the selfie.

Figure 9. Post from @lilacpoetica, February 17 2025. Accessed April 9 2025, https://www.instagram.com/p/DGLfVU3xgZn/?igsh=MXc2MDZlbThxb296NA==.

For example, one post from @lilacpoetica (fig. 9) shows a number of objects that the user desires to acquire, evidenced through their implied sequential acquisition following the receipt of a direct deposit (presumably, a paycheque of some sort).[56] The image shows a black slip dress, a pair of small black heels, a collection of cosmetics,

[55] Instagram, "#shelfie." Accessed April 3 2025.
[56] Online, "direct deposit" is sometimes used as shorthand to refer to a paycheque received from one's place of employment, particularly those received on a biweekly pay cycle.

a loaf of sourdough bread, a sleeping mask, tea and a tea set, a quilt, a journal, and a place setting, among other things. Collectively, these items invoke a feeling of domestic tranquility—all are beautiful, and some are even consumable. What reveals some of the meaning behind this post, though, is its caption—"Wifely motivated."[57] Suddenly, the slip dress becomes a slip dress being worn by the viewer for someone else, and the cosmetics, the tea, the bread, the quilt become instruments of a domestic life that this user constructs both for themselves and for an imagined other. This user, through creating this post, represents themselves as desiring wifehood, constructing this facet of themselves in a way that is visually readable to other users within the girlblogging subculture.

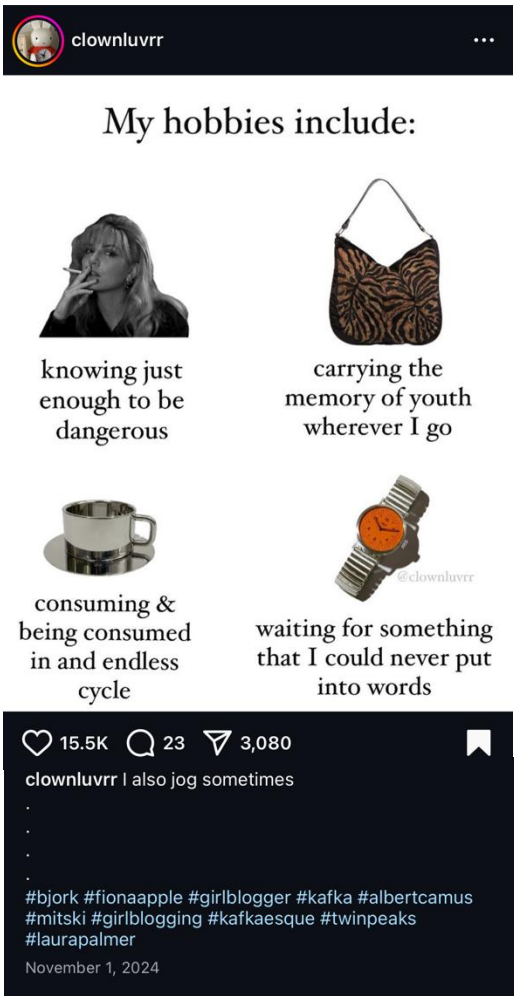

Figure 10. Post from @clownluvrr, November 1 2024. Accessed April 9 2025, https://www.instagram.com/p/DB1teBdysYE/?igsh=MWd5NGcybXZ6cHR3dQ==.

Another post by @clownluvrr (fig. 10) depicts the user's "hobbies"—including "knowing just enough to be dangerous," "carrying the memory of youth wherever I go," "consuming and being consumed in and (sic.) endless cycle," and "waiting for something that [they] could never put into words."[58] Each hobby has an associated visual, although the relationships between them seem superficial—a bag to carry the memory of youth, a cup from which to consume and be consumed, a watch to track time spent waiting for something

[57] See Figure 9.
[58] See Figure 10.

inarticulable. However, these hobbies together invoke a feeling of miserable wandering, of having always known something is coming and waiting for it to arrive. This foreboding is palpable across content within the girlblogging subculture, and this example likely functions to represent the user's own feeling of doom for what is to come (although what exactly that is remains difficult to determine).

This difficulty in determining exact meaning presents a significant hurdle in studying this content. However, by understanding girlblogging as developing a subcultural language through Jodi Dean's previously mentioned theoretical framework of subcultural language development in digital spaces, the role of self-representation begins to make itself evident. Understanding the exact meaning of these symbols may not be necessary to understand the communication that takes place through this content. Crucially, the users within these subcultures know exactly as much about each other as this researcher knows about them. They do not understand each other based on an exact code or cipher—their community is formed based on their subjective relation to each other and their identification with each other's content. They need not understand it exactly, or even entirely, to engage in these relations. Rather, they need simply to have shared the experiences to which the content makes reference. Bollmer and Guinness write that "orientation toward the world is a power relation, and although selfies may popularly be seen as documenting someone's presence, relation, not documentation, is the essence of the selfie."[59] Through its use of symbols and its formation of a unique visual language, girlblogging becomes a relational practice through which girls, women, and femme users can understand themselves, their

[59] Grant Bollmer and Katherine Guinness, "Phenomenology for the Selfie," Cultural Politics 13, no. 2 (July 2017): 156–76, https://doi.org/10.1215/17432197-4129113.

relationships to each other, and perhaps even their positions in relation to contemporary femininity.

Furthermore, both of the content examples cited above invoke morbidity, even resignation. Themes of misery trend across girlblogging content, and much of it makes direct reference to feelings of mourning, dread, or longing for profound change. While much of this content does not specify exactly what it mourns, dreads, or longs for, some of it makes explicit what it is emoting in response to. In almost every case, it is emoting against the female condition. One piece of content which says this outright is another post by @clownluvrr (fig. 11), which shows a Venn diagram comparing show ponies and girls. Corresponding to the overlapping middle, the user writes "my quality of life is directly proportional to my ability to perform."[60] In contrast to its more subdued counterparts, this post displays a vivid moment of lucidity in which a girlblogger, through her posts, critiques the very act of performance that girlblogging itself is. Even without this lucidity, though, it's clear that girlblogging as a subculture is painfully aware of its condition. The morbidity and resignation that can be traced through its content show that, while girlblogging may sometimes seem to

Figure 11. Post from @clownluvrr, September 24 2024. Accessed April 9 2025, https://www.instagram.com/p/DAUCQTJz5uD/?img_index=1&igsh=Z3Z0MDgzdGRqbHJp.

[60] See Figure 11.

reproduce oppressive and patriarchal ideals of femininity, it does not lack self-awareness. Rather than reproduce these ideals as an agent of patriarchy, users within the girlblogging subculture do so as a method of working through and attempting to situate themselves among contemporary expectations and relations of femininity.

Understanding the girlblogging subculture's situation through these examples, and recognizing its existing (if developing) self-awareness, a definition of girlblogging as a relational, even self-defensive practice can begin to emerge. From the previously cited precedents in art history and media studies, the relationship of contemporary girlblogging content to the male gaze, self-portraiture and self-depiction, and subcultural language and identification becomes evident, and considering these relations alongside one another, girblogging content as a phenomenon finds its place as more than an innocent or naïve style of posting—it becomes a practice that is aware of the structures in which it is implicated, and uses symbolic representation to subvert these implications. This subversion through symbolic representation which constitutes a subcultural visual language, comprehensible only to those within and adjacent to the subculture itself, creates a space of safety and privacy for users within the subculture to contend with their relationships to contemporary femininity on the peripheries of online voyeurism.

In her essay, *Video and the Aesthetics of Narcissism,* Rosalind Krauss argues the following of video performance, which was an emerging medium at the time:

> The performance itself ties itself to the fact of something that existed before the given moment. Most immediately, this sense of something having come before refers to the specific text for the performance at hand. But in a larger way it evokes the more general historical relationship between a specific text and the history constructed for all texts of a

given genre. Independent of the gesture made within the present, this larger history is the source of meaning for that gesture.[61]

Although girlblogging seems distant from art history, from cinema, and perhaps from the selfie, it can be understood as succedent through this logic. The significance of girlblogging as a gesture, as a phenomenon, is derived from a larger history of meaning; one that has synthesized in the contemporary moment from structures of looking developed over centuries. By understanding how looking operates in art, in photography, and in film, and using that understanding to closely read the visual language of girlblogging content, the position of girlblogging relative to these canons becomes evident. Through Bollmer's and Guinness's phenomenology, this evidence manifests into a framework through which to understand girlblogging as a site upon which girl, women, and femme users of social and digital media can learn how to identify with themselves, with each other, and with the ideals and demands of contemporary femininity, allowing them to make sociopolitical and sociocultural assertions through a medium readable only to those within the girlblogging subculture, and incomprehensible to those outside who may invalidate its legitimacy.

Conclusion

Although this essay provided an opportunity for the beginnings of a theoretical synthesis between art history, media studies, and girlblogging, there remains much work to be done, which I hope to pursue further as this body of research matures. Perhaps the most logical next step is to give this work a stronger theoretical basis in gender studies and feminist media studies, in service of asserting how girlblogging benefits contemporary feminism, harms it, or both, or neither

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[61] Rosalind Krauss, "Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism," October 1 (1976): 50-64, https://doi.org/10.2307/778507.

(although I am quite confident, at this point, that it does at least one of the three). In other projects, I have briefly explored the relationship of contemporary girlblogging content on Instagram to neoliberal consumerism and postfeminism, citing works from Angela McRobbie, Sarah Banet-Weiser, and Rosalind Gill, among others. In future research, I hope to broaden my horizons to understand how content like girlblogging, which heavily revolves around a distinct subcultural identity, expresses (or refuses) political stances such as feminism or postfeminism, and how ideas from those movements manifest in the content itself. This would likely consist of more extensive content analysis and conversations with the creators themselves, which the timeline of this project did not allow for.

Furthermore, in consulting Claire Bishop's book *Disordered Attention,* I came across a passage of great interest on normative and disordered attention:

> By presupposing a universal human subject of vision, attention discourse creates inadvertent exclusions…normative attention assumes a normative subject—privileged, white, straight, able-bodied, volitional—who confers his attention onto an exteriority thereby constituted as an object. For minoritarian subjects, the discourse of attention has little relevance because it is structurally difficult to occupy the position of attentiveness; historically, we have always been the objects of others' attention.[62]

I see this passage as tracing back to the larger question of girlblogging's position in relation to contemporary feminism, and in particular, this passage highlights the question of girlblogging's position in relation to contemporary feminism's intersectionality. The versions of femininity that girlblogging content often platforms are white, cisgender, patriarchal. How this is of interest,

[62] Claire Bishop, Disordered Attention (Verso Books, 2024), 14-15.

though, seems to me to depend on whether the content in question is determined to be feminist or anti-feminist in its motivations and messaging.

Something that has also posed a challenge in studying this content is developing a comprehensive understanding of the visual language that the girlblogging subculture uses. Although I maintain that an exact understanding of its signs and symbols is not necessary to analyze the content itself, I would like to dedicate more time in the future to developing a stronger theoretical framework and methodology through which to analyze this, and other online subcultural languages composed primarily of visual motifs. It is there that I believe my background in visual studies will prove beneficial, even as this analysis takes on scholarship from other fields.

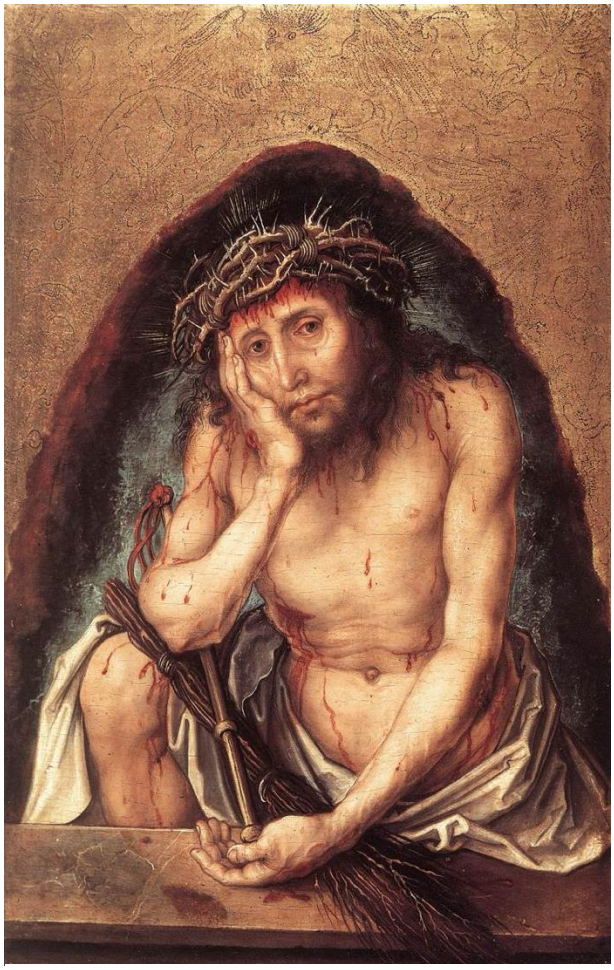
Finally, perhaps the most ambitious gap that I aim to address is what attracted me to my study of girblogging content in the first place. There seems to be a trend among this content of users narrativizing their lives and experiences—they often reference "doing things for the plot," "being doomed by the narrative," and other such things that indicate they view themselves as characters in some sort of predetermined story. I'm interested in how this narritivization manifests online as a result of the demand to constantly perform oneself, and how the ever-present gaze of social media follows users into their personal and private lives. To investigate this, I consulted sources in rhetorical genre studies, cinema studies, and media studies among others, however in my research I quickly realized that the scope of this project was not nearly wide enough to accommodate the research required to thoroughly conduct this line of inquiry. However, it is certainly a theme I hope to carry forward in my academic practice overall.

All of these avenues of research, however, can be traced back to the ultimate condition of girlblogging, Instagram, and social media at large iterating familiar structures of observation and

self-observation that have been perpetuated for centuries through analog media. The main, marring difference in digital media lies not in the looking itself, but in the ‘relatable’ content that makes this looking part of users’ social and cultural identities online. In art and film, women were imprisoned by narratives imposed unto them by others. On Instagram, on social media, women iterate this imposition; they imprison themselves.

Appendix

Appendix 1. Sir Peter Lely, *Unknown woman, formerly known as Nell Gwynn,* oil on canvas, c. 1675. Image from National Portrait Gallery, https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw02794/Unknown-woman-formerly-known-as-Nell-Gwyn.



Appendix 2. Albrecht Dürer, *Christ as the Man of Sorrows,* oil on panel, c. 1493. Image from Web Gallery of Art, https://www.wga.hu/html_m/d/durer/1/01/05sorrow.html.

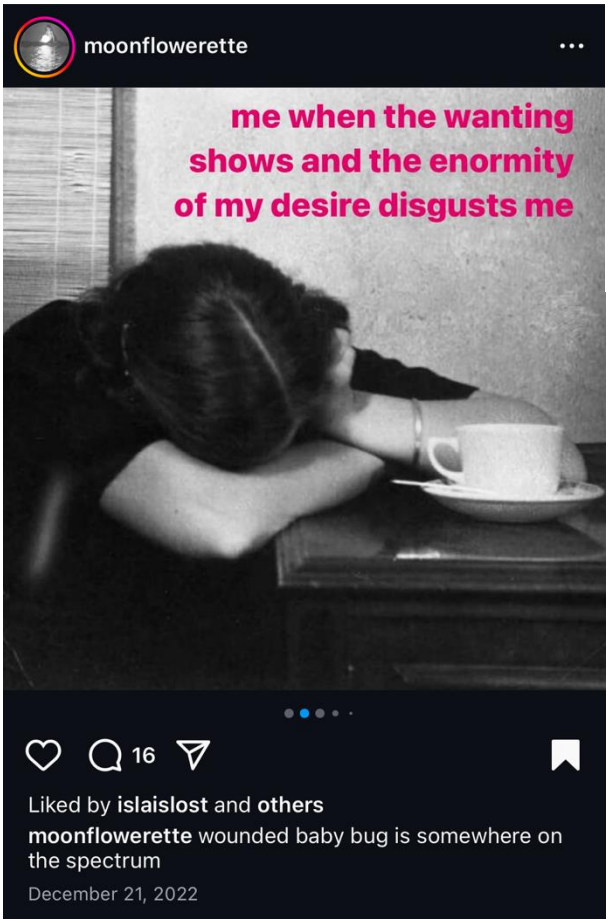
Appendix 3. Albrecht Dürer, *Self-Portrait in a Fur-Collared Robe,* oil on lime panel, 1500. Image from Web Gallery of Art, https://www.wga.hu/html_m/d/durer/1/03/1self28.html.

Appendix 4. Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Still #10,* black and white photograph, 1978. Image from MoMA, https://www.moma.org/artists/5392-cindy-sherman.

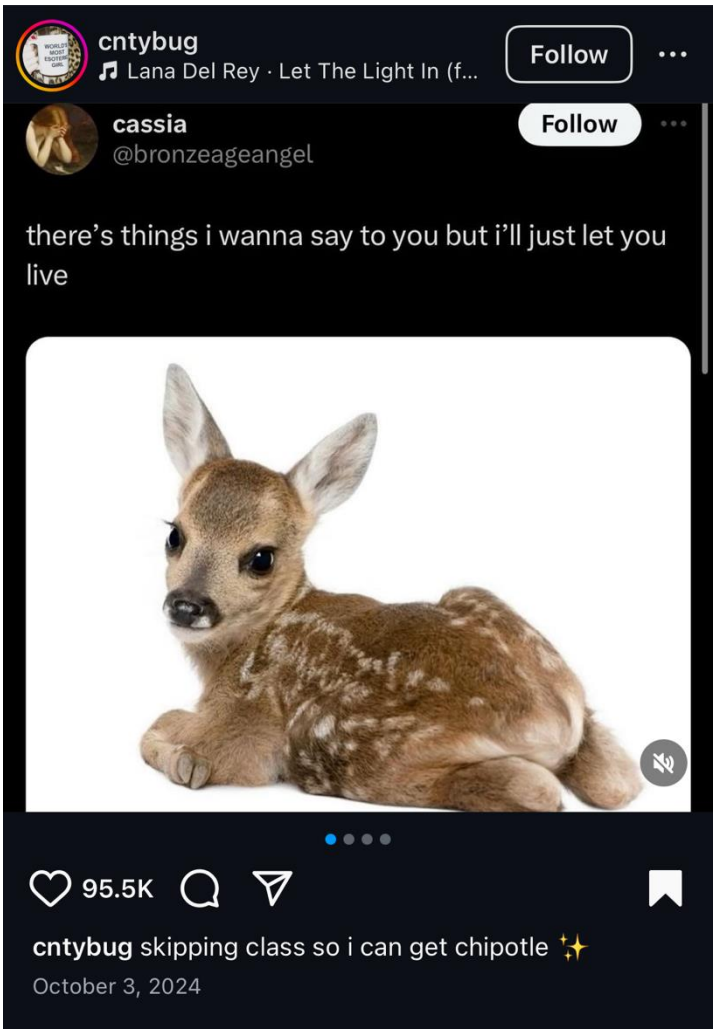
Appendix 5. Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Still #16,* black and white photograph, 1978. Image from MoMA, https://www.moma.org/artists/5392-cindy-sherman.

Appendix 6. Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Still #13,* black and white photograph, 1978. Image from MoMA, https://www.moma.org/artists/5392-cindy-sherman.

Appendix 7. Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Still #27,* black and white photograph, 1978. Image from MoMA, https://www.moma.org/artists/5392-cindy-sherman.



Appendix 8. Post from @moonflowerette, December 21 2022. Accessed March 3 2025, https://www.instagram.com/p/CmcbgHpIp-K/?img_index=1&igsh=MTY2Zm96azFjZGNpYw==.



Appendix 9. Post from @cntybug, October 3 2024. Accessed March 3 2025, https://www.instagram.com/p/DArHw28vB67/?igsh=Z2xjMjRuMnE2MWV1.

Appendix 10. Post from @brokenpoet_21, October 21 2024. Accessed March 3 2025, https://www.instagram.com/p/DBZSJZcJU0_/?igsh=Y2x1Y3lydm5kemY4.

Appendix 11. Post from @dustyspines, February 16 2025. Accessed March 3 2025, https://www.instagram.com/p/DAUCQTJz5uD/?img_index=1&igsh=Z3Z0MDgzdGRqbHJp.

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